



The Number of Love

THE CODEBREAKERS #1

by Roseanna M. White

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QUESTIONS & ANSWERS WITH ROSEANNA M. WHITE

1. How did you come up with the idea of a female codebreaker in England of World War I?

As I was researching the Great War in England for my previous series, *SHADOWS OVER ENGLAND*, I came across some tantalizing information about England's secret intelligence division—the codebreakers of Room 40. This group grew from a few talented mathematicians at the start of the war, when the Admiralty realized they could intercept every single wireless communication from the enemy, to a huge team of codebreakers, secretaries, and agents in the field. I knew I wanted to tell their story . . . but I wanted to do it through a fictional character. While there were over twenty female employees of the historical Room 40, none of them were actually codebreakers. However, I decided it would be great fun to have one of those young women who everyone thought was a secretary really be one of their most talented cryptographers.

2. What were the challenges of writing a character like Margot De Wilde, mathematical genius?

I've always been good at math, but I never really loved it. When I developed the character of Margot, however, as the little sister of the hero in a previous book, *A Song Unheard*, I wanted her to not just love math, but to think in it. Her character was actually inspired by a premise I'd come up with during college, in which the smartest person in the world was a thirteen-year-old girl. Margot is a very unique character, which in some ways made her easy—her voice is so strong! But on the other hand, she's such a challenge to steer through emotions, which she deems foreign and unwelcome. Writing her story had some difficult parts, to be sure, but I loved every bit of it!

3. What's the most interesting or unexpected thing you learned in your research?

I was quite honestly shocked by the immense and seemingly all-powerful intelligence network that Blinker Hall set up, which included Room 40 and also countless field agents. They had to decide daily what intelligence could be acted on and what would tip their hand to the enemy. But in some ways, this was a game to them. Hall was famous for feeding false information not only to England's enemies in the war, but also to his own political adversaries in England. He was frequently likened by his peers to Sherlock Holmes—capable of drawing connections and seeing solutions where normal people could not. Learning about him was just amazing, and I can only pray I do him justice in my books!

4. Which characters are historical figures and which are fictional?

While my main characters are all fictional, I use the real historical figures of Room 40 as my backdrop. All mention of the officers and staff in charge are factual, and the central codebreakers do have cameo appearances. But the hero, heroine, their families, and their closest friends are all fictional.

5. What will happen for *THE CODEBREAKERS* moving forward?

The next book in the series, *On Wings of Devotion*, will follow two secondary characters into a story of their own. We'll learn more about pilots in the Great War, nurses working at the hospitals where injured soldiers were brought, and of course, about the intelligence game and some of Admiral Hall's more far-flung operations. And as always, there will be spies and mayhem dogging their steps!