

Five - Ruby's

I have finished my second day of college, and I just know my time here is going to fly by. I'll blink and then suddenly be married with three kids! I wonder whom I'll end up with... Oh well, there is no point spending time contemplating on something that I will never be able to guess! What will be, will be.

In order to live and have some money to actually do things with my life, I am currently on the hunt for a job. I am not expecting much, but anything is better than nothing. Of course, my dream would be to be a dance teacher, but there are no vacancies in my area, and I am not fully qualified yet. I am going to have to settle for working in a café or shop for now, but I don't mind too much.

At the moment I am very lucky as my brother Kai is paying for my tuition and giving me a monthly allowance. However he has a family, mortgage and is taking his final law exams, which are all very expensive so I want to take the financial stress off him. Waverly is fortunate as she is a single child and her father is a specialist biomedical scientist, meaning he brings home the big bucks. Her parents are paying for everything, meaning she can concentrate on her studies. Daryl and Jeanine Hart are like parents to me, and their home is like my own - I've stayed around there often enough! They were the ones popping in with meals and making sure we were ok every day when we first lost our parents, and my siblings and I will always be grateful to them for their support. Very kindly, they have insisted on paying for mine and Waverly's apartment, as I am 'like daughter to them', although of course I am planning to pay them back once I have some extra cash.

Isaac and Owen have their own jobs to pay their way. At the moment Owen works Sunday's and three nights a week as a health care assistant in the local hospital, where he helps to look after patients by serving them meals and just being someone they can talk to. Isaac is insane at maths, like an actual genius, so he does tutoring (which is obviously very popular with the girls) and marks exam papers.

Roxanne suggested I apply for a job in the local café where she works, considering they have a vacancy as one of the waitresses got pregnant, and has subsequently dropped out of college and returned home for support. I am just heading in now, and I have to say it looks quite cute. There's nothing slick about it, no fancy fonts or white etching upon the glass, but there is a vibrant neon sign reading 'Ruby's'. The rest of the walls are a dull grey, with a huge glass window displaying several fresh cream cakes designed to tempt the passers-by. Hundreds of people rush by outside on the crowded street, but I am the only one heading in. The dozen customers glance up as I swing the door open, heralded by a blast of cold wind. I am immediately hit with the smell of strong coffee and sweet cakes, and it is quite noisy inside with customers chatting idly, machines whirring and an old Dean Martin song playing in the background.

Unlike the outside, the interior of the café is warm and cheery, with bright lights and colourful walls. The customers return to their conversations as the door swings close behind me, and the cold breeze is forgotten about.

Awkwardly I stumble forward across the grey tiled floor, until I notice Roxanne busily scrubbing away at one of the booth tables, obviously cleaning up. I adjust my bag strap on my shoulder before making my way over to her. On the walls there are pictures of the old greats, including Elvis and Marilyn Monroe, and I notice several children with huge grins drinking diabetes-inducing milkshakes overflowing with whipped cream and chocolate sauce.

"Hey Roxanne!" I exclaim as she looks up at me with a smile.

"Ah hey Nell, I was wondering when you were going to drop in! Come with me, I have told Ruby about you." She reveals as she grabs my hand and pulls me along with her to the barista area.

The guy on the till looks at me suspiciously as Roxanne takes me through the busy kitchen area and then through a wooden door at the back, leading to a long mossy-green corridor. We stop at the first door on the right, which Roxanne knocks on rhythmically. A sharp 'come in' calls out a second later, so Roxanne opens the door revealing a messy office with papers everywhere and plant pots randomly placed around the room. Sitting at the wooden desk is a rather butch woman, with tattoos crawling up her arms, cropped red hair and thick eyeliner framing her bright blue eyes.

"Hey Ruby, this is Nell, the girl I was telling you about. She's here for the job." Roxanne explains with a point of her thumb.

"Ah hello Nell, excuse the mess, I am run on my feet with not enough workers and my mother in hospital." Ruby apologises as she stands up to shake my hand, wiping hers on her leather pants first.

"Oh hello Ruby, not to worry. You have an awesome café." I reply with a grin.

"Thank you darlin'. Roxanne please go back and help John and Amanda. I'll have a little chat with Nell now." Ruby instructs, and Roxanne gives my hand an encouraging squeeze and flashes me a bright smile before heading back to work. "So Nell, do you have any experience in the hospitality sector?" Ruby asks as she leans onto her desk and crosses her arms.

"Erm yes. I worked at a small café in high school, and I have a reference here from my boss." I reveal as I fish around in my bag for that darn piece of paper. I hand it to Ruby when I find it who skims over it briefly.

"Ok, this all looks good. What days can you do and how many hours a week?" She asks.

"Well mostly evenings and early mornings, but Friday afternoon is clear. Also about hours - I was thinking ten or so a week?"

"Ok that's fine; I pay all my staff \$13 an hour. Can you do an hour now?"

"Erm sure." I reply, surprised at how fast this is going, but I guess this is what happens when you are desperate.

"Ok your hired, your work will be on a rota basis, but I will put you down for two opening shifts a week and two closing shifts, and you will be asked to cover other shifts if anyone is off sick. Any problems speak to my niece Amanda; she runs that side of things for me."

"Seriously? You're hiring me just like that?" I ask, feeling relieved.

"Why, is there any reason I shouldn't?" She asks as she raises an eyebrow.

"No of course not, thank you." I hurriedly say.

"Ok go and speak to Roxanne, she will get you a t-shirt and apron to wear. Also please bear in mind you are not irreplaceable - if you regularly turn up late or have a bad attitude I will just fire you." Ruby warns and I nod in understanding. "But anyway, welcome to the team, any problems just speak to Amanda or me." Ruby finishes with a smile before returning to her desk.

"Thank you, I will make sure to work hard." I promise on my way out.

As I exit from the room, I feel so relieved and happy that I have a job. I make my way back out into the main café area and notice Roxanne making drinks for a couple of people I recognise from college. As we are so close to the college, I guess I will see a lot of classmates in here.

"How did it go?" Roxanne squeals once she is done with the drinks.

"Well thank you! I got the job!"

"Yay! We are work buddies now! What shifts are you doing?" She asks.

"Mornings and evenings I think."

"Oh man that's a bummer... The café opens at six am, meaning you will have to get here for quarter to." Roxanne pouts sympathetically, making me cry inside.

Early mornings and me do not mix well, and I have a feeling our biggest customer is going to be me just so I can get through the day.

"Come on then, I'll introduce you to everyone and get your uniform."

The uniform is a plain black top with 'Ruby's' embroidered into it in red swirly writing, with a matching black apron. I quickly changed into it in the bathroom, and hung up my coat and bag in the staff cloakroom. There are four other employees at Ruby's, including Roxanne, which are John, Amanda and Darcy. Seemingly they are all nice, although John is a bit of a flirt and has wandering hands. They are in college like us, but in their last year, and Amanda is assistant manager to Ruby. Apparently you do not want to get on the wrong side of Amanda who runs a tight ship, and is pleasant as long as you are an obedient puppet and don't step out of line. She has long ginger hair with porcelain skin, and is freakishly tall - I think she must be around six foot four!

Darcy isn't working at the minute so I haven't had a chance to meet her yet. Roxanne starts by showing me how to use the coffee machine and getting me to wipe down the tables once customers leave. I make sure to work hard even though the work is kind of boring and monotonous. Roxanne sets me up with John on the till a little while later, after warning him to keep his hands to himself. He isn't too bad really, and kind of cute looking with bleached blonde hair and a gappy smile. I get the hang of the register quite quickly with John's help, until the evening rush starts to settle down and I am back to clearing tables with Roxie.

I decide to stay on until the end of the shift to help the others out, and we all find ourselves counting down the minutes to six thirty, having to refrain from kicking a few stragglers out the door. When at last the sign is flipped to closed and the café is empty apart from us and Ruby (who is still hibernating away in her office), we only have to finish clearing up and preparing for tomorrow morning before we can go. Amanda leaves without helping to tidy anything away, but no one can challenge her considering she has a title above us.

"Hey Nell, my room mate and I are having a party at our place Saturday evening. You should come. You too Roxanne." John suggests as he puts a few plates and glasses in the dishwasher.

I look over to Roxie who is cleaning the adjacent table and nods in encouragement.

"Ok sounds good... can I bring a friend?" I ask.

"If she's as beautiful as you of course." He winks making me roll my eyes.

"All three of us will be there." Roxie confirms.

Wow my first college party! I'm excited to get wild and force Waverly to come with me, although I'm sure we will both really enjoy it.

"Great... and the kitchen is done." He whoops. "Are you girls ok to close up for Ruby?"

"Yeah of course, enjoy your night John." Roxanne calls out.

"Bye!" I wave.

"See you soon ladies."

Once he has left we only have a little more to do, and are soon turning off the lights and locking up, then shouting a goodbye to Ruby. Luckily our apartment is only ten minutes away from the shop, so it is an easy walk, although a chilly night and the stars are covered up with a blanket of fog.

"So what do you think of John? He's totally into you! Do you think you will sleep with him Saturday? He is certainly skilled in the bedroom department." Roxanne giggles with a wiggle of her eyebrows.

"Eww how do you know that?" I laugh and playfully shove her.

"We went to the same high school - we messed around a bit back then, and last week when I got the job and we were reunited." Roxanne shrugs.

"So you wouldn't care if we slept with the same guy? You don't have feelings for him at all?" I ask with my cold hands tucked deep into my coat pockets as we stroll along to our apartment building.

"Well I did forever ago but not anymore. Anyway, it's not as if it's a big deal - only one night. You know how these things go." No I don't.

"Yeah..." I answer hesitantly, although I am certainly not going to be sleeping with anyone at the party.

I decide not to tell Roxanne that I am a virgin and want my first time to be special. She is obviously very experienced with all things sex, and I don't want her to see me as a child, although I know being a virgin at eighteen and three quarters isn't actually a bad thing. However lately I have been wondering whether I should bother waiting for Mr Right, as the likelihood of ending up with the person you lose your virginity to isn't very high, and I am kind of living in a fairy-tale. Apparently boys prefer experienced girls anyway. Oh well, I'm not going to drop my standards just to please some guy I probably haven't even met!

Unless Zander falls in love with me of course...

Edited