

RUTH WARE

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Woman in Cabin 10*

THE
TURN
OF
THE
a novel
KEY

Praise for Ruth Ware's instant *New York Times* bestseller

THE DEATH OF MRS. WESTAWAY

* Starred reviews from *Kirkus Reviews*, *Library Journal*, and *Booklist* * Named one of the best books of the year by *CrimeReads* and the New York Public Library * Included in summer reading lists by *USA Today*, *People*, the *New York Post*, *PopSugar*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Medium*, *AARP The Magazine*, *Bustle*, B&N Reads, *CrimeReads*, *Harper's Bazaar*, Goodreads, BookBub, *Literary Hub*, *Insider*, [Today.com](https://www.today.com), *DC Refined*, and *BuzzFeed* * Among "The 10 Best Thrillers and Mysteries of 2018" according to the *Washington Post* * One of *BuzzFeed's* "20 Thrillers That Will Mess With Your Sleep Schedule" *

"Fans of *The Woman in Cabin 10*, rejoice. Ruth Ware is bringing you another page-turning tale of suspense. . . . Thrilling and clever, *The Death of Mrs. Westaway* will be hard to put down."

—*PopSugar*

"A delightfully chilly mystery."

—*People*

"This British writer knows how to hook crime-novel/psychological suspense fans."

—*USA Today*

"[A] captivating and eerie page-turner."

—*The Wall Street Journal*

"Ruth Ware returns with another chilling page-turner."

—*Us Weekly*

“A classic never goes out of style. Consider the confident simplicity of the dry martini, the Edison lightbulb, and Meghan Markle’s wedding dress. Now, add to that list Ruth Ware’s new novel, *The Death of Mrs. Westaway* . . . a perfectly executed suspense tale very much in the mode of Daphne du Maurier’s *Rebecca*.”

—*The Washington Post*

“Nobody writes psychological thrillers like Ruth Ware. Nobody. And her latest atmospheric novel, about a woman who is the accidental recipient of a mysterious letter offering her a large sum of money, is no exception. You’ll thoroughly enjoy playing detective along the way.”

—*Hello Giggles*

“Ware’s fourth novel is her best yet, with steadily increasing tension, a complicated twisty mystery, and a sharp, sympathetic heroine who’s up to the challenge of solving it . . . well-crafted, gothic-tinged suspense.”

—*Library Journal* (starred review)

“Ware’s novels continue to evoke comparison to Agatha Christie; they certainly have that classic flavor despite the contemporary settings. Expertly paced, expertly crafted.”

—*Kirkus Reviews* (starred review)

“Ware, who, with a run of acclaimed thrillers, including *The Lying Game* (2017), has established herself as one of today’s most popular suspense writers, twists the knife quite expertly here. . . . The labyrinth Ware has devised here is much more winding than expected, with reveals even on the final pages . . . a clever heroine and an atmospheric setting, accented by wisps of meaning that drift from the tarot cards.”

—*Booklist* (starred review)

“Evocative prose, artfully shaded characters, and a creepy, claustrophobic atmosphere keep the pages of this explosive family drama turning.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“I’ve adored Ruth Ware’s work for some time, ever since I picked up her first playful puzzler of a mystery, *In a Dark, Dark Wood*. She’s been making her way through classic mystery settings, making each her own, and her new volume promises to continue the trend, in a tale of a con artist headed to a family funeral that promises to be the most entertaining fictional British burial since the film *Death at a Funeral* first graced our screens.”

—*Literary Hub*

“The bestselling writer of psychological thrillers (*In a Dark, Dark Wood* and *The Woman in Cabin 10*) has a new winner . . . the situation grows increasingly complicated and creepy, Agatha Christie–style.”

—*AARP The Magazine*

“Ruth Ware’s master storytelling again sets readers on edge.”

—*RT Book Reviews*

“If you’ve been pining away for a first-rate gothic murder mystery for the past forty-odd years since Agatha Christie’s passing, hie yourself to your local (or online) book vendor for Ruth Ware’s *The Death of Mrs. Westaway*. It has everything you’re looking for. . . . Atmospheric and twisting in a very Christie-like manner (manor?), *The Death of Mrs. Westaway* is guaranteed to keep you flipping pages well past your bedtime.”

—*BookPage*

“Ruth Ware continues to revitalize the traditional mystery for millennial audiences in *The Death of Mrs. Westaway*, for another mystery that functions both as tribute to the genre’s tropes and a playful revisioning of the drawing room mystery.”

—*CrimeReads*

“Ruth Ware has written another gripping thriller . . . Creepy and atmospheric, *The Death of Mrs. Westaway* will keep readers on the edge of their seats. Ware spins a convincing web of intrigue and tension.”

—*Shelf Awareness*

“If you, like me, have a weakness for British haunted-house novels, this one, by the author of *The Woman in Cabin 10* and *The Lying Game*, might keep you flipping pages late on a summer’s night.”

—*Seattle Times*

“Just as the cards disclose meanings deeper and more complicated than their superficial ones, the novel hints at haunting emotional truths under its playful tribute to traditional crime novels.”

—*Columbus Dispatch*

“[Ruth Ware’s] newest novel, *The Death of Mrs. Westaway* may be her best novel yet, and it’s most definitely my favorite Ware novel thus far.”

—*The Nerd Daily*

“With lots of clever twists and surprises, this creepy and entertaining thriller will keep you in suspense right up until the last few pages. If you’re a fan of Ware’s *The Woman in Cabin 10*, you’ll also enjoy this chilling and gripping thriller.”

—*TripSavvy*

“*The Death of Mrs. Westaway* is a tautly atmospheric novel that is perfect to curl up with on a stormy night. . . . There are a lot of psychological thrillers being published these days, but *The Death of Mrs. Westaway* is one of the best I’ve read this year.”

—*All About Romance*

“In true Agatha Christie style, this book will make a fantastic summer read.”

—*Medium*

“Though set in the present day, the novel feels timeless—further cementing Ware’s reputation as a skilled mystery author writing in a classic vein.”

—*Bookreporter*

“Ruth Ware, with her modern melding of traditional mystery and domestic suspense, never fails to impress, and her latest, *The Death of Mrs. Westaway*, continues her winning streak in the mystery department.”

—*CrimeReads*

“*The Death of Mrs. Westaway* by Ruth Ware is the standard by which other suspense novels must be judged, and frankly it’s doubtful any forthcoming books can approach, much less exceed, that standard.”

—*New York Journal of Books*

“This is the mystery I’ve been raving about to everyone, but particularly to fans of Daphne du Maurier’s masterpiece, *Rebecca*. . . . A gloomy ancestral mansion, never-ending rainstorms, a maniacal killer, and plot twists aplenty grace this standout suspense novel.”

—Maureen Corrigan, book critic, *Fresh Air*

“Ruth Ware is a magician. Her novels—suspenseful, sophisticated, relentlessly compelling—blow the dust off half a dozen crime genres, from Golden Age whodunits to psychological suspense. And *The Death of Mrs. Westaway*, her latest, is also her best: a dark and dramatic thriller, part murder mystery, part family drama, altogether riveting. More, please, and soon.”

—A. J. Finn, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Woman in the Window*

Thank you for downloading this Simon & Schuster ebook.

Get a FREE ebook when you join our mailing list. Plus, get updates on new releases, deals, recommended reads, and more from Simon & Schuster. Click below to sign up and see terms and conditions.

[CLICK HERE TO SIGN UP](#)

Already a subscriber? Provide your email again so we can register this ebook and send you more of what you like to read. You will continue to receive exclusive offers in your inbox.

THE
TURN
OF
THE
KEY

RUTH WARE



SCOUT PRESS

New York London Toronto Sydney New Delhi

For Ian, with more love than I know how to put into words

3rd September 2017

Dear Mr. Wrexham,

I know you don't know me but please, please, please you have to help me

3rd September 2017

HMP Charnworth

Dear Mr. Wrexham,

You don't know me, but you may have seen coverage of my case in the newspapers.
The reason I am writing to you is to ask you please

4th September 2017

HMP Charnworth

Dear Mr. Wrexham,

I hope that's the right way to address you. I have never written to a barrister before.

The first thing I have to say is that I know this is unconventional. I know I should have gone via my solicitor, but he's

5th September 2017

Dear Mr. Wrexham,

Are you a father? An uncle? If so, let me appeal

Dear Mr. Wrexham,

Please help me. I *didn't* kill anyone.

7th September 2017

HMP Charnworth

Dear Mr. Wrexham,

You have no idea how many times I've started this letter and screwed up the resulting mess, but I've realized there is no magic formula here. There is no way I can *make* you listen to my case. So I'm just going to have to do my best to set things out. However long it takes, however much I mess this up, I'm just going to keep going and tell the truth.

My name is . . . And here I stop, wanting to tear up the page again.

Because if I tell you my name, you will know why I am writing to you. My case has been all over the papers, my name in every headline, my agonized face staring out of every front page—and every single article insinuating my guilt in a way that falls only just short of contempt of court. If I tell you my name, I have a horrible feeling you might write me off as a lost cause and throw my letter away. I wouldn't entirely blame you, but please—before you do that, hear me out.

I am a young woman, twenty-seven years old, and as you'll have seen from the return address above, I am currently at the Scottish women's prison HMP Charnworth. I've never received a letter from anyone in prison, so I don't know what they look like when they come through the door, but I imagine my current living arrangements were pretty obvious even before you opened the envelope.

What you probably don't know is that I'm on remand.

And what you cannot know is that I'm innocent.

I know, I know. They all say that. Every single person I've met here is innocent—according to them, anyway. But in my case it's true.

You may have guessed what's coming next. I'm writing to ask you to represent me as my solicitor advocate at my trial.

I realize that this is unconventional and not how defendants are supposed to approach advocates. (I accidentally called you a barrister in an earlier draft of this letter—I know

nothing about the law, and even less about the Scottish system. Everything I do know I have picked up from the women I'm in prison with, including your name.)

I have a solicitor already—Mr. Gates—and from what I understand, he is the person who should be appointing an advocate for the actual trial. But he is also the person who landed me here in the first place. I didn't choose him—the police picked him for me when I began to get scared and finally had the sense to shut up and refuse to answer questions until they found me a lawyer.

I thought that he would straighten everything out—help me to make my case. But when he arrived—I don't know, I can't explain it. He just made everything worse. He didn't let me *speak*. Everything I tried to say he was cutting in with “My client has no comment at this time,” and it just made me look so much more guilty. I feel like if only I could have explained properly, it would never have got this far. But somehow the facts kept twisting in my mouth, and the police, they made everything sound so bad, so incriminating.

It's not that Mr. Gates hasn't heard my side of the story exactly. He has, of course—but somehow— Oh God, this is so hard to explain in writing. He's sat down and talked to me, but he doesn't *listen*. Or if he does, he doesn't believe me. Every time I try to tell him what happened, starting from the beginning, he cuts in with these questions that muddle me up and my story gets all tangled and I want to scream at him to just *shut the fuck up*.

And he keeps talking to me about what I said in the transcripts from that awful first night at the police station, when they grilled me and grilled me and I said— God, I don't know what I said. I'm sorry, I'm crying now. I'm sorry—I'm so sorry for the stains on the paper. I hope you can read my writing through the blotches.

What I said, what I said then, there's no undoing that. I know that. They have all that on tape. And it's bad—it's really bad. But it came out wrong; I feel like if only I could be given a chance to get my case across, to someone who would really listen . . . do you see what I'm saying?

Oh God, maybe you don't. You've never been here, after all. You've never sat across a desk feeling so exhausted you want to drop and so scared you want to vomit, with the police asking and asking and asking until you don't know what you're saying anymore.

I guess it comes down to this in the end.

I am the nanny in the Elincourt case, Mr. Wrexham.
And I *didn't* kill that child.

I started writing to you last night, Mr. Wrexham, and when I woke up this morning and looked at the crumpled pages covered with my pleading scrawl, my first instinct was to rip them up and start again, just like I had a dozen times before. I had meant to be so cool, so calm and collected—I had meant to set everything out so clearly and *make* you see. And instead I ended up crying onto the page in a mess of recrimination.

But then I reread what I'd written and I thought, *No. I can't start again. I just have to keep going.*

All this time I have been telling myself that if only someone would let me clear my head and get my side of the story straight, without interrupting, maybe this whole awful mess would get sorted out.

And here I am. This is my chance, right?

140 days, they can hold you in Scotland before a trial. Though there's a woman here who has been waiting almost ten months. Ten months! Do you know how long that is, Mr. Wrexham? You probably think you do, but let me tell you. In her case that's 297 days. She's missed Christmas with her kids. She's missed all their birthdays. She's missed Mother's Day and Easter and first days at school.

297 days. And they still keep pushing back the date of her trial.

Mr. Gates says he doesn't think mine will take that long because of all the publicity, but I don't see how he can be sure.

Either way, 100 days, 140 days, 297 days . . . that's a lot of writing time, Mr. Wrexham. A lot of time to think, and remember, and try to work out what really happened. Because there's so much I don't understand, but there's one thing I know. I did not kill that little girl. I *didn't*. However hard the police try to twist the facts and trip me up, they can't change that.

I didn't kill her. Which means someone else did. And they are out there.

While I am in here, rotting.

I will finish now, because I know I can't make this letter too long—you're a busy man; you'll just stop reading.

But please, you have to believe me. You're the only person who can help.

Please, come and see me, Mr. Wrexham. Let me explain the situation to you and how I got tangled into this nightmare. If anyone can make the jury understand, it's you.

I have put your name down for a visitor's pass—or you can write to me here if you have more questions. It's not like I'm going anywhere. Ha.

Sorry, I didn't mean to end on a joke. It's not a laughing matter, I know that. If I'm convicted, I'm facing—

But no. I can't think about that. Not right now. I won't be. I won't be convicted, because I'm innocent. I just have to make everyone understand that. Starting with you.

Please, Mr. Wrexham, please say you'll help. Please write back. I don't want to be melodramatic about this, but I feel like you're my only hope.

Mr. Gates doesn't believe me; I see it in his eyes.

But I think that you might.

12th September 2017

HMP Charnworth

Dear Mr. Wrexham,

It's been three days since I wrote to you, and I'm not going to lie, I've been waiting for a reply with my heart in my mouth. Every day the post comes round and I feel my pulse speed up, with a kind of painful hope, and every day (so far) you've let me down.

I'm sorry. That sounds like emotional blackmail. I don't mean it like that. I get it. You're a busy man, and it's been only three days since I sent my letter but . . . I guess I half hoped that if the publicity surrounding the case had done nothing else, it would have given me a certain twisted celebrity—made you pick out my letter from among all the others you presumably get from clients and would-be clients and nutters.

Don't you want to know what happened, Mr. Wrexham? I would.

Anyway, it's three days now (did I mention that already?) and . . . well, I'm beginning to worry. There's not much to do in here, and there's a lot of time to think and fret and start to build up catastrophes inside your head.

I've spent the last few days and nights doing that. Worrying that you didn't get the letter. Worrying that the prison authorities didn't pass it on (can they do that without telling me? I honestly don't know). Worrying that I didn't *explain* right.

It's the last one that has been keeping me awake. Because if it's that, then it's my fault.

I was trying to keep it short and snappy, but now I'm thinking, I shouldn't have stopped so quickly. I should have put in more of the facts, tried to show you *why* I'm innocent. Because you can't just take my word for it—I get that.

When I came here, the other women—I can be honest with you, Mr. Wrexham—they felt like another species. It's not that I think I'm better than them. But they all seemed . . . they all seemed to fit in here. Even the frightened ones, the self-harmers and the ones who screamed and banged their heads against their cell walls and cried at night, even the girls barely out of school. They looked . . . I don't know. They looked like they belonged here,

with their pale, gaunt faces and their pulled-back hair and their blurred tattoos. They looked . . . well, they looked *guilty*.

But I was different.

I'm English, for a start, of course, which didn't help. I couldn't understand them when they got angry and started shouting and all up in my face. I had no idea what half the slang meant. And I was visibly middle-class, in a way that I can't put my finger on but which might as well have been written across my forehead as far as the other women were concerned.

But the main thing was, I had never been in prison. I don't think I'd ever even met someone who had, before I came here. There were secret codes I couldn't decipher, and currents I had no way of navigating. I didn't understand what was going on when one woman passed something to another in the corridor and all of a sudden the wardens came barreling out, shouting. I didn't see the fights coming; I didn't know who was off her meds, or who was coming down from a high and might lash out. I didn't know the ones to avoid or the ones with permanent PMS. I didn't know what to wear or what to do, or what would get you spat on or punched by the other inmates, or what would provoke the wardens to come down hard on you.

I sounded different. I looked different. I *felt* different.

And then one day I went into the bathroom and I caught a glimpse of a woman walking towards me from the far corner. She had her hair scraped back like all the others, her eyes were like chips of granite, and her face was set, hard and white. My first thought was, *Oh God, she looks pissed off; I wonder what she's in for.*

My second thought was, *Maybe I'd better use the other bathroom.*

And then I realized.

It was a mirror on the far wall. The woman was me.

It should have been a shock—the realization that I wasn't different at all but just another woman sucked into this soulless system. But in a strange way it helped.

I still don't fit in completely. I'm still the English girl—and they all know what I'm in for. In prison they don't like people who harm children, Mr. Wrexham; you probably know that. I've told them it's not true, of course—what I'm accused of. But they look at me and I know what they're thinking—*They all say that.*

And I know—I know that's what you'll be thinking too. That's what I wanted to say. I understand if you're skeptical. I didn't manage to convince the police, after all. I'm here. Without bail. I must be guilty.

But it's not true.

I have 140 days to convince you. All I have to do is tell the truth, right? I just have to start at the beginning and set it all out, clearly and calmly, until I get to the end.

And the beginning was the advert.

WANTED:

LARGE FAMILY SEEKS EXPERIENCED LIVE-IN NANNY

ABOUT US: *We are a busy family of four children, living in a beautiful (but remote!) house in the Highlands. Mum and Dad co-run the family architecture practice.*

ABOUT YOU: *We are seeking an experienced nanny, used to working with children of all ages, from babyhood to teens. You must be practical, unflappable, and comfortable looking after children on your own. Excellent references, background check, first aid certificate, and clean driving license are a must.*

ABOUT THE POST: *Mum and Dad work mainly from home, and during those periods you will have a simple eight-to-five post, with one night a week babysitting and weekends off. As far as possible we arrange our schedule so that one parent is always around. However, there are times when we may both need to be away (very occasionally for up to a fortnight), and when this occurs, you will be in loco parentis.*

In return we can offer a highly competitive remuneration package totaling £55,000 per annum (gross, including bonus), use of a car, and eight weeks' holiday a year.

Applications to Sandra and Bill Elincourt, Heatherbrae House, Carn Bridge.

I remember it nearly word for word. The funny thing was, I wasn't even looking for a job when it came up on my Google results—I was searching for . . . well, it doesn't really matter what I was looking for. But something completely different. And then there it was—like a gift thrown into my hands so unexpectedly I almost didn't catch it.

I read it through once, and then again, my heart beating faster the second time, because it was *perfect*. It was almost too perfect.

When I read it a third time I was scared to look at the closing date for applications—convinced I would have missed it.

But it was that very evening.

It was unbelievable. Not just the salary—though God knows, that was a pretty startling sum. Not just the post. But the luck of it. The whole package—just falling in my lap, right when I was in the perfect position to apply.

You see, my flatmate was away, traveling. We'd met at the Little Nippers nursery in Peckham, working side by side in the baby room, laughing about our terrible boss and the pushy, faddy parents, with their fucking fabric nappies and their homemade—

Sorry. I shouldn't have sworn. I've scribbled it out, but you can probably see the word through the paper and, God knows, maybe you've got kids, maybe you even put them in Little Plushy Bottoms or whatever the fashionable brand was at the time.

And I get it, I do. They're your babies. Nothing is too much trouble. I understand that. It's just that when you're the one having to stockpile a whole day's worth of pissy, shitty bits of cloth and hand them back to the parent at collection time with your eyes watering from the ammonia . . . it's not that I *mind* exactly, you know? It's part of the job. I get that. But we all deserve a moan, don't we? We all need to let off steam, or we'd explode with frustration.

Sorry. I'm rambling. Maybe this is why Mr. Gates is always trying to shut me up. Because I dig myself a hole with my words and instead of knowing when to stop, I keep digging. You're probably adding two and two together right now. *Doesn't seem to like kids much. Freely admits to frustration with role. What would happen when she was cooped up with four kids and no adults to "let off steam" with?*

That's exactly what the police did. All those little throwaway remarks—all those unedifying facts. I could see the triumph on their faces every time I dropped one, and I watched them picking them up like bread crumbs, adding them to the weight of arguments against me.

But that's the thing, Mr. Wrexham. I could spin you a web of bullshit about what a perfect, caring, saintly person I am—but it would be just that. Bullshit. And I am not here to bullshit you. I want you to believe that—I want it more than anything in the world.

I am telling you the *truth*. The unvarnished, ugly truth. And it is all that. It *is* unpolished and unpleasant, and I don't pretend I acted like an angel. But *I didn't kill anyone*. I just fucking didn't.

I'm sorry. I didn't mean to swear again.

God, I am messing this up so badly. I have to keep a clear head—get this all straight in my head. It's like Mr. Gates says—I should stick to the facts.

Okay then. Fact. The advert. The advert is a fact, right?

The advert . . . with its amazing, dizzying, fabulous salary.

That should have been my first warning signal, you know. The salary. Because it was *stupidly* generous. I mean it would have been generous even for London, even for a live-out nanny. But for a nanny in someone's house, with free accommodation provided and all bills paid, even down to the car, it was ridiculous.

It was so ridiculous, in fact, that I half wondered if there had been a typo. Or something that they weren't saying—a child with significant behavioral needs maybe? But wouldn't they have mentioned that in the ad?

Six months ago I probably would have paused, frowned a little, and then passed on without thinking too much more about it. But then, six months ago I wouldn't have been looking at that web page in the first place. Six months ago I had a flatmate and a job I liked, and even the prospect of promotion. Six months ago I was in a pretty good place. But now . . . well, things were a bit different now.

My friend, the girl at Little Nippers I mentioned, had left to go traveling a couple of months ago. It hadn't seemed like the end of the world when she told me—to be honest, I found her quite annoying, her habit of loading the dishwasher but never actually switching it on, her endless Euro-pop disco hits, hissing through my bedroom wall when I was trying to sleep. I mean, I knew I'd miss her, but I didn't realize how much.

She had left her stuff in her room, and we'd agreed she'd pay half rent and I'd keep the room open for her. It seemed like a good compromise—I'd had a series of terrible flatmates before we found each other, and I wasn't keen to return to posting on Facebook Local and trying to weed out weirdos by text message and email, and it felt, in some small way, like an anchor—like a guarantee that she would come back.

But when the first flush of freedom wore off, and the novelty of having the whole place to myself and watching whatever I liked on the shared TV in the living room had

started to fade a little, I found I was lonely. I missed the way she'd say "Wine o'clock, darling?" when we rolled in together from work. I missed sounding off to her about Val, the owner of Little Nippers, and sharing anecdotes about the worst of the parents. When I applied for a promotion and didn't get it, I went to the pub alone to drown my sorrows and ended up crying into my beer, thinking how different it would have been if she had still been here. We could have laughed about it together, she would have flipped Val the bird behind her back at work, and given her earthy belly laugh when Val turned around to almost catch her in the act.

I am not very good at failing, Mr. Wrexham, that's the thing. Exams. Dating. Jobs. Any kind of test, really. My instinct is always to aim low, save myself some pain. Or, in the case of dating, just don't aim at all, rather than risk being rejected. It's why I didn't go to university in the end. I had the grades, but I couldn't bear the idea of being turned down, the thought of them reading my applications with a scornful snigger. "Who does she think she is?"

Better to achieve perfect marks on an easy test than flunk a hard one, that was my motto. I've always known that about myself. But what I didn't know, until my flatmate left, was that I am also not very good at being alone. And I think it was that, more than anything, that pushed me out of my comfort zone and made me scroll down that advert, holding my breath, imagining what lay at the other end of it.

The police made a lot out of the salary when they first questioned me. But the truth is, the money wasn't the reason I applied for the post. It wasn't even really about my flatmate, though I can't deny, if she hadn't left, none of it would have happened. No, the real reason . . . well, you probably know what the real reason was. It was all over the papers, after all.

* * *

I called in sick to Little Nippers and spent the entire day working on a CV and getting together everything that I knew I would need to convince the Elincourts that I was the person they were looking for. Background check—check. First aid certificate—check. Spotless references—check, check, and check.

The only problem was the driving license. But I pushed the issue aside for the moment. I could cross that bridge when I came to it—if I got that far. Right now, I wasn't thinking past the interview.

I added a note to the cover letter, asking the Elincourts not to contact Little Nippers for a reference—I told them that I didn't want my current employers knowing that I was casting about for another job, which was true—and then I emailed it off to the address provided and held my breath and waited.

I had given myself the best possible chance of meeting them face-to-face. There was nothing else I could do now.

* * *

Those next few days were hard, Mr. Wrexham. Not as hard as the time I've spent in here, but hard enough. Because—God—I wanted that interview *so much*. I was only just beginning to realize how much. With every day that passed, my hopes ebbed a little more, and I had to fight off the urge to contact them again and beg for an answer. The only thing that stopped me was the knowledge that looking so desperate would certainly not help my case if they were still deciding.

But six days later it came, pinging into my email inbox.

To: supernanny1990@ymail.com

From: sandra.elincourt@elincourtandelincourt.com

Subject: Nanny position.

Elincourt. The surname alone was enough to make my stomach start churning like a washing machine. My fingers were shaking almost too much to open it, and my heart was hammering in my throat. Surely, surely they didn't often contact unsuccessful applicants. Surely an email must mean . . . ?

I clicked.

Hi, Rowan! Thank you so much for your application, and apologies for taking so long to get back to you. I have to admit, we were slightly taken by surprise at the

volume of applications. Your CV was very impressive, and we would like to invite you to interview. Our house is rather remote, so we are happy to pay your train fare and can offer you a room in our house overnight, as you will not be able to make the trip from London in one day.

However, there is one thing I must make you aware of up front, in case it affects your enthusiasm for the post.

Since we bought Heatherbrae we have become aware of various superstitions surrounding the house's history. It is an old building and has had no more than the usual number of deaths and tragedies in its past, but for some reason these have resulted in some local tales of hauntings, etc. Unfortunately, this fact has upset some of our recent nannies, to the extent that four have resigned in the past fourteen months.

As you can imagine, this has been very disruptive for the children, not to mention extremely awkward for myself and my husband professionally.

For that reason we wanted to be completely honest about our predicament, and we are offering a generous salary in the hopes of attracting someone who can really commit to staying with our family for the long term—at least a year.

If you do not feel that is you, or if you feel at all concerned about the history of the house, please say so now, as we are very keen to minimize further disruption to the children. With that in mind, the salary will be made up of a basic stipend, paid monthly, and then a generous year-end bonus on the anniversary of employment.

If you are still keen to attend the interview, please let me know your availability for the forthcoming week.

Best wishes, and I look forward to meeting you.

Sandra Elincourt

I closed down the email and for a moment just sat there staring at the screen. Then I got up and did a little silent scream, punching the air in jubilation.

I had done it. I had *done* it.

I should have known it was too good to be true.

I had done it, Mr. Wrexham. I had cleared the first hurdle. But it *was* only the first hurdle. I had to get through the interview next—and without slipping up.

Almost exactly one week after I had opened the email from Sandra Elincourt, I was on a train up to Scotland, doing my very best impression of Rowan the Perfect Nanny. My normally bushy hair was brushed to a shine and tamed into a neat, jaunty ponytail, my nails were buffed, and my makeup unobtrusively on point, and I was wearing my best “approachable yet responsible, fun yet hardworking, professional yet not too proud to get down on my knees and clear up vomit” outfit—a neat tweed skirt and a white cotton fitted shirt with a cashmere cardigan over the top. Not quite a Norland nanny, but definitely a nod in that direction.

My stomach was flipping with butterflies. I had never done anything like this before. Not the nannying, I mean. Obviously. I had done that for nearly ten years, though mostly in nurseries rather than private homes.

But . . . *this*. Putting myself on the line. Setting myself up for rejection like this.

I wanted this *so* much. So much that I was almost scared of what I was going to find.

Much to my annoyance, the train was delayed, so it took nearly six hours to get to Edinburgh instead of the time-tabled four and a half, and when I got off the train at Waverley, stiffly flexing my legs, I found it was past five o’clock, and I had missed my connection by a good hour. Fortunately there was another train due, and while I waited, I texted Mrs. Elincourt, apologizing profusely and warning her that I would be late into Carn Bridge.

At last the train arrived—much smaller than the big intercity, and older too. I settled myself in a window seat, and as the train headed north I watched the countryside change from rolling green fields to the smoke-blue and purples of heathered moors, mountains rising behind, darker and bleaker with every station we passed. It was so beautiful it made me forget my irritation at being late. The sight of the huge hills rising inexorably around us somehow put everything else into perspective. I felt the hard lump of trepidation

lodged in my gut start to soften. And something inside me began . . . I don't know, Mr. Wrexham. It was like I began to *hope*. To hope that this could truly be real.

I felt, in some twisted kind of way, like I was coming home.

We passed through stations with half-familiar names, Perth, Pitlochry, Aviemore, the sky growing darker all the time. At last I heard "Carn Bridge, next stop Carn Bridge," and the train pulled into a little Victorian station, and I got out. I stood on the platform, jumpy with nerves, wondering what to do.

Someone will meet you, Mrs. Elincourt's email had said. What did that mean? A taxi? Someone holding up a sign with my name?

I followed the small straggle of travelers to the exit and stood awkwardly while the other passengers dispersed to cars and waiting friends and relatives. My case was heavy, and I set it down by my feet as I looked up and down the dusky platform. The shadows were lengthening into evening, and the fleeting optimism I had felt on the train was starting to fade. What if Mrs. Elincourt hadn't got my text? She hadn't replied. Perhaps a prebooked taxi had come and gone hours ago and I'd been marked up as a no-show.

Suddenly the butterflies were back—and badly.

It was early June, but we were pretty far north, and the night air was surprisingly cold after the foggy summer warmth of London. I found I was shivering as I pulled my coat around me, a cool wind whipping down from the hills. The platform had emptied, and I was all alone.

I felt a strong urge for a cigarette, but I knew from experience that turning up to an interview stinking of fags was not a great start. Instead, I looked at my phone. The train had arrived exactly on time—at least, exactly at the revised time I had told Mrs. Elincourt in my text. I would give it five minutes and then call her.

Five minutes passed, but I told myself I'd give it just five minutes more. I didn't want to start off on the wrong foot, badgering them if they were stuck in traffic.

Five more minutes ticked away, and I was just digging in my bag, looking for the printout of Mrs. Elincourt's email, when I saw a man walking down the platform, hands in pockets.

For a moment something seemed to stutter in my chest, but then he got closer and he looked up, his eyes meeting mine, and I realized, it couldn't possibly be *him*. He was much too young. Thirty, thirty-five at the outside. He was also—and even in my