

SHADOWS OVER ENGLAND ♦ 1

A NAME
UNKNOWN

ROSEANNA M. WHITE



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To Mom and Dad, who named me Roseanna
To Nanny, who named me Banana Boat
To Brittney, who named me Annie
To Jennifer, who named me Pooky
To David, who named me Hunny
To Xoë and Rowyn, who named me Mommy
To Stephanie, who named me Ro
And to the Lord, who whispered in my ear, “Mine.”
The sweetest name of all.





ONE



London
May 1914

Rosemary Gresham may have been a thief, but she was a thief who preferred to work in broad daylight. Pulling her coat more tightly around her middle, she stopped in one circle of streetlight outside the park and looked toward the next. Perhaps it was that she knew all too well what could hide in the darkness. Perhaps it was because she had spent too many nights overwhelmed by it as a child, huddling in a dark alley and praying to a deaf God that her parents would live again.

She ought to have protested when Mr. V designated this meeting place at such an hour. Ought to have . . . but hadn't been quite that brave. She had completed two successful small jobs for the man before, but she still knew nothing about him. Nothing but that he paid promptly, in pounds sterling. That he was of average height, average build. That he spoke with the careful cadence of a man who had worked hard to obliterate his natural accent.

A hack drove by, the horse's hooves *clip-clopping*. One street over, an automobile rumbled along. From a flat somewhere nearby

came the smell of cooking onions . . . and the sound of raised voices. Rosemary drew in a long breath and walked toward the next light. Not so quickly that she would look afraid. Not so slowly that she would look lost or without purpose.

“Miss Gresham.”

She didn’t like the dark, but she knew how to use it as well as the next thief. Without so much as a flinch or start, she stepped outside the circle of golden light, summoning a tight smile. “Mr. V.”

He stood beside a darkened bench. As he had during their meetings, he wore a bowler on his head, a crisp tie under his coat. His clothes were of good quality but without the flair or ostentatiousness of those with more wealth than taste. The hair peeking out from under his hat was a silver-gold that spoke of age and . . . heritage?

Rosemary’s stomach went tight. He could very well be a German. Not that she had any particular loyalty to her own country, which had ground her under its very heel—but she had more loyalty to it than to any other, she supposed.

Mr. V stretched out an arm to indicate the bench.

She approached it but declined the invitation to sit. He wouldn’t, and she wasn’t much for being hovered over. Were it any other client, she would have issued a sharp, quiet *Make this quick*.

Such words were unnecessary, she had learned, with Mr. V. He acknowledged her denial with a nod and reached into his inner pocket. A moment later he pulled out an envelope identical to the other two he’d given her in the last year.

Rosemary took it, extracted from her handbag the letter opener she’d brought for just this occasion, and slit the top of the envelope. The sheet of paper inside contained the name *Peter Holstein* and a direction in Cornwall. “This is where I’m to go?”

“Indeed.” Mr. V had folded his hands in front of him now and looked carved from stone, yet somehow completely at ease. “I need you to gain access to his home and discover his loyalties.”

She tucked the direction into her handbag, working hard not to let her puzzlement show. “Need I remind you of my expertise, sir? I am no mind-reader. I get *things*.”

“And the *thing* I need just now is information—are you telling me I’ve hired the wrong girl?”

Her shoulders edged back. He paid well, she reminded herself. And promptly. “It’s simply not where my experience lies. I’m a thief, not a spy. You’ll need to tell me what exactly I’m looking for.”

With a nod, Mr. V slid a step closer, no doubt so he could speak in a whisper. “Mr. Holstein has the ear of the king. Certain parties are most eager to ascertain whether he is filling those ears with ideas for or against Germany.”

Which parties were eager? English ones or German ones? But she didn’t ask, just nodded. “So you need . . . documents?”

“Hard evidence proving him a traitor to England. We cannot move without hard evidence, you understand.”

There, then, a physical thing. Papers. Letters. Telegrams, perhaps. *Things*. She could deal with things. “Right.”

“They could be in German—you read it, I understand. That is why I’ve come to you.”

The hair on the back of her neck stood up. How would he have known that? How *could* he have? She’d only learned it to complete that museum job three years ago. Had he somehow been behind that one too, and she’d not known it?

If so, he hadn’t paid as well as he had been lately.

And she couldn’t afford to ask such questions. Certainly couldn’t afford to mention the missing manuscript from the British Museum. If he *didn’t* know, it would be a fool thing to tell him. It still ranked as the biggest job she had ever pulled off—well, she and Barclay.

She simply nodded in response to his question. “I apparently have a bit of a knack for languages. It won’t be a problem. How long have I?”

Mr. V nodded as well. “You should plan on going to Cornwall within the fortnight. Take however long you need, but be aware that if war is declared, we must act quickly. When that eventuality comes to pass, you will have but days to get me the documents. Send them to the same direction you did last time.” He held out a second envelope. “You will need appropriate clothing, no doubt. And perhaps other supplies. Contact me for anything you require.”

She took the second envelope and opened it. Her eyes bulged. One hundred pounds—twice what most people made in a year. Twice what he’d paid her for the last job. “You’re paying me up front?”

“That, my dear, is just a down payment. Pull this off and there will be another nine hundred coming.”

“Nine . . .” A thousand pounds. She’d never dealt with a number that large, with so many zeroes. The things the family could do with that much! She swallowed, nodded.

Mr. V took a step back, where the shadows cloaked him again. “A good-faith deposit, Miss Gresham. Assuring us both of continued partnership in the future. I have many more tasks for you after this one, if you can pull this off.”

More coming? Tamping down a smile, Rosemary turned. No farewell, no more questions. She knew better. When someone hired her, it was because they needed her particular set of skills, which meant they lacked them on their own. He wasn’t the one to help her think of how to accomplish the task. But she knew who would.

Though she listened for them, she didn’t hear his footsteps move away. The heels of her pumps clicked on the bricks of the walk, though, as she left the park and strode down the familiar London streets. The nearest tube stop was just ahead, around the corner. She hurried toward it, mind whirring.

She couldn’t think of those unnamed future jobs, not yet. She must focus on this one. How was she to gain entrance to the

house of a wealthy gent? Apply for a position, perhaps? But no, then she would answer to a housekeeper. She needed a way in that would leave her independent. And yet gain her access to all his private papers—a tall order indeed.

She bought a ticket at the counter, turned away from the booth, and headed for the platform. Shadows lurked there too, but she ignored them and let this newest puzzle crease her brow. She needed to learn more about Holstein. About his house in Cornwall. The answers usually came with enough research.

A jerk jarred her shoulder as someone caught her handbag, yanking it off. Perhaps most women would have cried out in alarm. Rosemary instead caught the strap with reflexes born of necessity, spun, and prepared to deliver a punch to the would-be mugger's jugular.

Until she caught his outline in the bit of lamplight that reached them. "Georgie! What the devil are you about?"

The young man—not a day over seventeen by her estimation, though he hadn't a clue as to his actual birth date—gave a sheepish laugh. "Oh, Rosie, I didn't realize . . . is that a new hat you're wearing? It changes your look."

She jerked her bag out of his hand and scowled at him as she fancied a mother would. Her voice pitched low. "And what are you doing out here, haunting the tube station this time of night? We've talked about this. You'll get nothing worth getting at this hour."

Georgie shrugged and looked away, hands in his faded pockets. "I had no luck earlier, so . . ."

"So if you're determined to change that luck, you—"

"Miss, are you all right?" A stranger jogged her way, the glow of the streetlight casting his frown in gold. He wore a frayed jacket, had worn spots on the knees of his trousers. If he carried anything in his pockets, it wouldn't be more than a few shillings. Not worth the effort of picking them—which she had *told* Georgie

repeatedly. Apparently this bloke had an inclination to be a hero, though. “I thought I saw this lad attack you.”

Rosemary smiled and tucked her hand through the crook of Georgie’s arm. “Just my brother joking with me, sir. Though I do thank you for your concern.”

The stranger paused a few steps away, still frowning. Glanced from Rosemary to Georgie and back again as if searching for a confirming resemblance in the low light. Apparently he decided he had no reason to doubt her word. With a nod, he moved off.

“Hmm. I could pick him easy enough. Do you think he—”

“No.” She took her arm from Georgie’s and then gripped his elbow to steer him away from the station. “We don’t prey on the poor; they’re in worse shape than we are. How many times must I tell you that? If you want to change your luck, Georgie, you have to know where to focus your efforts.” She paused at the edge of the walk and nodded across the street, to where a hired cab was parked. And had been since she got *off* the tube to meet with Mr. V. “I’ve seen a gent go inside that building before. He stays for about an hour and then leaves. Always uses a cab, but he’s well dressed.”

Georgie breathed a laugh. “And I bet a pretty miss has a flat there, eh?”

“No doubt. You want a worthwhile mark tonight, little brother, you wait for him to come out. I bet his wallet is fair to bursting.”

With an enthusiastic nod, Georgie said, “I can do that. Thank you, Rosie. And, ah . . . are you heading to meet the family, then?”

Rosemary loosed his elbow and folded her arms, well able to imagine what would come next. “Let me guess—if I would just not mention this little mishap to Barclay . . .”

“He’ll be cross and put me on division duty again, and you *know* how I hate numbers.”

She rolled her eyes upward, to where stars probably shone somewhere beyond the foul air and glowing lights, though she

couldn't recall seeing more than a stray twinkle here and there. It would serve Barclay right if she let slip how much *he* hated divvying up the week's take, after the way he lorded his elected position of head of the family over the rest of them.

But no. They were careful about keeping the balance of authority right. It worked well enough to have the young ones hold their older brother in awe. "All right. This time. But learn the lessons you're taught, Georgie."

"You're the best, Rosie." He leaned down with all the enthusiasm of youth to smack a loud kiss on her cheek and then scurried off into the shadows.

Rosemary sighed and turned with a shake of her head to wait for the train. Georgie always made her feel so blasted old, though she had only seven or eight years on him. But the really young ones . . . she and Willa were old enough to be their mums. How had that happened? Where had their own youth gone?

The wooden platform rumbled, a fair warning that the train approached. Rosemary queued up with the other few passengers still out and about, Mr. Would-Be Hero among them.

Perhaps the better question would be whether she'd even had a childhood, not where it had gone. Only the most shadowed of memories remained to tell her about her parents, about what it had felt like to wake every morning in the same bed and know that someone who loved her was just down the hall. Then came that confusion of waking one morning, feeling sick and confused, and realizing she was all alone.

She shook away the memory before it could take her stumbling down the hall to discover her parents. Shook it away and took a seat on the familiar train, smoothing down the tweed of her skirt. She'd sewn it herself, carefully following the guidance of the pattern in *Mode Pratique* until she had a garment that looked professionally tailored. That made her look, to the eye of those arrogant marks milling about London, like one of them.

As if she would ever be one of them. As if she would ever *want* to be.

Mr. Hero nodded her way, but his gaze didn't linger. Married, she would bet, and happily so. He'd have been out late for legitimate reasons. Working, most likely, to put meager food on his meager table, determined to live the honest life and provide for his family. He'd have a babe, given that white stain on his shoulder. Perhaps an older child too, if that was a jam stain on the side of his trousers.

Holstein—whoever he was—probably looked far different. If he had the ear of the king, then he sure wasn't scrounging around the factories for work, with barely two pence to rub together. No doubt he was of the ilk that she and the others had learned to mingle with ever so briefly at the galas they sneaked into. So rich he'd never notice the absence of a few pieces of jewelry or pounds sterling. His nose so high in the air that he couldn't be bothered to look down it long enough to see the people all but starving in the streets.

"Hello there, Jonesy." Another bloke sat beside Mr. Hero, nodding toward the newspaper he—Jonesy, apparently—had pulled out. "Anything good today?"

Jonesy sighed. "More about the tensions in Europe."

The newcomer sighed. "Blighted Germans. If that Kaiser Wilhelm ever showed his snout around here, I'd—"

Jonesy snorted. "If he did, it would probably be to pay a visit to his cousin the king. Certainly not to see *you*, Percy."

Percy echoed the snort. "Cousins . . . why is it that every blamed monarch in Europe is the cousin of every other blamed monarch? 'Tain't right, if you ask me. All this intermarrying. And making it so we have a German on our own throne."

"Now . . ." Jonesy's face somehow softened in one respect and hardened in another. Though to be sure, Rosemary studied it only in the reflection of her window as the train chugged off, not

outright. “I reckon he’s as English as you or me, Perc, excepting that he’s traveled more’n either of us ever could. Just his name is German is all.”

“You know, I heard tell there was talk of him changing his name from Saxe-Coburg. Can you believe that? To something more English-sounding. That’ll be the day.”

Jonesy chuckled. “I remember Granny talking about how old Queen Victoria had to have a team of researchers just to figure out what her surname *was*. How do you suppose he’d go about changing it? To another family name, do you think?”

“Maybe. Who’s to say? Surely there’s an Englishman in his lineage *somewhere*.”

Lineage. Rosemary pursed her lips. Was that something this Holstein might be concerned about too? Quite possibly, in a day when his very name shouted an allegiance that he no doubt didn’t want it proclaiming, wherever his loyalties lay. Perhaps that was her angle.

Her lips twitched up. Wouldn’t Barclay and Willa think it amusing if she could steal a bloke’s very name? Retta would laugh until her sides hurt. And Lucy would get that look on her face, the one where her mouth was a perfect O.

Jonesy folded his paper as the train slowed again for the next stop—her stop. She could have walked, and would have had it not been dark. But this time of night, it was worth the two pence to ride.

The other man leaned his head back. “You read where that author fellow—Wells? H. G. Wells, that’s it. He accused King George of being uninspiring and foreign.”

“Did he really? What did the king have to say?”

Rosemary stood, handbag clutched in her hand, knees bent to steady her as the train screeched to a halt. The doors opened, and she stepped off, barely catching Jonesy’s reply.

“Said he may well be uninspiring, but he sure as blazes wasn’t foreign.”

Rosemary's lips curled up as she stepped off onto the tube platform and hurried away. The king had certainly been born and bred in England, there was no disputing that—but what of this Holstein? She'd have to figure it out. Barclay could tell her where to go looking for such information. Probably—unfortunately—some library somewhere with newspapers archived.

She screwed up her face at the very thought of that. Give her a ballroom glittering with gems ready to be swiped any day. A museum full of the latest security. She'd even learn to drive one of those rumble-throated automobiles if stealing it paid well enough.

But nothing paid so well as Mr. V. So she'd likely have to suffer days in the library. It wasn't that she disliked reading, it was just that she preferred reading certain things. Old newspapers not among them.

Light spilled from the windows of the pub, making her hasten her step. Pauly would have a kettle on and a cup waiting to steep for her. And, today being Tuesday, meat pies. Her mouth watered at the very thought. She'd skipped tea. And luncheon. Breakfast had been a boiled egg. She and Willa had given most of their food to a couple of urchins the night before—after feeding the little ones they claimed as their own, of course—and they both agreed they would rather not dip into their savings to buy more just yet. Willa had need of a new evening gown—some stumbling drunk had ripped hers beyond repair last week—and the silk and beads would cost all they'd put back and then some. Though with this advance payment from Mr. V, that wouldn't be an issue. Tomorrow they could go shopping.

But tonight would be meat pies, laughter, a steaming cup, and perhaps even . . . yes. She smiled as she pushed open the door and heard the lively strains of a violin. Willa was playing. With gusto tonight—an energetic tune that sounded Irish to Rosemary's ears. Her best friend—her sister for more than a

decade—grinned at her as she slid through the crowded room but didn't interrupt her playing.

Rosemary grinned back and nodded to let her know she'd taken the job from Mr. V. An occasion deserving of an energetic tune and savory pie if ever there was one.

“Rosie!”

She headed to their usual corner, where the older members of the family were crowded around two tables shoved together. Her quick glance showed only Retta missing, and Georgie. Retta must have taken the little ones back to her flat after their early meal.

It was the youngest of this older group who had shouted for her. Elinor, with her rosy cheeks and shining golden hair—she was getting far too pretty, their little Ellie. Pretty was notable, and notable was bad in their line of work. But Barclay was aware of that and had begun using her merely as a distraction.

Much as it sometimes annoyed her to admit it, he knew what he was about, Barclay did. Even if he was a pain in her posterior. She waved her hello to Ellie and moved to the empty chair beside the oldest of her brothers, greeting him with a punch in the arm and a kiss on the cheek. “I got the job.”

“Of course you did.” He raised his nearly empty pint. “To a successful day for Rosie!”

“Cheers!” the group called out, raising their mugs too. A few even stood. Shakily. They must be celebrating something more than her success.

She motioned them all back down and took her seat. “Good day?”

“Oh. Oh, Rosie. The best day.” Barclay laughed and drained his cup. Then raised it again. “Another round, Pauly.”

“You'll regret that in the morning.” But she smiled. It had been too long since Barclay had grinned quite like that. “Let me guess . . . you stole the Crown Jewels.”

“Ha!” But he laughed—at least until Pauly poured coffee into

his mug rather than ale. Rosemary wrinkled her nose at how those flavors might mix, but after glaring at it for a moment, Barclay shrugged and took a sip. “Not bad, actually.”

Rosemary shook her head and glanced over her shoulder to watch Willa play. She should have been wearing some overly fine gown while she did so, and be standing up on a stage at a conservatory. Not in a pub in a run-down neighborhood of London, with pipe smoke and curses clouding the air. “If not the Crown Jewels, then what?”

Barclay chuckled again. “I’ll tell you what—I *did* it, that’s what. I stole the wedding ring right from the duchess’s finger and slipped it onto the duke’s mistress.”

“No!” That got her full attention, and she spun back to face her brother with wide eyes. When she’d issued that challenge a month ago . . . “How did you manage it?”

Barclay wiggled his fingers. “Magic hands, Rosie. Magic hands.”

“I helped!” Ellie bounced on her seat across the table, blue eyes glittering like stolen gems. “I came up to the duke like I knew him, which of course made Her Grace wonder how . . . as if I’d ever know him like *that*—he’s so *old*! He’s fifty if he’s a day.”

And a known philanderer, which was why it’d seemed like such an amusing challenge when she’d made it—though apparently she ought to have come up with something more difficult. Rosemary narrowed her eyes at Barclay. “Enlisting help is against the rules.”

“Is not. You’re just a sore loser, little sister.” When he grinned, Barclay was very nearly too handsome, just as Ellie was too pretty. Luckily, he rarely found cause to grin in public. He took another sip of the tainted coffee and nodded toward Ellie. “And a fine job she did too. After I’d done the switch, she went up to the mistress all innocent-like and complimented her on the ring. Loudly. Loud enough to get the attention of the duchess.”

Ellie’s cheeks flushed to an even rosier shade. “I can’t believe

they were all there together, at the same ball. When I have a husband, you can bet he won't be getting away with having another gal, and certainly not under my very nose."

Sweet, optimistic Elinor. Rosie reached across the table to chuck her under the chin. "No man would ever need another but you, little luv. Though I ought to be cross with you for helping this oaf." She elbowed Barclay in the side.

He gave her an easy shove away.

Ellie grinned. "Well, I got to wear Lucy's new gown—how was I to say no to that?"

Rosemary laughed, despite the fact that she knew well what was coming.

"Meat pie for you, Rosie." Pauly put a plate in front of her and a warm, burly hand on her shoulder. "You been a good girl?"

She grinned up at the closest thing any of them had had to a father in recent years. "Only on the bad days."

Pauly smiled down at her with that easy warmth that meant acceptance, no matter what. The exact same smile he'd given her when she was a mite of nine, rooting through his rubbish. Perhaps there *was* a God, to lead her to this particular pub's back alley.

The music came to a rousing end, earning hearty applause and shouts for more from the pub's patrons. "Later!" Willa shouted, stepping down from the tiny little stage Pauly had built for her.

Rosemary scooted her chair closer to Barclay's so Willa, her straight hair slipping from its knot as it always did when she played, could squeeze into her seat on Rosemary's other side. "Irish?"

Willa rolled her blue eyes. "You've no ear for music, Rosie. You're lucky I continue to speak to you."

"Speaking of speaking to her." That impish grin back in place, Barclay drummed his fingers on the scuffed edge of the table, drawing hooting, shouting attention from the rest of their group. "Your turn, Rosie!"

“No.” With an exaggerated groan, she made a show of resting her head in her hand. Which put her face right over the plate of fragrant food. Her stomach’s growl was covered by the family’s laughter at least. “It was just my turn two months ago!”

Never one for mercy, Barclay pointed a finger at her. “You should have chosen a harder challenge for me then, shouldn’t you have?”

It had seemed hard at the time. Everyone in England knew the duchess was paranoid about theft, crying out over every bump and casual brush. More staff had been fired from their house than could be counted—and the out-of-work maids and footmen always had plenty to say about it. Loudly. No one could steal from the duke’s house; it was battened down tighter than the British Museum.

No one.

Except, apparently, Barclay.

“All right.” She straightened, drew in a large breath, squared her shoulders. “I’ll face it like a man. What’s the challenge?”

Willa’s laugh burst with cruel glee. “You’ll never do it. Never.”

“Never. And I shall reign as king supreme.” And would never stop gloating, as evidenced by the way Barclay leaned back in his chair, stretched his arms before him, and cracked his knuckles. “Here it is. I hereby challenge you, Rosemary Gresham, to steal . . .”

She closed her eyes, grimaced, and waited through the drumming of every set of fingers upon the tables. Only when they stopped did she open her eyes again.

Barclay was smirking, a single eyebrow lifted. “A manor house.”

Rosemary just stared at him. “A *house*? You want me to steal a whole *house*?”

He laughed and reached for the mug again. “And don’t try to get clever with me. I’m talking about an honest-to-goodness house, complete with grounds and outbuildings and whatnot. The

whole estate. Which you will never manage. Then there will be no more doubt of who among us is the best. I am, hands down. No question. Because never in a lifetime will you pull off this one.”

Rosemary picked up her fork, pointing it at him rather than her plate. “Don’t be so sure, Mr. Pearce.”

“Oh, come on, Rosie. Admit defeat.” Willa bumped their shoulders together. “Even you can’t steal an estate.”

Probably not. But she’d be willing to bet that this Holstein fellow had a manor house. And if he were a traitor and were stripped of his estates . . . well, she didn’t know how that would help her. But who knew? Maybe she could fake her way into his family and have herself named an heir.

She would tackle this challenge along with her new job. She grinned and forked a bite of pie. “Don’t count me out so soon, luvs. You’ve yet to learn what Rosemary Gresham can do when she sets her mind to a thing.”