



## Rogue Spy (The Spymaster Series Book 5)

By Joanna Bourne

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~Chosen as one of *Library Journal's* Best Romances of 2014~

*For years he'd lived a lie. It was time to tell the truth . . . even if it cost him the woman he loved.*

Ten years ago he was a boy, given the name Thomas Paxton and sent by Revolutionary France to infiltrate the British Intelligence Service. Now his sense of honor brings him back to London, alone and unarmed, to confess. But instead of facing the gallows, he's given one last impossible assignment to prove his loyalty.

Lovely, lying, former French spy Camille Leyland is dragged from her safe rural obscurity by threats and blackmail. Dusting off her spy skills, she sets out to track down a ruthless French fanatic and rescue the innocent victim he's holding—only to find an old colleague already on the case. Pax.

Old friendship turns to new love, and as Pax and Camille's dark secrets loom up from the past, Pax is left with a choice—go rogue from the Service or lose Camille forever...

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## **Rogue Spy (The Spymaster Series Book 5) By Joanna Bourne Bibliography**

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## Editorial Review

### Review

"Complex plotting, flawless pacing, truly exquisite prose, and characters who leap from the page, stilettos in hand, result in a riveting story that is rife with surprises. One more gem from a master of the craft." - *Library Journal*

"*Rogue Spy* is so many things: puzzles within puzzles, a race-against-time to prevent a disaster that will leave many people dead in its wake, an exploration of friendships, the meaning of family, and personal trials, but at its heart it explores a love that did not and will not fade over time." - *Heroes and Heartbreakers*

"When two former double agents who trained together as children risk everything to help each other, falling in love becomes the most dangerous move in a deadly spy master's game." - *Kirkus Reviews*

"I can say with complete honesty that *Rogue Spy* is one of the best books I've read this year. There's plenty of fast-paced action, a tender romance, lots of humour, and a shocking denouement which had me on the edge of my seat. It's intelligently and beautifully written - and now I think I need to go and read the entire series all over again. Brava! Ms. Bourne." - *All About Romance*

It's funny how many times I hear people say they don't like historical spy romance books. They are tricky and complex to write, but Joanna Bourne does them so well. There were several times during *Rogue Spy* that I set down my Kindle and thought to myself, "How did Joanna Bourne even come up with this? She is so tricky!" - *USA Today Happily Ever After*

**~*Rogue Spy* has been chosen as one of Library Journal's Best Romances of 2014~**

### About the Author

**Joanna Bourne** is the award-winning author of the Spymaster series: *Spymaster's Lady*, *My Lord and Spymaster*, *Forbidden Rose*, *Black Hawk*, and her latest, *Rogue Spy*. She's drawn to the excitement and intellectual ferment of Revolutionary and Napoleonic France and the mannered wit of Regency England.

Joanna credits a lifelong fascination with history, her many beloved Romance books, and the pulp classic tales of fantastical adventure as the inspiration of her stories. She lived for many years in England and France, the settings of the Spymaster series.

Nowadays Joanna makes her home on a mountaintop in the Appalachians with her family, a peculiar cat, and an old brown country dog.

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### Acknowledgments

When you must run, carry nothing and never look back.

#### A BALDONI SAYING

The end of her own particular world arrived early on a Tuesday morning, wrapped in brown paper and twine, sealed with a blob of red wax. She found it at the bottom of the pile of the morning's mail.

She sat at her desk in the library, pleasantly full of breakfast, opening letters, ready to be brisk with the contents. Camille Leyland—Cami—dutiful niece, British subject, codebreaker, French spy, ready to deal with the morning post.

The Fluffy Aunts didn't believe in opening mail at the breakfast table. "A barbarous custom," Aunt Lily called it.

Books filled the room she sat in and most of the rest of the substantial cottage. They ran floor to ceiling along every wall of the front parlor, the entry hall, the back parlor, what had originally been a bedroom, and this little study at the back of the house. Books, plump with pages of notes and bristling with bookmarks, stuffed the shelves two deep and wedged in every available space on top.

In the next room Aunt Lily and Aunt Violet bumbled back and forth, trailing scarves and arguing amiably about . . . something to do with Gnostic symbology. In any case, they had wandered deep into the maze of academic dispute. Any decoding done today would fall in her lap.

The window at her back was open to the morning. Sun fell across these nearest shelves in the pattern of the windowpanes, eighteen trapezoids across the books. The leather binding was mellow brown, red, and blue. The gold lettering on the spines turned to curls of fire.

To work, to work. She'd get the pesky small business of the day out of the way first. It was an old relaxing routine to cut a fresh nib on the pen and unstopper the ink. She slipped her shoes off and cuddled her stocking feet under her, comfy as a cat. Her desk was bare as the deck of a ship at sea. When one codes and decodes for diplomats and the secret agencies of the British government, one keeps a tidy desk.

"I can't find . . ." Aunt Violet leaned in at the door. "Cami, did you move the Norbert manuscript for some reason?"

"Try the boxes on the table." That answer usually worked.

"I have it here." Aunt Lily's voice came around the corner. "I was consulting it last night. Fanshaw is wrong. Incorrect citations. Sloppy scholarship. No real knowledge of his subject. He is quite simply wrong."

"*Ex scientia vera*," Aunt Violet said.

Half a lifetime of Latin over the dinner table made the translation automatic. "From knowledge, truth." Herself, she'd always thought one could have too much truth.

Aunt Lily crossed the door to the front room, coming in and out of the line of sight, carrying a large manuscript. "Stupid as *owls*. Not the Hungarians. Stuffy old fools and their Cambridge politics." That was obscure, but probably true, the Fluffy Aunts being shrewd in such matters.

A serene, blue and gold morning filled the sky outside the window to her left. The air was full of academic infighting and the scent of late roses. This first letter . . . she glanced at the postmarks. That was from Aunt Lily's man of business. She could set it aside, unopened. The Fluffy Aunts invested in cog production and

rope inventories and God knew what and didn't seem to go bankrupt.

She slipped her letter opener under the seal of the next letter and loosed the news that Mr. Owens, owner of the Sparrow Bookshop in London, had located a copy of *De Componendis Cifris*, exhaustively described herein. How much would they authorize him to bid on it? That went to the pile on the far left, for Aunt Violet, who collected. A bill for a hat slid into a drawer with other bills to be paid next time she was in London. A letter from Germany, in German. That was for Aunt Lily.

Paper by paper, she sorted order out of chaos. It was not unlike decoding, in its way.

Aunt Lily stalked about, muttering, in the other room, "Not Ogham. Not Welsh. Next he's going to spout nonsense about Aramaic."

The letter opener was an antique dagger from Italy, honed to a killing edge. But no one would wonder why she kept a deadly weapon in the house. Lay it gently in a desk drawer and the knife became unremarkable as a goose quill.

It was beautiful in a spare, serious way, the sort of knife one of her Baldoni ancestors would have used to commit murder. She'd bought it in London eight years ago for that purpose, and it worked. She hadn't killed anybody with it since.

The knife was also perfectly good at opening letters.

The next offering of the mail was a note, elegantly addressed and hand-delivered from the manor. There would be a tea next Tuesday. Would the Misses Leyland care to attend?

Tea and tittle-tattle, chatter of King Charles spaniels, flooding in the lower fields. The Fluffy Aunts would love it. She set that aside to write a bright, cheery answer later, because the bottom of the pile held something more interesting. Her last but not least of the morning was a square packet wrapped in clean brown paper, tied with string. It was wider than her hand and not much thicker than an ordinary letter. Some object about the size of a shilling weighted the center.

Because of what she'd once been, because of what she'd once known, she saw the dozens of small details and tried to fit them into a pattern. Shopkeeper paper, suitable to wrap Byron's poems or a ham. Ordinary twine. Unremarkable red wax for the seal. That seal slopped over the flap of the paper and the knot in the twine. It would be hard to lift undetectably, if anyone took a notion to engage in that sort of behavior. The signet could have been the letter *L* or a boat. Or a duck.

The aunts had an eclectic network of friends spread to every corner of the map. Sometimes their friends sent curios. But when she turned the little package over, it was addressed to her, not one of the aunts. Educated writing, probably in a man's hand. The postmarks showed it had been sent from London four days ago.

She cut the string and smoothed the wrapping back to reveal a sheet of cream-colored writing paper inside, folded in thirds, then folded inward at the sides. When she picked it up, a ring fell out to spin in a long, small clatter and wobble itself flat.

A gold ring. Her fingers told her it was real gold and worth far too much to send in a letter through the post. The band held a pearl the size of a pea. She slanted it to the light. It was set in a circle of ten very nice little rubies. Well matched, square cut, excellent color, about a carat all told. Very nice indeed.

A child's ring. She'd seen this somewhere.

Her body recognized disaster before her mind did.

She read the first lines of the letter and distinctly, crystal by spiked crystal, she felt herself turn to ice.

My dear Camille,

We are not yet acquainted, so I enclose this small token as introduction. You will have seen this ring in the portrait that hangs above the fireplace in the parlor of Wythe Cottage. Hyacinth Besançon, née Leyland, toys with a brown-and-white spaniel named Felix, called Lix-Lix. The child to her left, the genuine Camille Besançon, wears this ring.

She is here with me now. I foresee great awkwardness when this somewhat more authentic Camille returns to her aunts' house. The Leylands might forgive your deception. The British Service, Military Intelligence, and the Foreign Office will not.

If you try to run, they will pursue you mercilessly.

Make some excuse to travel to London. Meet me at the Moravian church in Fetter Lane on Friday at noon. Bring with you the key to the Mandarin Code. Do so, and you may continue your comfortable life with the Leylands. I will present you with the inconvenient remnant of the past I hold. You may do with her as you will.

A friend

Snakes of fear slithered along her bones. She had not forgotten how to be terrified, even after many years of safety.

Outside the window, in the garden, a few house sparrows had come to hop about in the grass. The brightest color was the quince tree, yellow against the brick. The hollyhocks were seedpods now, all their leaves brown, looking disgruntled with autumn. Even in early September frost nipped them at night. She could see beyond the wall to the wood on the other side of Dawson's field. Tree shadows flickered against the sky.

It was really a beautiful day.

For ten years she'd been safe in the village of Brodemere, playing the part of the Leylands' niece. But before that, she'd been one of the Cachés, one of the terrible, well-trained children sent to England by the fanatics of the Revolution. She'd been a French spy, placed in an English family. Placed with the Leylands, because the two dithering, scholarly old ladies were the codemakers and codebreakers for the British Intelligence Service.

The British Service would not be forgiving. They could not allow a French spy who knew so much to escape. It would not matter to them that she had never stolen secrets. That she had long since shaken free of her French masters. She'd read thousands of documents as she ciphered and deciphered. The British Service couldn't afford to let her live.

She let her breath out unevenly, accepting this truth. One must know when it is time to run. When she was a child, her parents had died because they stayed one day too long in Paris, playing a role that was too profitable to abandon.

She lowered the fluttering letter to the blotter to cover the ring. Rested her hands on the desk so they

wouldn't shake. She would not alarm the Fluffy Aunts. Would not bring them to her desk, worried and curious, full of sharp, shrewd attention.

It had been a long, fine game, being Camille Leyland. She'd played it so thoroughly she had almost forgotten it was a lie.

Aunt Lily stood at the table in the corner and leafed through a folio book, exchanging opinions through the open door with Aunt Violet . . . something about the Hermetics and Rosenkreuz. They'd slipped into speaking German.

At any moment either of them could look in her direction and know something was terribly wrong.

*Become smooth as an egg. Placid as tea in a cup. Show nothing.*

She bent over the desk as if she were reading the letter. Nothing in the poise of her body betrayed fear. Nothing, nothing showed on her face.

*I have not forgotten what it is to be a Caché.* At the school in Paris—the Coach House, it was called—she'd learned to recite the English kings, to play spillikins and Fox and Geese, to make small bombs, to dance the Scotch Reel, to kill with her hands. She'd had a different name then. Memories of that time spun and tumbled in her head like a pack of cards, tossed in the air, falling.

When she looked up, the world was changed. The books beside her desk, the mail in its prim stacks, the big lamp, the copybooks and quills, the sharpened pencils in the Etruscan cup felt strange, distant, trivial. The woman she was becoming, second by second, no longer belonged in this quiet village, in this small house where two harmless old women argued about Finnish vowel sounds.

The Fluffy Aunts knew the Mandarin Code as well as she did. The man who sent this disgusting letter must be well aware of that. If he couldn't get the code from her, he would come to acquire it from them. Her first task, before all others, was to lead his attention away from this cottage. Away from the aunts.

She slipped the letter opener into her sleeve, where it stopped being harmless and turned into a dagger again. She put her palms flat on the desk and made herself think.

From the next room, Aunt Violet called, "So vexing. He agrees with Johnson."

"Then they are both wrong." Aunt Lily snapped the volume she was studying closed. Emphatically, she pushed her glasses back up the bridge of her nose.

"Huncher is very unhelpful. I'll try Middleton."

"I'd accept Middleton," Aunt Lily stepped briskly from the room, "*cum grano salis.*"

. . . *with a grain of salt.* She would miss them so much.

She folded the letter, feeling the texture of it acutely, seeing every nuance and shade of the wood grain of her desk. The pearl ring was light in her hand when she picked it up.

For ten years, she'd lived in this safe, pretty cottage in the place that belonged to Camille Besançon. At night, in her room up under the slope of the roof, in the narrow bed beside the window, she'd looked out over the fields toward the mill pond and imagined the child who'd died. That child, her parents, and the young brother had been murdered so a Caché could be placed in the Leyland household. So many murders

committed so a French spy could live in the cottage in Brodemere with the Latin and tea cakes, German, algebra, Hebrew and Arabic, the intricacies of code, the calculus, Spanish, Polish, chess, good wine . . .  
“There is nothing worse than inferior wine,” Aunt Violet always said. “One might as well drink ditchwater.”

*I couldn't have saved that child. I was a child myself, and helpless.*

But in the silence of the night, all those years, she'd felt guilty.

Could Camille Besançon have somehow escaped the slaughter? Could the little girl who'd worn this ring possibly be alive?

“Whyever am I holding this Von Herder book?” Aunt Violet's voice receded toward the parlor. “What was I looking for?”

“Middleton. It should be on the shelf behind you, next to the Asiatic Register. To the right. The other right, dear.”

They'd given her so much. She'd been able to give them so little.

Now she could protect them. She could make certain this blackmailer never, ever came near them. If Camille Besançon had somehow survived, she could give the Fluffy Aunts their niece. Their only blood relative. It would be a small repayment for the lies she'd told.

*I'll never see them again. I can't even say goodbye.*

She slipped the ring into her pocket. It was time to go. She turned in her chair and dropped the blackmail letter on the fire. It blackened and became ashes. No one would be surprised to see her burning it. Codemakers burn every scrap of paper they're not using.

The man who'd written that sly, lying letter could have bribed some villager or one of the servants to report to him. Even now, someone might be standing in the wood spying on them with field glasses. From this moment on, she'd assume someone was watching.

She'd always known that one day, without warning, it would be time to walk away. But she wasn't ready. She would never be ready.

She'd made her preparations. Two miles past the parish pump, under a great flat stone at the end of an old stone wall, money, warm clothing, and sturdy walking shoes waited, wrapped in oilcloth. She'd help herself to the muff pistol and kit from the drawer in the hall when she went by. Then she'd stroll down the front walk carrying nothing but her reticule, as if she went on some ordinary stroll to the village. She'd stand up and walk away. It was as simple and as hard as that.

In a minute of two she'd get up and do it. When she was quite certain she wasn't going to cry.

It didn't matter how determined and clever you were. When the sword of Damocles falls, there you sit, stupid as a chicken, with your skull cleaved neatly in half.

Two

Many a man has woven his own noose from parchment. Put nothing in writing.



## A BALDONI SAYING

Pax stood at the window of the Dancing Dog, holding a mug of ale, looking out at Braddy Square. He'd come back to London, to duty undone and promises broken. To men he'd betrayed. Back to where it began. Back to Meeks Street. There were no decisions to make. No work left undone. He was just putting off the inevitable. Strange to discover this late in the game that he was a coward.

*Stop thinking.* He'd slogged the leagues across France, crossed the Channel, and made the long ride from Dover to London by not letting himself think.

He set his mug lightly to one of the windowpanes and didn't pretend an interest in drinking ale. Nobody in the tavern bothered him. He found himself watching a woman who stood in the open space of the square. At this distance she was just a brown cloak, making a line of dark sienna against the light behind. He couldn't see her face under the hood. Something in the sweep of cloak from shoulder to ground when she moved said she was young. She'd brought bread to scatter for the birds. A couple dozen pigeons and sparrows had formed an attentive circle.

He hadn't slept for a long time. Hadn't tried to. He'd ridden . . . how many horses had he ridden to exhaustion? He'd pushed on through the night, not because what he had to do was important but because he'd rather spend the hours riding than lying down, staring at the ceiling in some French inn. He was almost sure he hadn't slept since he left Paris.

This last quarter mile, within sight of Meeks Street, was the hardest. He couldn't make himself go on. He'd washed up at the Dancing Dog, dropped his valise, and stuck.

The woman in her dark cloak had a quality of waiting, as if she were meeting somebody. Maybe that was what caught his eye. She stayed motionless while everyone else passed through the square on business that took them elsewhere.

The wide front window of the Dancing Dog was made of old, thick, wavery panes of glass that distorted the world. A man in a blue coat passed the tavern, west to east, carrying a parcel. His image thinned and stretched from pane to pane. It was like watching him through water.

They knew Thomas Paxton at the Dog. A decade ago, when he'd been doorkeeper and messenger boy at Number Seven, he'd raced in and out of here every day, fetching meat pasties and beer to the agents, rattling through at a run, returning empty jugs to the counter in back.

Ten years ago he'd kept an appointment with a traitor in that dim and shadowy back corner to the right. He'd handed over a sheaf of secrets and become a traitor himself. A milestone in his life.

He snuffed out that thought the way he'd pinch off flame to save the candle for another day.

The battered valise at his feet held two changes of clothing, money, and a spare knife. His gun was packed on top, loaded. Carruthers had handed it back when he rode out of Paris, probably hoping he'd use it to suicide. That might be the simplest solution for everybody.

Damned if he'd make it that easy for them.

In the false bottom of the bag he carried a dozen letters, correspondence from Paris to the Meeks Street headquarters. They'd made their resident traitor the courier on this trip. The ways of the British Service were mysterious indeed.

Maybe Carruthers knew this particular burden was the best way to get him to London alive, and as fast as a horse could travel. That might be what she had planned. The British Intelligence Service worked five or six levels of subtlety deep.

He was carrying a copy of his confession with the other messages. That last week in Paris he'd written out a lengthy account of his life, with particular attention to the ways he'd betrayed the British Service. He was also delivering a final report on the whole matter from Carruthers, Head of Section for France, to Galba, Head of the British Service.

He could have opened that. He could have lifted the seal and replaced it undetectably when he was eight. Twice, he'd taken that report out from the other letters and thought about reading it.

Snare after snare. Temptation after temptation. Maybe Carruthers advised a swift and final end for the man who called himself Thomas Paxton. What did a man do when he opened that letter and found his death warrant?

He'd never know. Both times, he'd put the report back with the other letters and repacked the bag. He hadn't taken the bait, if it was bait. He didn't have much honor left—just a patched-up, threadbare rag of it—but he would have used the gun on himself before he lost the last of it.

He ran the back of his fingers across the window glass, feeling the ripple in it, feeling the cold. Trapped inside the glass, pinpoint bubbles glinted silver.

Galba wouldn't be content with killing him. Galba would want to pry the top off his soul and drag every one of his slimy secrets out into the sunlight.

Mugs clicked behind him. A chair scraped on the floor. The barman cleared tables. Two plump women walked past the Dancing Dog, side by side, one neat in dark green, the other in dark blue. They leaned together, their heads close, their handbaskets bumping, steps matched, a picture of old friendship and a lifetime of confidences shared. He'd have sketched them in quick slashes of watercolor, then stacked up ink in a blunt, dark splotch on the pavement at their feet to give them a single shadow.

On a bench in the square, a man unfolded a cloth across his lap and took out bread and cheese, enjoying an early lunch. The woman he'd been watching tossed another wide circle of crumbs and her cloak flowed like water falling. Sparrows hopped and scuttled madly left or right around her feet. He'd do that lone, self-contained figure in chalks, the sweet curve of her cloak laid in burnt sienna over indigo. He'd thumb in one soft smudge of pale amber under her hood, where the plane of her cheek showed. He would have liked to see her face.

There. That was her last handful of bread. He watched her dust her fingers and motion to the boy lounging on the step at the mercer's. Sam, floor sweeper, delivery boy, holder of horses, one of the fixtures in the neighborhood, ran over to conduct business. He took coin, accepted a letter, and headed down Meeks Street.

She wasn't here to feed sparrows, then. The calculations that always churned in the bottom of his mind broke the surface. Why would a woman send a note from the middle of Braddy Square instead of from her own front door? Why not drop it in the post? Why was she wearing her hood up on a fine day like today?

Life was full of mysteries he'd never solve. Maybe that was a love letter she was sending. Maybe she'd spend the afternoon naked in the arms of her man.

*Enjoy yourself, pretty lady.* His own afternoon would be less pleasant. Time to get on with it.

His mug of ale was still full when he slid it onto the nearest table. He set a coin beside it and picked his bag up, taking it left-handed so he'd have his knife hand free. Nobody looked up to see him leave. It was a point of pride to him that nobody noticed.

He checked to make sure he wasn't followed out of the Dog. It was habit. Just habit. He had all the habits of a spy.

\* \* \*

Cami trailed her messenger lad to the top of Meeks Street and stood watching him strut down the pavement. He was brisk as any boy who knew eyes were on him.

The church bells finished up the count of eleven. Her flock of birds flew away to do bird errands now that she had no more bread for them. Probably their lives were full of whatever troubles birds fell heir to and all that cheery chirping and hopping about was a deception. She was something of an expert in deception.

When she paid the boy tuppence to deliver the letter, she'd pressed a shilling into his hand on top of it. "If they ask who gave you the letter, describe someone else. If they ask where I went, point the other way."

Her family—the Baldoni—used to say, "Prepare for many evil eventualities. Some of them will arrive."

The air settled around her, still and heavy. The sky over London was white, opaque and dull as cheap crockery, full of bright sun. Her boy turned at Number Seven, tripped up the stair, and stood waiting for an answer to his knock. She waited also. She'd stay to see this letter delivered. There was too much at stake to take that for granted. Inside the shell of calm she'd closed around her was a chaos so loud she couldn't think. It was fortunate she'd made her plans beforehand and needed only to follow the path she'd laid out.

From the corner of her eye she saw the shift of light. A man walked toward her across Braddy Square. For a sharp instant, she was afraid.

But no. She wasn't in danger yet. She had an hour before she walked into the trap laid for her.

She turned away, not sharing her face with this man passing by, being careful. In the long, soft years since Paris, she hadn't forgotten the rules.

She collected only a glimpse of him as he walked past her and continued down Meeks Street . . . a tall, long-limbed man, dressed in dark traveling clothes, somewhat dusty. He wore well-scuffed riding boots, riding gloves, and a soft, broad-brimmed felt hat that shaded his face. He carried a valise and moved fast, with the clean grace of an athlete. Something about him made her think of a man trudging uphill with no end in sight. If she hadn't been supplied with a sufficiency of troubles of her own, she would have been curious.

Far down Meeks Street, her messenger boy delivered the letter, gave a cheeky salute to the house, and was down the stair before the door closed behind him.

That was done. Whatever happened to her in the Moravian church on Fetter Lane, that message was safe. There should be no repercussions. She'd timed its delivery so the men of Meeks Street would decode it only after she'd completed her business with the blackmailer.

She crossed Braddy Square in the direction of a godly church where an ungodly meeting would take place. She looked back once. She wasn't really surprised to see the man with the valise climb the stairs of Number Seven Meeks Street.

Three

Many buckets of quarrel are filled from the well of ignorance.

A BALDONI SAYING

Pax put one foot in front of the other for the last thousand steps, not letting himself slow down.

Meeks Street hadn't changed. Ugly prosperous houses lined both sides of the street, the doorknobs polished and the steps well scrubbed. Some houses were shut up tight, keeping the air out, but most had the window sashes up. Muslin curtains rippled, lipping in and out over the sills. The linden trees were turning yellow. Gray smoke from the kitchen fires slanted off the chimneys and spread out to disappear.

Number Thirty-one was still ruled by the sleek black tomcat that played sentry on the garden wall. Number Twenty-three had added five stone urns along the front, carrying five yew trees shaved and clipped within an inch of their lives. At Nineteen, a dog stuck a yapping muzzle through a gap in the iron gate.

All familiar. He didn't belong at Meeks Street anymore, but it felt like coming home.

Down the street, Sam had delivered that woman's message to Number Seven.

He glanced back over his shoulder. The woman in the dark cloak was gone. She'd waited just long enough to see her letter delivered. Gone . . . and she left the air behind her shimmering with intention and planning.

*I don't like this.*

Young Sam swung away from Number Seven, errand completed, and headed back to the square, running his fingers along the iron palings, whistling, pleased with himself.

*Why didn't she want to come to Number Seven?* He took the steps fast. For the first time in two weeks, he had a reason to be in a hurry.

He pounded the knocker and left his hand spread flat on the door, willing it to open. The door was painted Prussian green with a little black in the base. The knocker was brass, in the shape of a rose. Forty years ago they'd picked the rose knocker out of the ruins of the old headquarters after it burned. The plate to the right of the door read, *The Penumbra Walking Club*.

He didn't have a key. Nobody got past the front door of Number Seven unless somebody let him in.

He pounded again. Where was Giles?

The lock disengaged. Giles, a sturdy, open-faced sixteen-year-old, opened the door, letter in hand. He said, "Pax." Nothing but surprise and pleasure in his voice. "You're back. Hawker said you'd be here in a day or two. Grey's landed in Dover—"

"Give me that." He took the letter from Giles, dropped it on the table, and brushed his fingers on his coat.

"It just came," Giles said. "Sam brought it. It's addressed to Galba."

The door on the other side of the ugly front parlor opened. Hawker, compact, dark haired, deadly as a snake, dressed like a gentleman, strolled in. "I didn't think you'd be fool enough to show up. There's still time to turn around and run."

“No, there isn’t. Hawk, look at this. Don’t touch it.”

“I wasn’t going to.” Hawker approached, feline and inquisitive. “Communication from the greater world.”

The folded paper was addressed to Anson Jones. That was Galba’s real name, not the name he used when he was Head of Service. *Mr. Anson Jones, Number Seven, Meeks Street.*

“What’s wrong with it?” Hawker took his knife out, twitched the blade under the note, flipped it over.

“It’s from a woman.”

“Not, in itself, a bad thing.”

In fifty words he told Hawk how the note had been sent. “And . . . I know the handwriting. This *e* with the sharp corner, tilted up. The bar on the *t* slanted down. I’ve seen that.”

“Where?”

“Not recently. It’s . . .” He shook his head. “A long time ago. Somewhere.”

“Part of life’s eventful journey.”

“It’ll come to me.” He pulled his knife and helped himself to Hawker’s. He steadied the note and slit the seal without touching the paper at all. “Don’t breathe.” That was for Giles. Hawker had already stepped back.

Hawker murmured, “You do realize we’re prying into the private correspondence of the Head of Service.”

“I know.” He laid the page flat, using the knife point to push the edges back. On the paper, line after line of numbers and letters. “And we have code.”

“Do we?” Hawker bent forward. “How dramatic.”

“A Service code.”

“A Leyland code.” Hawk’s finger hovered over the inkblot that marked it as Leyland code. “I don’t recognize the identifier.”

“One of the old ones. Before you came to the Service.” Code. Something about code . . . and that handwriting.

Then he remembered. He’d been thirteen or fourteen, sitting at a long table in the cold, bare schoolroom of the Coach House, painstakingly disassembling a code. The dark-haired girl beside him leaned over her slate, scribbling down the sharp little *e* and the slanted *t*, deciphering as fast as she could write. None of them could touch her when it came to code breaking.

*Vérité. Vérité’s handwriting.* Ten years ago, when he’d had a different name and Vérité had been his best friend. “I know who she is. I knew her when she was a child.” A particularly deadly child.

Hawk said, “A French spy, then. One of you Cachés.”

“One of us. Yes.” He flipped Hawk’s knife to hold it by the blade and handed it back to him. “I have to find her. Giles, go wash your hands. Don’t touch the letter again. Don’t let anyone get close to it till I come

back.”

Giles said, “Why not?”

Hawker answered for him. “Because Galba opens mail addressed to that name with his own hands. There could be poison in the paper. Or smallpox. I saw that done once. We may be playing host to a weapon of the assassin’s trade. The woman who sent it is Police Secrète.”

“At one time, she was. I don’t know what she is now.” He wondered what else to say and couldn’t think of anything. “Tell Galba I’ll be back.”

“Giles will tell him.” Hawk was already grabbing his hat from the hideous sideboard.

“Hawk, you can’t help me with this. You know why.”

“Because you’re Thomas Paxton, infamous French spy.” Hawker’s dark face was inscrutable, his eyes cool and assessing. “I’d better keep an eye on you.”

“You’re on the sick list. You have a bullet hole in you.”

“Not a large one. We’ll argue about it as we walk. Lead the way.”

The hell of it was, he needed Hawk. He made the only decision possible. Somehow he’d make it right with Galba when they got back. “Then come on.”

Four

The eagle is uplifted by air. The fish is supported by water. The Baldoni are sustained by subtlety.

#### A BALDONI SAYING

A dozen people dawdled their way around Braddy Square or sat on the benches. Vérité was gone. Pax swung in a circle, looking for any sign of her.

Hawker caught up with him. “She has five minutes’ head start. Will she break into a run?”

With her training? “She won’t even walk fast. She’s gone three or four hundred yards.”

He and Hawk had worked together so long they didn’t have to discuss strategy. Hawk took off to the left, following the perimeter of the square, clockwise.

One person in Braddy Square would have noticed which way Vérité had gone. Sam was back at his accustomed post in front of the mercer’s, meditating on the distant clouds. He was willing enough to point to the corner where the Dancing Dog did its trade. “She went down there. In a hurry, she was.”

Wouldn’t it be nice if life were that simple? He fumbled a half crown loose from his pocket and held it up. “There’s two of these if I catch up with her.”

He made to tuck the coin back in his pocket.

“Down there. Morte Road.” The boy’s eyes shifted east. “She give me shilling to say she gone t’other way.”

Now they had a chance. He flipped the coin to Sam and said, "If I catch her, come find two more of these tonight at Number Seven," and left the boy with a grin on his face.

He ran east, hearing Hawk behind him. The first corner gave no sign of her. No dark cloak. No woman alone. No woman the right size and shape.

"This is exceptionally futile," Hawk said. "Except for Sam, who had a profitable morning. You bribe large."

"Always bribe large, close to home."

"A rule to live by. What are we chasing?"

"Long, dark brown cloak with a hood. Dress under it is dark blue. The woman's thin, medium height, a bit more than twenty. Brown eyes. Black hair, short and curly. She's pretty." He corrected that. "She's probably pretty. I didn't see her face."

"You didn't bother to angle over and get a good look. You are a waste of balls, Mr. Paxton."

"I didn't let a woman put a bullet in my shoulder, Mr. Hawkins. We go left."

They ran the next street without a glimpse of Vérité. At the corner, this time, he chose the right hand. There were more people on the street in this direction. Then, sixty feet ahead . . .

He slowed. "You see?" He shifted aside to let Hawker get a good look.

"Do we follow her, or do we collect her now?"

"We follow. You take the lead. And keep your face covered. If she makes a habit of watching Meeks Street, she may know you."

"A joy shared by feminine multitudes." Hawk stripped off his neckcloth and stuffed it in his pocket. He pulled a thin black neckerchief from another pocket and tied it in place around his neck, a fashion for laborers and small tradesmen. "Who is she?"

"French."

"Not precisely a crime. More what Doyle would be calling a social solecism." Hawk unbuttoned his jacket. Crushed the lapels tight in his fists and let them hang rumpled and slightly crooked. What had been fashionable now looked like a cheap imitation. "Hold on to this for me." Hawker handed his hat over and ran a rough hand through his hair, putting himself another step downward on the social ladder.

"She may be armed. Don't get close."

"I never take chances," Hawk said. He probably even believed it.

"I'll signal when we need to change places."

Hawk nodded, his eyes on the dark flick of a cloak in the distance. He reset his coat on his shoulders and hunched in on himself, losing an inch in height. Unrecognizable, he faded into the crowd.

\* \* \*

Twenty minutes later, inconspicuous behind a handcart stacked with bales of newsprint, Pax watched Vérité open the door of a small church on Fetter Lane, just off Fleet Street. He was fairly sure she hadn't spotted him. Ten years ago she'd been skilled in the game of follow and be followed, but he and Hawker had used every trick in the book to stay invisible. They were skilled, too.

An empty church. This looked like she was meeting somebody.

He picked a rectangular slash of shade at the doorway of a stationer's across the street from the church, a spot just made for a man to be patient in. Fetter Lane wasn't as busy as Fleet Street, but it was full enough of printers and booksellers, newspaper offices and taverns, that a man might stand here awhile, waiting for a friend and an innocent meal of chops and ale. Playing his part, he pulled his watch out and checked it. Still well short of noon.

He'd been carrying a newspaper for the last little while. Now he shook it open to hide his face. He signaled, *Come here*, by holding the paper with the first two fingers on his left hand spread and his thumb up.

A minute later, Hawk stopped at the stationer's window and became absorbed in boxes of nice letter paper, a blotter with green felt, and a gold-plated pen set. He said, "The Moravian church. How religious of her. May I assume our quarry is a dedicated Christian reformer with a grim face and abominable taste in clothes?"

"Our quarry is a dedicated French spy." Under cover of the newspaper, he slipped his pistol out and checked it. Everything in order.

"Doubtless she's expecting others of her ilk," Hawk said. "Or they're already inside. And me with only two knives concealed about my person. If I'd had some warning, I'd have dressed for work."

"Don't kill anybody. Don't put knife holes in her."

"Right. No killing," Hawk said. Then, "And largely unhurt."

"Yes."

They considered the church. He, over the top of a stiff newspaper. Hawk, in the reflection in the shop window.

Hawk said, "Do we call for reinforcements, which is my own personal favorite in situations like this, or do we pop in and join her?"

"You wait here." He folded the newspaper. "I'll go talk to her."

"Or I could deal with her, which won't ruffle my pinfeathers a bit, and you could while away the idle minutes out here."

"If you hear shots, that's not a signal to engage. Stay out of it unless I call you. Follow anyone who leaves."

Hawker said, "You're giving orders for some discernible reason? Last I heard, you were a French spy and a traitor."

"When two Independent Agents undertake a joint operation," he quoted, "the senior agent shall command."

"The hell with that."



“You took the words right out of my mouth. Circle round the right of the church and stay in place. I’ll go pay a call on an old friend.” He crossed Fetter Lane, dropping his newspaper in the back of a goods wagon on the way.

Five

One cannot walk straight when the path is crooked.

#### A BALDONI SAYING

There are no congenial places to meet a blackmailer, Cami thought. The Moravian church would do as well as anywhere.

Fetter Lane headed north from Fleet Street, being stingy in width and less than straight about it. It was a street of printers and bookshops, with an inn that had been serving pork pie since the time of Good Queen Bess. Samuel Johnson had lived on Fetter Lane and Thomas Hobbes and Dryden. Even nowadays you couldn’t lob a rock without hitting somebody bookish.

She knew Fetter Lane well. She couldn’t count the times she’d tagged along behind the Fluffy Aunts from bookshop to bookshop, carrying their spoil of carefully wrapped commentaries on the Babylonians and histories of the Scythians. She’d never paid any attention to the Moravian church, though.

She’d passed it three times yesterday, studying the outside but not getting close. Now . . . the door swung open, unlocked. That would be her blackmailer who’d arranged that. How helpful of him.

She pulled her hood up over her hair to be respectful, stepped across the threshold, and closed the door behind her. It was quiet here, a private, muffled-up place to kill somebody, when you came down to it. She was surprised there weren’t more murders done in church.

She swatted the thoughts away and they came buzzing back, like flies.

She was fairly safe. If the French wanted her dead, they’d have drowned her in the duck pond in Brodemere. If they wanted to kidnap her, they’d have done that in Brodemere, too.

She walked corner to corner to corner of the church, feeling cold seep out of the stone of the floor, smelling tallow candles and soap. There were four tall windows on the right side of the church, but they’d built a gallery with extra benches up there, right across them, blocking most of the light. The only thing worse than meeting a blackmailer was meeting one in all this gloom.

A thin descant warbled behind her thoughts listing all the ways she might die in the next hour or so. She ignored it.

The windows were clear glass. The walls were whitewashed, utterly unadorned. The stiff, upright pews were unpadding. At the front, rising high and dominating everything, was a huge pulpit of dark wood, devoid of carving or ornament. It said much about the blackmailer that he held his rendezvous in a church. Such contempt for God, to choose this place. He’d picked a cold, ugly church, too.

She slid into a pew on the left-hand side, along wood worn smooth by many backsides, and straightened her clothes. She touched the hard shape of her knife, safe beneath her skirt. Touched the pistol that rested in the pouch sewed inside her cloak, over her heart. She was comforted, as one always is by concealed weapons.

She'd been born in the hills of Tuscany, into the great, rich, noisy household of the Baldoni, in the town of San Biagio del Colle. In the church there, the carved stone soared to heaven and the pillars unfurled at the top to bloom like lilies. At the feet of the old statues, there was always a garden of lit candles, sending prayers to heaven. The windows told stories in jewels of light.

She'd never understood why the English thought God did not like this. But then, even after a decade among them, there were many things she did not understand about the English.

It wouldn't be long now. She felt afraid around the edges, but the core of her was vibrating with excitement. Soon the game would be in play. She'd missed this. She was Baldoni, and scheming was in her blood.

She pressed her hands together, knuckle to knuckle, and steadied her breathing, building strength for the confrontation to come, clearing her mind, setting the little voices of fear to rest. She laid row upon row of certainty in walls around her heart and lungs, until she made of herself a fortress.

It was hard to work alone. Hard to be without anyone to guard her back. Without family. The aunts had been—

She cut off the thought before it formed and resolutely laid her hands, one in the other, loose in her lap. Her hands would whisper, *I am not worried. I'm prepared to deal with you.* It was an old saying of the Baldoni that lies are not words only. One deceives with every fingernail and toe.

The latch clicked. The door opened and sounds of the street spilled in.

He was early. What did it say about her blackmailer that he'd come to the meeting early?

The boot steps told her it was one man who walked toward her, taking a long stride. There was no scrape or sound of breathing to indicate he'd brought accomplices. He'd decided this was not a transaction to share with the multitudes.

She stayed as she was, seated, head bowed, making him come to her. When he was close, she turned to see him.

He stalked toward her, a tall, lean man, not hurrying. He walked like a fighter, graceful, balanced forward on his feet. Walked like one of the larger predators, entering a dangerous patch of jungle. Nothing about him called attention, and yet the threat of him coalesced from the dimness like one single, pure violin note from noise.

His eyes hid in darkness under the wide brim of his hat. He hadn't bothered to remove it in this poor excuse for a church. Then he lifted his head and light found his features. High-bridged nose, wide lips, angular jaw. A face of spare bones with the skin tight across.

She knew him. Shock hit like cold water. "Devoir . . . ?"

"Vérité." He said her name calmly. Her old name. The name from the years in Paris.

"What are you doing here? How did you find me?"

"I followed you."

She tried to match this man with the brilliant boy she'd known, a boy on the edge of manhood, angry inside, tightly controlled, given to long silences, self-contained, secret as a closed watch.

He took hold of the carved wood at the end of the pew. In that simple act, he demonstrated, beyond doubt, that this was, indeed, Devoir. She would have recognized his hand anywhere, in all its familiar machinery of long fingers and the jutting bony knob of his wrist. His hand was like the rest of him—sparse, enduring, the flesh and bone stripped to the essential, the necessary, the irreplaceable.

He wore his hair long enough to tie behind, out of his way. Strands of it, uncooperative, marked sharp white lines from his temple, across his cheek. She said, “You haven’t changed.”

“You have. I passed a dozen feet away from you and didn’t recognize you.” His eyes were the same emphatic blue, so dark it was almost black. Devoir’s eyes. “I barely know you even now.”

The cold voice didn’t belong to the boy she’d known ten years ago.

Why was he here? Devoir wasn’t the blackmailer. Not possibly. The boy she’d known might have grown up to lie, kill, commit great crimes and treasons, but he could never have framed the sly melodrama of that note. Why had he followed her? Not to exchange cheerful reminiscences, apparently.

Her blackmailer would arrive at any minute. *I can deal with only one debacle at a time.* Then she thought, *I know that coat.*

He wore a dark greatcoat, cut for riding, the sort of anonymous garment a man could buy in any town from London to St. Petersburg. At the Coach House, they’d been taught to dress plainly when they were working.

That coat had passed her in Braddy Square. She’d noticed it because it was dusty and the man who wore it walked carefully and deliberately, as if he were very weary indeed. He’d made his way down Meeks Street a minute after she sent her messenger boy in that direction. The man wearing this coat had climbed the stairs at Number Seven, looking very much at home.

The Service had found her. Or the French. Either way, it was disaster.

Six

If the box is opened even a crack, all the secrets escape.

#### A BALDONI SAYING

In the cool dark of the church, Pax looked down at black, black curls and skin that glowed like a wash of ochre over rose madder. Vérité never lost that gold color to her skin, even in the middle of winter.

He’d said, “I barely know you,” but it wasn’t true.

Ten years had fined down her features and taken the childish plumpness from her cheeks, but the set of the eyes was the same, girl or woman. The long, strong planes of that stubborn face hadn’t altered. The bones are immutable.

Some indefinable interior quality of Vérité remained as well. An unflappable toughness. An ironic intelligence. Whatever it was, it looked up at him from behind the same familiar brown eyes.

There was no better place to confront her. It was private as a tomb in here. Without preamble, he said, “You sent a letter to Meeks Street. Why?”

“Is that where you saw me? In Braddy Square?”

“Feeding birds. You made a pretty picture.”

Her shoulders lifted a fraction of an inch. “That was a mistake, then. Another mistake was waiting to see the message delivered. One can be too conscientious. Next time, I’ll wrap the letter around a spontaneous rock and throw it through the window.”

“That works, too. You sent a letter to Galba. What did you put in the paper, Vérité?”

A moment passed. “It’s not about the words. You’re asking if I sent poison in that letter.”

“You had a certain skill with poisons, once upon a time.”

She looked at her hands, there in her lap. “And having that skill, I must use it . . . as if I were an amateur musician, eager to sing a ditty in the drawing room after supper.” Her voice was empty as wind whistling through a crack in the window. “I put that note into the hand of a young boy. There’s another, not much older, who answers the door at Meeks Street. And you ask if I poisoned the paper.”

“The child I knew in Paris wouldn’t have. You aren’t that child.”

She lifted her eyes to meet his.

A decade peeled away and he was back in the Coach House in Paris, learning to be a good, obedient French spy. Vérité, in the schoolroom, head tilted to the side, deciphering code on a slate. Vérité lying to the Tuteurs, her face innocent as an upturned daisy. Vérité, grinning, reaching her hand down to hoist him up over the wall of the Coach House for an expedition, stealing pastries for everybody. Vérité, sharing her dinner with a stray cat.

They’d been friends.

She said, “You opened the letter and saw code. Do you know, a great many troubles in this world would be avoided if we all stopped reading each other’s mail.”

She gathered her cloak around her and slid toward him across the place she’d left empty. She wore drab, practical clothing. Spy’s clothing. No jewelry. Nothing about her to attract attention. Nothing to flash a warning if she moved quickly.

He hadn’t expected to find Vérité still deep in the Game. When he thought of her in the years between, he’d hoped she’d slipped into an ordinary life. Sometimes, lying in a shepherd’s hut on the side of a mountain, looking into a fire of pinecones and dried moss, he’d remember her. She was a piece of his past he wanted to remember. He didn’t have that many. He’d pictured her dancing at a country ball or running her fingers down the row of books at a lending library. Painting bad watercolors of some English countryside. Taking music lessons. He’d imagined what she’d look like without any shadows behind her eyes.

She wasn’t wearing a wedding ring. He’d thought she’d have a husband by now.

*Why didn’t you get out of the Game, Vérité? The Tuteurs went to the guillotine and the French lost track of us. You could have been free.*

When the records in the Coach House burned, most of the Cachés faded quietly into the populace and became English. Vérité was still a spy, still working for the French.

As he'd chosen to work for the English. Damnable that his last act as an agent would be turning an old friend over to the Service. "How did you get that code?"

"You'll figure it out." She sat looking at the back of the seat before her, face closed and intent, as if she were reading something written on the wood there. "We missed you, you know. It was hard at the Coach House without you. We fell apart for a while, me and the other Cachés. We depended on you."

"I told you not to."

"We did anyway."

The Tuteurs always took the boy or girl without warning, from a meal or in the classroom. They'd say, "You have been chosen to serve France," and march them away with nothing but the clothes on their back.

He'd known it would be his turn, sooner or later. He wasn't exempt. He'd never been treated specially.

When the Tuteurs came for him, Vérité stood at her bench, looking stricken, scattering gunpowder and tangled fuse from a half-made bomb. He'd worried what would happen to her—the youngest, the smallest of them—when he was gone.

"We voted Fidélité leader after you left." She ran her fingertip around the post at the end of the pew.

"Good choice."

"He did well enough, but he wasn't you. When we parceled out your things, they gave me your blanket." Laughter flickered across her face, under the soberness. That was pure Vérité, that glinting, elusive spark that lit up in the middle of some desperate business. "For a week, I went to sleep holding on to it and crying . . . till everybody got tired of that and tossed it out the window. It took me two days to wash the mud out." She shook herself. "I haven't thought about that in years."

"A lot of water under a lot of bridges."

"And some bridges burned forever." She sighed and stood up, turning so she ended up facing him. Every instant of movement was graceful. Unstudied. She could have been a leaf twirled in the wind. "This is like . . . it's like when Alexander burned his ships on the shore so his army couldn't run away. We have our backs to the sea. Neither of us can retreat."

"No retreat," he agreed. In a few moments, one of them would hurt the other. They shared that knowledge without having to say it aloud.

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