

SHADOWS OVER ENGLAND ♦ 2

A SONG UNHEARD

ROSEANNA M. WHITE



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Roseanna M. White, *A Song Unheard*
Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, © 2018. Used by permission.

(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

© 2018 by Roseanna M. White

Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: White, Roseanna M., author.

Title: A song unheard / Roseanna M. White.

Description: Minneapolis, Minnesota : Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2018] | Series: Shadows over England ; 2

Identifiers: LCCN 2017036157 | ISBN 9780764219276 (trade paper) | ISBN 9780764231469 (hard cover)

Subjects: LCSH: Man-woman relationships—Fiction. | Women spies—Fiction. | GSAFD: Christian fiction. | Love stories.

Classification: LCC PS3623.H578785 S66 2018 | DDC 813/.6—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017036157>

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Cover design by Jennifer Parker

Cover photography by Mike Habermann Photography, LLC

Cover background: Hennepin History Museum, Minneapolis, MN

Roseanna M. White is represented by The Steve Laube Agency.

18 19 20 21 22 23 24 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



To my childhood piano teacher, Joanne Peto,
who taught me that a D# could weep, an E♭ could sing,
and a melody could be Jesus to a hurting heart
that would never listen to words.





ONE



London, England
September 28, 1914

The music seeped into her soul like fog over the Thames. Willa Forsythe leaned back against the grimy bricks and tilted her face up to the early-evening mist. It kissed her cheeks, cooled her, dampened her clothes. She let it. It was a reasonable price to pay for this.

Above her, the music spilled from the window, cracked open just enough to help it escape. Timpani and double bass, cello and bassoon. Clarinet and flute and horn.

And violin. She rested her head against the bricks and strained up onto her toes, as if that would draw her closer. She focused all her energy on that clear soprano voice.

The cellos missed their entrance. Again. And the rest of the group trickled to silence while the maestro shouted his displeasure.

Sometimes she imagined herself on one of those chairs with the other violinists. She imagined the heat that would sting her cheeks when it was one of her mistakes the maestro berated. She imagined exchanging a look with the other musicians that said . . .

She didn't know what it would say. Comradery with other musicians was as mysterious as the man she was about to meet. Which . . . She pulled out the cheap pocket watch she'd liberated from a drunken lecher last year. Ten minutes to make the seven-minute trek. Good. She would rather be early than arrive to find Mr. V already there.

With a friendly pat of thanks to the cold bricks for hosting her yet again, she slipped away from the symphony's practice chamber, out of the little alcove that the city had neglected, over the crumbling half-wall, and down the night-dark alley. If she were Rosemary, the shadows would make her shiver. If she were Elinor, the mist would make her reach to check the hair under her hat. If she were Retta, she'd pause there where alley met street to admire the slant of the sun as it made one final hurrah through the mist and fog, turning them to gold in one second and then vanishing in the next.

But Willa was none of her sisters.

For a moment, she almost caught a melody that danced its way through the sunburst. Almost. It was there one moment but then it slipped away, too fleet of foot for her ever to follow.

Her fingers itched for her bow. That elusive wisp of song wouldn't come when she had her violin in hand. But she could play that line the strings had been singing in the practice chamber. She wished she had heard the ending, but that bit between sections would do for one. After she met with Mr. V, she'd head back to her flat in Poplar and fetch her violin before going to the pub. They may not be a symphony-going crowd at Pauly's, but they always welcomed her to the little stub of a stage with hoots and applause. It was enough.

Even if it was never enough.

A toddler whined to her right as his mother hurried him along. A cab sputtered by. Someone coughed, and someone else shouted. In Flemish.

The crowds clogging the streets had shifted in the past two weeks. First it had been rosy-cheeked English lads in freshly pressed uniforms—like her little brother, Georgie—jostling and joking with one another and boasting about how they’d go and teach the Krauts a lesson for invading poor little Belgium. Then they had vanished, to be replaced with bedraggled refugees *from* poor little Belgium. Women and children who had escaped with only the clothes on their back. Men who stood about with their hands in their pockets, or reading the papers with perpetual scowls.

Willa turned the corner, trying to identify the newcomers by sight. Sometimes it was possible when they wore the country garb they’d fled their little communes in. Not so much when they were dressed like everyone else in the city. Until they opened their mouths and either Flemish or French spilled out.

Was it wrong of her to wish those English lads were here instead? Or Georgie, anyway. She missed his jests. His perpetual stretching of their family’s rules.

The army would either straighten him out or crush him when he refused to be straightened. Either way, he wouldn’t come home the same person he’d left as. Either way, it deserved some mourning.

She checked the street and crossed in front of a slow-moving wagon that was making motorists honk their horns and wave their fists. Not even a month officially at war, and already everything was changing. She could only hope it would be over as soon as the papers were predicting. A few months, they said, like the Boer War. That was all it would take.

Mr. V said otherwise. She turned into the little park where she was scheduled to meet him and breathed easy when she saw the bench unoccupied. No nondescript bowler hat. No careful grey suit. No placid blue eyes that seemed to see into the shadows of the past and future with equal, terrifying skill.

But he paid well. She could deal with a bit of fearsome omniscience if it carried ample pound notes along with it.

Her bench was damp, so she pulled a hankie from her handbag and swiped a spot dry before sitting. Then she stuffed the masking white square back in, overtop the wallet she'd slipped out of a gent's pocket an hour before, while he stood there spotting off at some poor street rat for not shining his shoes properly.

Served the lout right to be robbed. And she'd slipped the shoe-shine boy one of the bills after the rich bloke blustered off, since he'd refused to pay the poor lad.

Street rats had to stick together.

"Well, good day, pretty Willa Forsythe."

The voice, laced with Flemish and increasingly familiar, brought her head around and her heart rate up. Not at the handsome face that greeted her with a smile full of even white teeth—at the fact that he was here, now, when Mr. V also would be soon. "Cor Akkerman." She forced a smile for her new Belgian neighbor. Her landlady had announced to them all not a fortnight ago that she'd be doing her bit for "brave little Belgium" and taking in a few refugees.

This one was trouble. She'd known it the moment he doffed his cap and grinned at her like he was doing now. The kind of grin that said he intended to make the most of his tenure in England, and that his "most" would involve charming some English lass into a compromising position.

Willa had never much cared for charm. And didn't trust any man who called her pretty. But *she* was in less danger of sliding into stupidity than, say, her actually pretty little sister Elinor. So better he keep his attention on her.

He motioned to the bench beside her. "May I?"

Cor Akkerman was trouble, no question. But she liked him nonetheless. She darted a glance over her shoulder. "Perhaps for a moment, but I'm afraid I'm meeting someone. My employer,"

she added. The last thing she needed was him thinking it was a beau she was meeting and deciding to take it as a challenge.

He sat, heedless of the moisture on the bench, and flashed that grin again. “I will not keep you long. But I could not pass up a chance to talk with the prettiest girl in London.”

She snorted. She couldn’t help it. But didn’t bother responding to such obvious flattery with any other acknowledgment. “Were you out searching for a job again? You’re rather far from home.”

“*Ja*. I tried the utilities. The train stations.” He made a face that, on most men, would have looked sour. Somehow on him it looked amused. “With so many men enlisted already, I thought there would be openings. But the desire to help my people extends only to the point where it does not hurt an Englishman, I think. They will give jobs to your countrymen before mine.”

Reasonable, in a way. Though she understood the frustration it would give the refugees too. Willa flexed her fingers and tucked her handbag to her side—the side away from him. She’d turn the money over to Barclay—her eldest brother and leader of their patchwork clan—when she got home, and then she’d dispose of the wallet.

She felt as though she ought to have some advice for Cor. Suggestions on where else to look for a position. But she’d never much moved in the circles of the gainfully employed. “I’m sure you’ll find something soon. Anyone willing to work, as they say, can.” Though to her way of thinking, it was a complete waste to slave all day for some heartless employer, only to end up with barely two pence to rub together at the end of the day.

“Well. Perhaps my cousins and I will find our way to that pub you like tonight. Will you be there?”

Or miss one of the few square meals she ever got in a week? Willa nodded. “I will.” Though if Cor would be too, she’d be sure to remind Elinor that it was her turn to head home early with the little ones again.

“Then I will say farewell now and see you later.” He stood again and, not wanting to be rude, Willa did as well to see him off. He reached for her hand and raised it to his lips, angling his eyes up at her as he did so.

It was without question the most blatantly flirtatious move she’d ever personally received.

The question was, why did it feel so awkward? Other people engaged in such simple contact all the time, but on the rare occasions it happened to Willa with anyone but family, it always left her feeling stiff and uneasy. She reclaimed her hand, kept her smile cool, and waved him off.

Cor hadn’t even turned out of the park before a more familiar voice came from behind her. “I’d steer clear of that one if I were you.”

“Mr. V.” She didn’t turn, knowing he’d come to the front of the bench in another moment. No surprise seized her at his sudden appearance. No doubt he’d been there all along, waiting for Cor to leave. And he, at least, never reached for her hand.

Round the bench he did, though he wouldn’t sit. He never sat.

Willa did, and made sure she looked far more relaxed than she felt. “And while I appreciate the concern, sir, you needn’t worry. I wouldn’t trust that one any farther than I could kick him. Though if you know something about him I should . . .”

Mr. V’s gaze tracked Cor’s figure as he disappeared from view. “Nothing particular. Though all I need to know.”

Her brows knit. “Why do you say that? Just because he’s a refugee?” She hadn’t thought him the type to be prejudiced. But then, what did she really know of *him*? It seemed these days she passed quite a bit of time with absolute mysteries for companions.

“I was just in Belgium, recruiting refugees, Miss Forsythe. I assure you, it has nothing to do with his nationality.” With Cor gone, he turned his icy gaze on her. “Though I am glad *you* do

not seem opposed to them on principle. You'll be joining a few of them, if you take this little job."

Her fingers itched again, but not for her violin's bow this time. If he held true to the pattern Rosemary had shared with her, he'd have an envelope. In it would be instructions—and a bit of an advance on whatever he'd pay her for this *little job*. "Will I?"

"Mm." He drew it out and handed it to her.

Her pulse quickened far more over this plump, white rectangle than over even white teeth. Keeping her movements calm and deliberate, she reached for the envelope, stuck a finger under the flap, and ripped it open.

She didn't riffle through the bills, though she wanted to. One hundred pounds, she would bet. The same as he'd given Rosemary when she'd accepted her last job from him. She pulled out the paper instead, filled with precise type that told her nothing about him except that he liked order.

Her eyes skimmed the words. Snagged. "Are you quite serious?"

Mr. V clasped his hands behind his back. "Is there a problem? I rather thought you would enjoy this, given your . . . talents. It's why I've come to you with it rather than, say, your brother."

Her eyes were wide, she knew they were. But she couldn't regain her composure as she turned them on him. Not with *symphony orchestra* leaping off that page and scorching her. "You want me to . . . ? But the Belgians? Haven't they suffered enough? I don't steal from those who are worse off than I am, it's—"

"Do finish reading before you jump to conclusions, Miss Forsythe." Not a twitch of his lips. But she almost thought she detected a gleam in his eye. Perhaps. "This particular Belgian is not so badly off, I assure you. Or wouldn't be, if he could access his accounts. They're frozen, of course. The Germans have frozen all banking in Belgium. But it isn't money I want you to steal from him regardless."

Her breath caught as she read farther down the page. She

blinked, but it didn't change. That neat type still said *Lukas De Wilde*. It still said *Belgian Symphony Orchestra*. It also said *Aberystwyth*. "Wales?"

"There are wealthy sisters there who have recruited artists and musicians from among the refugees. To support them, and also to bring some culture to their neighborhood. You will be posing as a friend of theirs from school."

So the instructions said. Though she had to look at him again at that, her eyes still wide. "And how am I to do that? They'll obviously know I'm *not* an old school chum. Given that they'll have no memory of me."

There, a twitch of his lips. Perhaps. "The Davies sisters are . . . family friends, let us say. They know that you are about important business and have agreed to participate that far in this. They will not know your true purpose, of course. Only that you are there at my bequest."

She still wasn't entirely certain what his role in the world was—he had, it seemed, some connection to the government. Though what exactly that connection was she couldn't determine. All she knew was that if her family could continue working for him, they wouldn't have to haunt the streets anymore, looking for a likely mark. Or lie their way into balls to liberate jewelry. If they could keep working for him, Rosemary and her new morals wouldn't keep frowning at them all.

But they wouldn't have to completely change. He used them because of the skills they had honed over the years. Skills Willa had no intention of giving up, regardless of Rosie's insistence that they needn't steal anymore, that she and her new husband, Peter, would support the family.

Nonsense. Supporting twelve strangers was too much to ask of some bloke who hadn't yet been tested. What if such strain spoiled their marriage? No. Willa and Barclay had both agreed that, while it was fine to let Peter Holstein take the little ones on

a holiday now and again, they would *not* be entirely beholden to him. They would support themselves, as they had always done.

In the *way* they had always done. Or nearly the same way. It was who she was. All she knew.

She glanced at the page again. “So what is it, exactly, that you want me to steal from Lukas De Wilde?” It took all her willpower to keep from crumpling the page, to keep her hands steady. To keep from seeing his face as it appeared on the poster she may have liberated from a rubbish bin and tacked to her wall. But he couldn’t be so handsome in reality. It wasn’t possible.

“I am not entirely certain—this is why I need someone with expert instincts to find it.” Mr. V shifted a bit, no doubt to block her and his envelope from the view of a few passersby on a path two leaps away. “I can tell you only that it is a cypher key. It could be a ring, a piece of paper, anything really. Anything small enough to be carried always with him. But you will recognize it—it should have letters that align with a traditional alphabet and provide alternates.”

She should be flattered, she supposed, at that reference to her instincts. But instead she frowned. “Cypher? You do know I’m no spy, Mr. V—just a thief.”

“And I am not asking you to break any codes, Miss Forsythe—simply to obtain the device that will allow others to do so.”

As if *that* were to ease her frown. “Why? Is he . . . is *he* a spy? For Germany?” The thought shouldn’t make her stomach sink as it did. She didn’t know the man, after all, aside from staring at his poster more than she ought.

Mr. V’s lips twitched. “Does it matter?”

“Yes.” She wasn’t sure why—it shouldn’t, not given the stack of pound notes. But it would be helpful to know who she was up against, wouldn’t it? If he were a spy, a trained one who carried around encoding devices . . . Well, that wasn’t just her average mark. He could be dangerous.

Mr. V chuckled. “No, my dear. He is not a spy. It is simply that his father had been doing work in the field of cryptography—coding and codebreaking. It is said he developed a cypher machine that could revolutionize the field. The Crown is very interested in procuring this machine, and finding this small device that Lukas De Wilde always carries with him is the first step.” He lifted his silver brows. “Satisfied?”

She nodded. Aside from recognizing the thing, it shouldn’t be too hard. Get into his room, snoop around. If all went well, it would take only a few days. At worst, a week or two. Although if he literally carried it *on* him, that would require getting close to him.

Willa Forsythe, rubbing elbows with a world-renowned violinist. With *Lukas De Wilde*.

She’d probably wake up tomorrow and find it all a dream.

He clasped his hands behind his back and eased a step away. “Time is of the essence. I’ve already made arrangements for your transport to Wales on Monday. Take tomorrow to get what you need to convince the world you are a gentleman’s daughter off for a holiday with friends. Memorize the information I’ve provided. Have you any questions?”

Of course she had—the leading one being why he didn’t just ask the man for this key, for the machine itself, if it was so important. And if he was *not* a spy for Germany. But she knew enough of her employer to guess that he wouldn’t provide those answers. She had already pushed him for more of an explanation than she’d honestly expected him to give.

It wasn’t her business anyway. She nodded and slipped the envelope into her handbag. “Consider it done, sir.”

His nod said the meeting was over, so she stood, angling toward home while he turned in the opposite direction.

Her thoughts were a whirl as she hurried for the tube, as she rode the familiar train through the familiar tunnels, as she

bustled toward her familiar little flat in dismal Poplar with its water-stained walls and rickety stairs. They could perhaps get something a little nicer, now that they had the payment from the last big job for Mr. V. But there was nothing better around here, and they never went more than a few blocks from Pauly's pub.

It was home.

And frankly, they could none of them square the thought of not being strapped. It was too new. Too unbelievable. And depending on how this job went, it could very well not last. So why get used to it?

She unlocked the door to the rooms she shared with Elinor and little Olivia, though she found the flat empty when she stepped inside. Rosemary had once lived in this bare little space with them too. Another something she couldn't square—that her oldest sister, her oldest friend, wouldn't be living here anymore. Wouldn't be a part of their world.

She was happy that Rosie was happy—she was. But sometimes it still cut. Was their life so bad that she could abandon it without a backward glance?

Willa looked around at the drab space, bare and ugly. They always had to be ready to move at the first sniff of the police, so their decorations were few. Their furniture all rented with the flat. A transient, temporary life.

No, she couldn't blame Rosemary for wanting something better. She just couldn't quite believe she'd found a way to get it.

Never mind all that though. Shaking it off, Willa deposited the envelope and pinched wallet in one of her hidey-holes, grabbed her violin, and rushed back into the dusk.

She could smell the food cooking at Pauly's from the end of the street, and it put more speed in her step. Another minute and she was pushing through those familiar doors, into the domain of the man who was the closest thing to a father she'd ever known.

Pauly was disappearing into the back as she walked in, but

he turned at the sound of the door and lifted a hand in warm greeting.

She didn't need a father anyway. Not so long as she had Pauly there, willing to play the part. Willing to love the ragtag bunch of street urchins he'd helped stitch together.

It was early yet, so the pub had only a few neighbors in it—and the family. None of them shared a drop of blood, but the bonds between them were all the stronger for being born of need rather than chance. They were at their usual table, the little ones all sandwiched between the older ones. She smiled to see Rosemary there, bending over Olivia to help her retie the ribbon on her braid.

Rosie would be leaving tomorrow, traveling to Cornwall with half the family, all of them who were twelve or under. It would do them all good to get out of London.

Still. London wasn't the same when all her family wasn't in it.

Then again, Willa wouldn't be in it either by Monday. Making sure her smile stayed bright, she bustled over to the people she loved best in the world. "Getting an early start tonight, are we?"

"And an early start tomorrow." Cressida, the oldest of the children going southwest in the morning, leapt up and greeted Willa with a mighty squeeze. "I'm so excited! I've never seen *anything* but London!"

Chuckling, Willa squeezed her back. "You'll have a grand time. Be sure to mind Rosie and—"

"We *know*, Will." Cressida added a roll of her eyes for good measure.

Little Nigel, the second youngest of their crew at seven, was bouncing on his seat. "I don't want supper. I want to go home to bed so it'll be *tomorrow*."

Willa chuckled and slid her violin case onto the floor under her chair. She looked over to the oldest of them—Barclay lifted a brow in silent question.

She nodded. “I have today’s wages for you at home. And the meeting with Mr. V went well. I’ll be going to Wales in a couple days.”

Retta, blond hair smoothed back in some new style of chignon that made her look far more elegant than usual, leaned forward. “Wales? Whatever is in *Wales*?”

The words—those beautiful words—nearly stuck in Willa’s throat as she sat. “A symphony orchestra. Made up of Belgian refugees, apparently, who are touring to raise money for the Belgian Relief Fund.”

Lucy’s mouth fell open, her dark, almond-shaped eyes going wide in her dusky face. “An orchestra! No wonder he came to you. You’ll have a marvelous time, Willa!”

She would. Though truth be told, she’d never been away from the family for more than a few days. And never alone.

Across from her, Rosemary grinned. “I daresay I won’t be able to convince you to come with us to Cornwall, then. I was going to try again.”

That cut burned. It was good, what her sister was doing—taking the little ones for some fresh air and solid meals. She was, as they had always done, sharing freely what she’d found for herself.

So why did it feel like a betrayal? Like she was abandoning them all? Still, it was Rosie. Her oldest, truest friend. Willa leaned back in her chair. “You might have succeeded, if it weren’t for this.” She craned her neck around for evidence of Pauly’s return. “Does he need help bringing the food out?” She’d eat first. Then she’d play.

“Nah, he said it would just be another minute or two.” Barclay folded his hands over his flat stomach and surveyed the crowded table. “Our last night all together for a while. I’m glad you brought your violin, Will.”

“Oh! The challenge.” Grinning, Retta scooted forward on her chair. “I’ve just got it!”

Willa breathed a laugh—given that introduction, she had a feeling their little game was about to turn her way. “Now wait just a minute—I’m still not satisfied that you managed the one Rosie gave you. It isn’t exactly stealing a train when you show up with a miniature in your pocket.”

Retta’s grin didn’t dim. “She didn’t say how *big*, did she? But trust me, I’ll be more precise. You, Willa Forsythe, must steal . . .”

As usual, everyone around the table drummed their fingers against the smooth, worn wood, laughter punctuating their percussion.

Retta slapped a hand to the table, silencing the finger drums. “Music.”

Willa blinked. “Music.”

“Music—*original* music, never before heard by the public. I want to see a score—that’s what it’s called, right?—that has never been seen before by anyone but the composer.”

Not quite as impossible as some of the things they challenged each other to lift. Not given where Willa was going. “Retta, that’s hardly even a challenge. I’d barely even be able to call myself the best when I do that.”

Retta’s blue eyes didn’t look at all uncertain. “I know for a fact most musicians aren’t composers. And symphonies mostly play tried-and-true pieces, right? Betcha it’ll be a far cry harder than you’re thinking.”

She may have a point. But surely *someone* among the Belgian orchestra composed something. Right? It would be a simple matter of finding out who. And seeing their work. Then *taking* their work. After making sure no one else had ever heard it.

Perhaps not quite so simple. But she pushed away from the table. “Piece of cake. I’ll play it for you when I get home. But for now . . .”

Dinner could wait. She bent down, grabbed her violin case, and extracted the precious bits of wood and string. Amid the

whooping and clapping of her family, she climbed onto the box of a stage Pauly had built for her. Lifted her bow. Closed her eyes. Called to mind that melody the violins had been singing from the practice chambers that afternoon, letting it fill her head until it spilled out into her veins and traveled to her fingers.

And she played.