

IRA LEVIN'S  
ROSEMARY'S BABY  
*(Excerpt)*

## CHAPTER 8

She went to upper Broadway for swordfish steaks and across town to Lexington Avenue for cheeses; not because she couldn't get swordfish steaks and cheeses right there in the neighborhood but simply because on that snappy bright-blue morning she wanted to be all over the city, walking briskly with her coat flying, drawing second glances for her prettiness, impressing tough clerks with the precision and know-how of her orders. It was Monday, October 4th, the day of Pope Paul's visit to the city, and the sharing of the event made people more open and communicative than they ordinarily were; *How nice it is*, Rosemary thought, *that the whole city is happy on a day when I'm so happy.*

She followed the Pope's rounds on television during the afternoon, moving the set out from the wall of the den (soon nursery) and turning it so she could watch from the kitchen while readying the fish and vegetables and salad greens. His speech at the UN moved her, and she was sure it would help ease the Vietnam situation. "War never again," he said; wouldn't his words give pause to even the most hardheaded statesman?

At four-thirty, while she was setting the table before the fireplace, the telephone rang.

"Rosemary? How are you?"

"Fine," she said. "How are you?" It was Margaret, the older of her two sisters.

"Fine," Margaret said.

"Where are you?"

"In Omaha."

They had never got on well. Margaret had been a sullen, resentful girl, too often used by their mother as the caretaker of the younger children. To be called by her like this was strange; strange and frightening.

"Is everyone all right?" Rosemary asked. *Someone's dead*, she thought. *Who? Ma? Pa? Brian?*

“Yes, everyone’s fine.”

“They are?”

“Yes. Are you?”

“Yes; I said I was.”

“I’ve had the funniest feeling all day long, Rosemary. That something happened to you. Like an accident or something. That you were hurt. Maybe in the hospital.”

“Well, I’m not,” Rosemary said, and laughed. “I’m fine. Really I am.”

“It was such a strong feeling,” Margaret said. “I was *sure* something had happened. Finally Gene said why don’t I call you and find out.”

“How is he?”

“Fine.”

“And the children?”

“Oh, the usual scrapes and scratches, but they’re fine too. I’ve got another one on the way, you know.”

“No, I didn’t know. That’s wonderful. When is it due?” *We’ll have one on the way soon too.*

“The end of March. How’s your husband, Rosemary?”

“He’s fine. He’s got an important part in a new play that’s going into rehearsal soon.”

“Say, did you get a good look at the Pope?” Margaret asked. “There must be terrific excitement there.”

“There is,” Rosemary said. “I’ve been watching it on television. It’s in Omaha too, isn’t it?”

“Not live? You didn’t go out and see him live?”

“No, I didn’t.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Honest to goodness, Rosemary,” Margaret said. “Do you know Ma and Pa were going to *fly* there to see him but they couldn’t because there’s going to be a strike vote and Pa’s seconding the motion? Lots of people did fly, though; the Donovans, and Dot and Sandy Wallingford; and you’re right there, *living* there, and didn’t go out and see him?”

“Religion doesn’t mean as much to me now as it did back home,” Rosemary said.

“Well,” Margaret said, “I guess that’s inevitable,” and Rosemary heard, unspoken, *when you’re married to a Protestant*. She said, “It was nice of you to call, Margaret. There’s nothing for you to worry about. I’ve never been healthier or happier.”

“It was such a strong feeling,” Margaret said. “From the minute I woke up. I’m so used to taking care of you little brats . . .”

“Give my love to everyone, will you? And tell Brian to answer my letter.”

“I will. Rosemary—”

“Yes?”

“I still have the feeling. Stay home tonight, will you?”

“That’s just what we’re planning to do,” Rosemary said, looking over at the partially set table.

“Good,” Margaret said. “Take care of yourself.”

“I will,” Rosemary said. “You too, Margaret.”

“I will. Good-by.”

“Good-by.”

She went back to setting the table, feeling pleasantly sad and nostalgic for Margaret and Brian and the other kids, for Omaha and the irretrievable past.

With the table set, she bathed; then powdered and perfumed herself, did her eyes and lips and hair, and put on a pair of burgundy silk lounging pajamas that Guy had given her the previous Christmas.

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He came home late, after six. “Mmm,” he said, kissing her, “you look good enough to eat. Shall we? Damn!”

“What?”

“I forgot the pie.”

He had told her not to make a dessert; he would bring home his absolute all-time favorite, a Horn and Hardart pumpkin pie. “I could *kick* myself,” he said. “I passed two of those damn retail stores; not one but two.”

“It’s all right,” Rosemary said. “We can have fruit and cheese. That’s the best dessert anyway, really.”

“It is not; Horn and Hardart pumpkin pie is.”

He went in to wash up and she put a tray of stuffed mushrooms into the

oven and mixed the salad dressing.

In a few minutes Guy came to the kitchen door, buttoning the collar of a blue velour shirt. He was bright-eyed and a bit on edge, the way he had been the first time they slept together, when he knew it was going to happen. It pleased Rosemary to see him that way.

“Your pal the Pope really loused up traffic today,” he said.

“Did you see any of the television?” she asked. “They’ve had fantastic coverage.”

“I got a glimpse up at Allan’s,” he said. “Glasses in the freezer?”

“Yes. He made a wonderful speech at the UN. ‘War never again,’ he told them.”

“Rotsa ruck. Hey, *those* look good.”

They had Gibsons and the stuffed mushrooms in the living room. Guy put crumpled newspaper and sticks of kindling on the fireplace grate, and two big chunks of cannel coal. “Here goes nothing,” he said, and struck a match and lit the paper. It flamed high and caught the kindling. Dark smoke began spilling out over the front of the mantel and up toward the ceiling. “Good grief,” Guy said, and groped inside the fireplace. “The paint, the paint!” Rosemary cried.

He got the flue opened; and the air conditioner, set at exhaust, drew out the smoke.

“Nobody, but nobody, has a fire tonight,” Guy said.

Rosemary, kneeling with her drink and staring into the spitting flame-wrapped coals, said, “Isn’t it gorgeous? I hope we have the coldest winter in eighty years.”

Guy put on Ella Fitzgerald singing Cole Porter.

They were halfway through the swordfish when the doorbell rang. “Shit,” Guy said. He got up, tossed down his napkin, and went to answer it. Rosemary cocked her head and listened.

The door opened and Minnie said, “Hi, Guy!” and more that was unintelligible. *Oh, no*, Rosemary thought. *Don’t let her in, Guy. Not now, not tonight.*

Guy spoke, and then Minnie again: “. . . extra. We don’t need them.” Guy again and Minnie again. Rosemary eased out held-in breath; it didn’t sound as if she was coming in, thank God.

The door closed and was chained (*Good!*) and bolted (*Good!*). Rosemary watched and waited, and Guy sidled into the archway, smiling smugly, with both hands behind his back. “*Who* says there’s nothing to ESP?” he said, and coming toward the table brought forth his hands with two white custard cups sitting one on each palm. “Madame and Monsieur shall have ze dessairt after all,” he said, setting one cup by Rosemary’s wineglass and the other by his own. “*Mousse au chocolat*,” he said, “or ‘chocolate mouse,’ as Minnie calls it. Of course with her it could *be* chocolate mouse, so eat with care.”

Rosemary laughed happily. “That’s wonderful,” she said. “It’s what *I* was going to make.”

“See?” Guy said, sitting. “ESP.” He replaced his napkin and poured more wine.

“I was afraid she was going to come charging in and stay all evening,” Rosemary said, forking up carrots.

“No,” Guy said, “she just wanted us to try her chocolate mouse, seein’ as how it’s one of her speci-*al*-ities.”

“It *looks* good.”

“It does, doesn’t it.”

The cups were filled with peaked swirls of chocolate. Guy’s was topped with a sprinkling of chopped nuts, and Rosemary’s with a half walnut.

“It’s sweet of her, really,” Rosemary said. “We shouldn’t make fun of her.”

“You’re right,” Guy said, “you’re right.”



The mousse was excellent, but it had a chalky undertaste that reminded Rosemary of blackboards and grade school. Guy tried but could find no “undertaste” at all, chalky or otherwise. Rosemary put her spoon down after two swallows. Guy said, “Aren’t you going to finish it? That’s silly, honey; there’s no ‘undertaste.’”

Rosemary said there was.

“Come on,” Guy said, “the old bat slaved all day over a hot stove; eat it.”

“But I don’t like it,” Rosemary said.

“It’s delicious.”

“You can have mine.”

Guy scowled. “All right, don’t eat it,” he said; “you don’t wear the charm she gave you, you might as well not eat her dessert too.”

Confused, Rosemary said, “What does one thing have to do with the other?”

“They’re both examples of—well, unkindness, that’s all.” Guy said. “Two minutes ago you said we should stop making fun of her. That’s a form of making fun too, accepting something and then not using it.”

“Oh—” Rosemary picked up her spoon. “If it’s going to turn into a big scene—” She took a full spoonful of the mousse and thrust it into her mouth.

“It isn’t going to turn into a big scene,” Guy said. “Look, if you really can’t stand it, don’t eat it.”

“Delicious,” Rosemary said, full-mouthed and taking another spoonful, “no undertaste at all. Turn the records over.”

Guy got up and went to the record player. Rosemary doubled her napkin in her lap and plopped two spoonfuls of the mousse into it, and another half-spoonful for good measure. She folded the napkin closed and then showily scraped clean the inside of the cup and swallowed down the scrapings as Guy came back to the table. “There, Daddy,” she said, tilting the cup toward him. “Do I get a gold star on my chart?”

“Two of them,” he said. “I’m sorry if I was stuffy.”

“You were.”

“I’m sorry.” He smiled.

Rosemary melted. “You’re forgiven,” she said. “It’s nice that you’re considerate of old ladies. It means you’ll be considerate of me when *I’m* one.”

They had coffee and crème de menthe.

“Margaret called this afternoon,” Rosemary said.

“Margaret?”

“My sister.”

“Oh. Everything okay?”

“Yes. She was afraid something had happened to me. She had a feeling.”

“Oh?”

“We’re to stay home tonight.”

“Drat. And I made a reservation at Nedick’s. In the Orange Room.”

“You’ll have to cancel it.”

“How come you turned out sane when the rest of your family is nutty?”



The first wave of dizziness caught Rosemary at the kitchen sink as she scraped the uneaten mousse from her napkin into the drain. She swayed for a moment, then blinked and frowned. Guy, in the den, said, “He isn’t there yet. Christ, what a mob.” The Pope at Yankee Stadium.

“I’ll be in in a minute,” Rosemary said.

Shaking her head to clear it, she rolled the napkins up inside the tablecloth and put the bundle aside for the hamper. She put the stopper in the drain, turned on the hot water, squeezed in some Joy, and began loading in the dishes and pans. She would do them in the morning, let them soak overnight.

The second wave came as she was hanging up the dish towel. It lasted longer, and this time the room turned slowly around and her legs almost slued out from under her. She hung on to the edge of the sink.

When it was over she said, “Oh boy,” and added up two Gibsons, two glasses of wine (or had it been three?), and one crème de menthe. No wonder.

She made it to the doorway of the den and kept her footing through the next wave by holding on to the knob with one hand and the jamb with the other.

“What is it?” Guy asked, standing up anxiously.

“Dizzy,” she said, and smiled.

He snapped off the TV and came to her, took her arm and held her surely around the waist. “No wonder,” he said. “All that booze. You probably had an empty stomach, too.”

He helped her toward the bedroom and, when her legs buckled, caught her up and carried her. He put her down on the bed and sat beside her, taking her hand and stroking her forehead sympathetically. She closed her eyes. The bed was a raft that floated on gentle ripples, tilting and swaying pleasantly. “Nice,” she said.

“Sleep is what you need,” Guy said, stroking her forehead. “A good night’s sleep.”

*(End of excerpt)*