

A woman with red hair, wearing a blue and white Victorian-style dress, is holding a camera. The background is a blurred interior with a window. The title is overlaid on the image.

A  
PORTRAIT  
OF LOYALTY

THE CODEBREAKERS ♦ 3

ROSEANNA M. WHITE

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Scripture quotations are from the King James Version of the Bible.

This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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Plead my cause, O LORD, with them that  
strive with me: fight against them that  
fight against me.

Take hold of shield and buckler, and stand up  
for mine help.

Draw out also the spear, and stop the way  
against them that persecute me: say unto  
my soul, I am thy salvation.

—Psalm 35:1–3

# Prologue

LATE FEBRUARY 1918  
SOMEWHERE IN THE FRENCH COUNTRYSIDE

He could see it all so clearly. As the renewed rocking of the train lulled his fellow passengers to sleep, Zivon Marin watched the pattern of their movements. The shrug of one shoulder, the stretch of two different legs, the shifting of heads. One's cough jerked another from the edge of slumber, the jerking causing a repositioning of someone else. Cause and effect. Ripples. Patterns that played out with such consistency he could predict who would fall asleep first and who last.

The door at the end of the car opened, both the wind and Evgeni blustering in. Pulling tired eyes open. Igniting French grumbles.

Zivon's hand fisted around the ruby ring he wore—would always wear—on his right ring finger. This was what he could never anticipate with accuracy. The sudden interference to the pattern. His brother entering a train car . . . Lenin uniting those disorganized Bolsheviks.

The bullet to Alyona's head.

Zivon's eyes slammed shut. No rest came with closed eyes,

not for him. Every time he blinked too long, he saw her again. Crumpled on his doorstep. A warning. An accusation.

“Are you going to let me in or keep those long legs of yours blocking my path?” Out of the politeness Matushka had drilled into them both, Evgeni spoke in French.

With his eyes closed, Zivon heard more clearly what had been needling him in his brother’s voice for weeks. He’d first called it resentment—Evgeni hadn’t wanted to flee Russia. It had also reminded him of petulance—his little brother had never been one to let Zivon take the lead without arguing, no matter how many times he’d proven his decisions wise.

But there was something else in his voice Zivon hadn’t detected before. Perhaps it was new. Or perhaps it had only now worked its way through the fog of his devastation.

It didn’t sound like resentment or petulance. It sounded like . . . satisfaction.

Slowly, Zivon opened his eyes and looked at his brother. He tried to see him not as Evgeni—his brother for whom he’d do anything, sacrifice anything, whom he hadn’t been able to imagine leaving home without—but as just another person obeying his own patterns.

The angle of his head—cocky. The gleam in his eyes—knowing. The way he moved—more energized than he ought to be at midnight in third class on a train taking him ever farther away from the home he hadn’t wanted to leave.

The hand hovering too near the pocket of his trench coat.

Zivon moved his legs out of the way. “You were gone a long time, Zhenya.”

Evgeni chuckled. “I wasn’t quite eager to fold myself back into this sardine can.”

Joviality that masked . . . something. He didn’t know what. And didn’t want to waste time dissecting it. He had to remain focused. Get to Paris, find a room for a few days, get messages

to the codebreaking divisions of the French and British governments. One or the other would hire him. They *had* to. It was Russia's best hope.

Evgeni settled back in his seat with a grunt, reaching for the bag stuffed under his seat. Zivon narrowed his eyes as his brother opened it, unable to think why he'd find it necessary to get his satchel out *now*.

Another grunt, and Evgeni shoved the bag at him. That, at least, was easy to understand. He'd pulled out Zivon's bag, not his own. There, right on top, was the photo album he hadn't let out of arm's reach in weeks. Sentimentality, everyone would think. They'd be partly right.

He rested a hand on the smooth leather cover, stared at it, through it, without really thinking about either the photos within or the encrypted message he'd stored behind the portrait of Batya and Matushka. He was still watching his brother.

Watching as Evgeni, humming as though all was right with the world, settled his own bag in his lap. Watching as he drew from his pocket the identification papers he'd managed to procure for them—with false names. Watching as he slid the passport into the bag.

But not just the passport. The edge of another paper peeked out.

Fast as a snake, Zivon shot out his arm and grabbed the bag's strap before Evgeni could shove it down to the floor again. Slow as a tiger's crouch, he lifted his eyes to his brother's.

They didn't look alike. Not really. But they had the same eyes. Batya's eyes. And Evgeni's burned now with the same temper that had made their father a noted fist-fighter . . . but an officer who never advanced as far as he should have in the Imperial Army. His brother growled, "What are you doing, Zivon?"

He switched his words to Russian. “What are *you* doing, Zhenya? Where were you when the train stopped to take on water?”

It couldn't be anything big. Anything important. Perhaps he'd found a girl to charm—he always did. It couldn't be anything *real*.

But Zivon was keenly aware of that encrypted message under his own hand. Of the knowledge that somewhere in this region, German officers were rumbling about mutiny. And somewhere, a Prussian soldier sympathetic to the Bolsheviks had told Lenin about them.

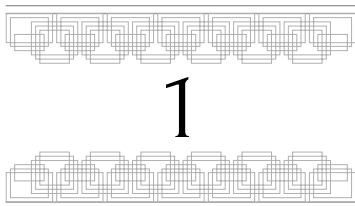
Evgeni snorted a laugh in that way he always did when he was trying to put Zivon off the scent of something. He opened his mouth.

But no words came out. Or if they did, they were lost under the sudden screeching of metal on metal.

The floor beneath them bucked. The car pitched. The soft snores from two seats behind them turned to screams. His own joined them. Screams to God. Screams for his brother. Screams of pain.

Then darkness swallowed the train whole.





**THURSDAY, 28 MARCH 1918**  
**MAYFAIR, LONDON, ENGLAND**

Lilian Blackwell held her breath and inched along the wall, praying with every footfall that Mama wouldn't look up. That the hurried explanation she'd offered the housekeeper would suffice. That she'd be able to slip out the door without the need for any more lies to slip past her lips. She put a hand over the camera in her pocket to keep it from banging against her leg—Mama had ears as sensitive as a rabbit's—and prepared for the most dangerous part of her escape: darting past the open drawing room doorway.

As she edged a little closer, she caught her sister's gaze inside the room. Ivy, blue eyes twinkling, pressed her lips against a smile and turned to their mother. "So, who's coming for dinner tonight, Mama? Officers, gentlemen, or both?"

Bless her. Lily waited until her mother dipped her brush into her oils and began to answer, then dashed by. She made it two whole steps past the door too. Then, "Lily! Is that you?"

Blast. Lily let the pumps she'd been carrying drop to the floor and slid her feet into them before moving to the door. Not *through* it, though. She didn't have much time. "Yes, Mama."

Her mother looked away from her painting with a smile as bright as the spring sunshine, though it froze and her brows arched when she saw Lily's uniform, complete with kerchief pinned over her hair. "I thought you weren't working today, my love. That you and Ivy had both taken the morning off."

She wasn't. Not at the hospital, at least. But she'd known she might be stopped, so the uniform had seemed like her best option. Especially given the note that had arrived an hour ago. "I wasn't, but Ara just sent word that they're shorthanded and asked if I could come in."

Those were, in fact, the words on the note that she'd left resting on the entryway table for her mother to find later. But Arabelle Denler, her friend and newly reinstated matron of their ward at Charing Cross Hospital, hadn't been the one to pen them.

Mama sighed. "I suppose since Ivy will be leaving soon for her appointment, I shouldn't bemoan the interruption to your time together. So long as you're home at a reasonable hour, of course. Don't forget we have guests tonight."

As they did at least twice a week. Lily darted a glance at her little sister and found Ivy grinning at the magazine she held. "I won't forget."

"And invite Miss Denler and her fiancé to dine with us soon. The week after next, perhaps?"

"I will." When she actually *saw* Ara. Though there was, she supposed, the possibility that she'd run into said fiancé today. She edged backward a step. "Well, I don't want to distract you, Mama. I know you're hoping to finish the central figure today while the light's right. You'd better make the most of it before Ivy needs to keep her appointment."

The mere mention of the painting underway urged her mother's gaze back to the canvas, as it usually did. "Mm."

Ivy's eyes went wide at whatever she'd just seen in her magazine, and she flipped the page a bit too quickly. Quickly

enough that it garnered their mother's attention and made the lazy pug sleeping in the sunshine open one eyelid.

"What is it?"

"Nothing." Poor, sweet Ivy. A flush stole into her cheeks, giving her away. Lily might be the one who inherited Euphemia Blackwell's strawberry-blond hair, but Ivy, despite sharing their father's brown locks, had a redhead's propensity to blush.

Mama lifted one red-gold brow and held out her hand.

With a gusty sigh, Ivy flipped the page back to the one she'd clearly wanted to avoid talking about and held it up rather than relinquishing it to their mother's paint-stained fingertips.

Lily didn't need to look to know what it would be. Not given that particular frown on Mama's face. "More propaganda." She said it as though it were a curse word—odd, since Daddy could say the same word with fondness. Lily edged back another step.

Ivy put the magazine down. "I think it's rather brave of those artists to go to the front and try to find something beautiful in a war so utterly wretched."

"No, Ivy." Mama turned back to her canvas, leaning close to paint a highlight onto the beautiful young woman she was bringing to life with her paints—the one fashioned to look like the beautiful young woman sitting on the couch for her now, decked out in Grecian robes that would have been comical in any other house. "What it is, is dishonest. And disgraceful. The Crown has made a mockery of both the war effort *and* art by asking artists to produce work like that."

Lily clenched her teeth and pivoted on her heel before the all-too-familiar argument could really unwind. It was one of her mother's favorite topics these days, and the threads of her arguments never ceased to tangle Lily up.

"Lilian."

Double blast. There was never any escape from these snarls. She paused, hand over her pocket, but didn't fully turn again. "Yes, Mama?"

"I see you have your camera with you. Enjoy the day, of course, but *do* keep an eye on the time, my love. I mean it."

Ivy chuckled and leaned back on the chaise as her painted counterpart was doing. "Now, Mama. She's only been late for dinner two of the last six times we had guests."

Lily stuck out her tongue at her sister, earning a fuller laugh, and then rushed away with a final farewell before her mother could come up with anything else to detain her. It wasn't as though she was habitually late in general. But it was difficult to motivate herself to get home in time for yet another tiresome dinner party populated by the most boring young men left in London.

She let herself out the door and hurried down the front steps, aiming her feet south toward St. James' Park, through which she would walk to get to Whitehall. First, though, she paused to pull off the kerchief and stuff it into her handbag. That thing was the worst part about being in the Voluntary Aid Detachment and serving at the hospital.

A motorcar pattered somewhere behind her. A few well-dressed women in an open carriage clopped toward her. Lily drew a long breath of spring air into her lungs and slid her eyes closed for a second. Two. Just enough to push it all down yet again. To call up the reasons she did what she did.

Brakes squealed, pulling her eyes open in time to see the door of the automobile push out, revealing a uniform in naval blue behind the steering wheel. "Get in. And hurry up, will you? I've been driving in circles for ten minutes already, and the admiral needs his car this morning."

Grinning, Lily hopped in and closed the door behind her, leaning over to press a kiss to her father's cheek. "Sorry. Mama saw me on my way out."

Daddy's smile was fleeting. "I didn't think she would give you any trouble if she thought you were going to the hospital."

"Not trouble—just the usual warnings to be home on time." She wasn't even going to mention the propaganda, as she had no desire to bring it up. "Is there an assignment waiting already, or will Admiral Hall want to speak with me?"

"I believe he left you written instructions, including the time by which he needs the results. We'll be cutting it close for him to get to an appointment on time."

She didn't have to ask why her father hadn't left the admiral his car and fetched her in his own. It wouldn't do to risk Mama glancing out the window and spotting him picking Lily up. Usually it was easy to make excuses for riding together, but not on a day when Daddy had already been at the office for hours before he summoned her. Though he *could* have just let her make the twenty-minute trip on foot or the tube.

"Well." She shot him a smile. "As long as I can get it finished before the dinner party this evening. Mama was rather insistent that I not be late again."

Her father chuckled and turned at the corner. "I'm certain you'll find our guests riveting tonight, Lily White. Who knows but that one of them will sweep you off your feet and steal you away from us."

He always said that. Twice a week. Each and every time they entertained more of the young men he brought home. Most of them were navy men, of course, because what captain didn't want his daughter to marry a fine, upstanding officer? But occasionally he invited veterans from the army, home to recuperate from trench fever, or an academic who'd been refused service for one reason or another, poor chap.

She had no desire to ask who it would be tonight. If she showed the slightest curiosity, he would spend the entire drive listing the virtues of Lieutenant This and Professor That. And while she knew her friends considered her lucky to have a

parade of young men around in these days when so few were in London, she just wanted to get through the war. Be done with the secrets.

The two parts of her life came to mind. Charing Cross Hospital on Agar Street, where she went in the mornings. Where she did the volunteer work of which her mother approved. And along Whitehall Street, the Old Admiralty Building. Where she brought very different skills to the aid of the navy. Where she did the work of which her *father* approved.

Her parents disagreed about so little. How had she managed to get caught in the middle of one of their few arguments?

A minute later, the parade grounds were before them, and then Daddy was navigating around the building, to the rear entrance she always used. Out of sight of anyone who might recognize her. He pulled the car up to the curb, where Admiral Hall himself opened her door for her. No doubt because he needed her and Daddy out so he and his driver could get in.

Still, he greeted her with a warm smile and a few rapid blinks. "Lilian. I appreciate your coming in on such short notice."

"My pleasure, sir." She put her hand in his so he could help her out. "Daddy says there are instructions awaiting me?"

Hall nodded. "If you have any questions, just send a note up to Commander James. He's been briefed on the project."

"I will. Thank you."

"We'll see you at dinner tonight." With a tip of his cap, he slid into the seat she'd just vacated.

Daddy had gotten out too, and Hall's driver had taken the wheel. Apparently, they really had no time to waste; it was unusual for her father's friend to be so quick in his greetings. But when one was the Director of the Intelligence Division, sometimes one's time was not one's own.

She smiled and waved as they pulled away again, stepping

to her father's side. "I take it he and Mrs. Hall are among the guests tonight?"

"Mm. As well as a few young officers, of course, to entertain you and Ivy Green." He gave her an indulgent smile.

Lily put one of her own in its proper place. She knew he was trying to help, trying to see that she and Ivy were cared for. That they would have a future full of security and family. She never had the heart to tell him that she couldn't let herself think of the future quite yet. Not when it took so much effort just to navigate today.

He didn't understand how hard it was for her to keep this part of her life from Mama. When she'd mentioned it once, years ago, he'd just waved her off and insisted she would get used to it. He, after all, had been keeping secrets from her mother throughout their entire marriage. It was necessary when one had a job like his.

But it was altogether different for her. Mama never tried to be involved in Daddy's work. But she maintained that her daughters' business was very much under her jurisdiction.

Lily drew in a deep breath and turned toward the entrance. "Well, I had better get to it. I daren't be late again today."

Daddy chuckled and walked with her to the door. "If you want to drive home together, send a note up. Though I do need to stop at the bank this afternoon."

Lily took care not to react. She avoided the bank whenever she could. Stepping inside it inevitably reminded her of Johanna. Johanna, whose father had been the bank manager. Johanna, whose family had been friends with the Blackwells since they moved to the neighborhood when Lily was five. Johanna, whose family had fled home to Germany two days before war was declared.

Johanna, whom Lily had been so sure was loyal to England . . . up until she'd been proven wrong.

She smiled at the guard who held the door open for her

and said over her shoulder to Daddy, “With a bit of luck, this won’t take that long and I’ll be able to leave before you. But if not, I’ll certainly let you know.”

Her father nodded. “I’ll wait to hear from you. Let me know if you have need of anything, dearest.”

“I will.” Though in general, Admiral Hall saw to it that she had absolutely anything she needed. In addition to her magnificent retouching desk, her darkroom at the OB also had drying racks, solutions, gels, frames, scalpels, brushes, paints, ink, an electric fan, and even a heater to speed up the drying process when they were really pressed for time.

Her hand rested on her camera. “Have a good day, Daddy.”

He smiled, but the shadows never left his eyes these days. Not fully. “I’ll have a good day once we’ve routed the Boche for good.” He hurried up the stairs.

She watched him for a moment. The war had aged him. Four years ago, his hair had still been a rich brown, his face scarcely lined, his form robust. These days, there was more salt than pepper in his hair, he looked older than his fifty-two years, and his tall frame had gone gaunt.

Perhaps some of it could be blamed on the illness within the first six months of the war that had landed him behind a desk instead of on his ship. But she suspected it was more because of the war itself, and the responsibilities that came with that desk.

Turning to the familiar stone steps, she padded down to the rooms she had made her own. The door was closed, as always. She let herself in, turned on the lights, and smiled at the beautifully ordered chaos. Mama had her oils and watercolors and canvas. Lily had her solutions and gels and baths. But this was her art. Perhaps it wasn’t art that would make her a household name, an accolade Euphemia Blackwell could claim.

But it made a difference.



And that was what kept her coming back here day after day, developing and altering photos for the admiral. Her mother wouldn't approve, not of the second part of her job. But her country needed her. Needed her skills.

She settled at her table and skimmed her eyes over what Hall had left for her—two photos to combine by three o'clock, when the field agent in need of it would pick it up before disappearing into the Continent again.

She smiled and turned for her scalpel. Getting out on time today would be no trouble at all.