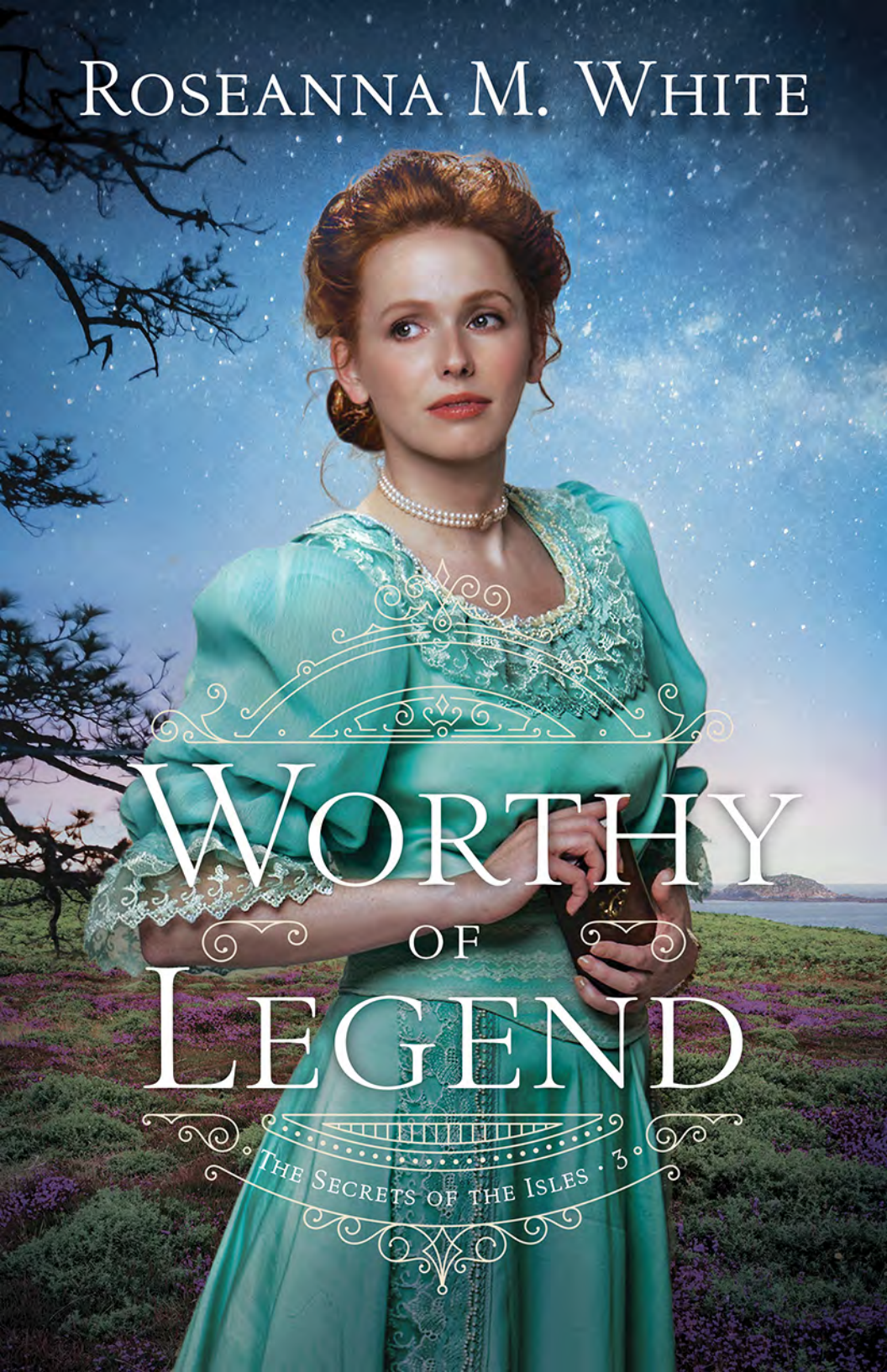


ROSEANNA M. WHITE



WORTHY
OF
LEGEND

THE SECRETS OF THE ISLES · 3 ·

THE SECRETS OF THE ISLES 3



WORTHY OF LEGEND

ROSEANNA M. WHITE



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

Worthy of Legend • Roseanna M. White

Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group • © 2022 used by permission

© 2022 by Roseanna M. White

Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Minneapolis, 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: Worthy of legend / Roseanna M. White.
Description: Minneapolis, Minnesota: Bethany House, a division of Baker Publishing Group, [2022] | Series: Secrets of the Isles; 3
Identifiers: LCCN 2022010981 | ISBN 9780764237201 (paperback) | ISBN 9780764240898 | ISBN 9781493439140 (ebook)
Subjects: LCGFT: Novels.
Classification: LCC PS3623.H578785 W67 2022 | DDC 813/.6—dc23
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2022010981>

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.

Cover design by Jennifer Parker
Cover photography by Todd Hafermann Photography, Inc.

Author is represented by The Steve Laube Agency.

Baker Publishing Group publications use paper produced from sustainable forestry practices and post-consumer waste whenever possible.

22 23 24 25 26 27 28 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

To Rowyn,
for always building me a library in your game worlds,
even though you don't share my love of books;
for laughing at all my jokes and coming out to share
with me all the ones you hear online;
for rising to the challenge
and taking life's curveballs in stride.

Since your diagnosis, I'm keenly aware
that each day with you is a gift from God.
Mama loves you more than you'll ever know.
I love seeing the young man you're becoming . . .
but resign yourself now to always being my boy-o,
no matter how much taller than me you grow.

The Isles of Scilly



Cornwall due East 28 miles >

Prologue

25 AUGUST 1651

SOMEWHERE IN THE ISLES OF SCILLY

The sea was vengeance. The sea was justice. The sea was the hand of the Almighty, stretched out to slap and strike. Elizabeth Mucknell turned her eyes from the tumultuous crash of the waves, bundle clutched to her chest and feet feeling for the next crag of rock beneath the thin soles of her slippers.

If John ever knew what she held in her hands, his fate would be sealed. She'd lose him to the waters, just as the last person to hold it had lost his entire domain. He mustn't know. He must never find out. If he did . . .

Tears lashed at her eyes as the wind lashed at her face. She scanned the dark horizon one more time, satisfied at last that no one had followed her. Then she turned and made her way through the dusk, toward the hiding place she'd stumbled across two years ago.

Praise the Lord that she'd found it first. That *she* had been the one to reach her hand into that crevasse and pull out the artifact. If John had beaten her to it . . . well, her husband was many things. But *noble* wasn't one of them. She daren't imagine what would have befallen him had he set his gaze on this living legend and seen only the silver or gold it could bring him. The fame. The fortune.

She blinked the tears from her eyes, though still they burned. She

loved John. Loved him because he was hers and she was his. Loved him because the Lord had knit them together and made them one. Loved him because she'd sworn to. She loved him because hidden under the cutthroat ambition and the cruel streak and the drunkenness was a heart that just craved acceptance and approval, as they all did. She loved him because he would move heaven and earth for her . . . even when she begged him not to try it.

How many times had he said he did it all for her? The piracy, the mutiny, the murder?

How did he not realize how it broke her heart each and every time she heard it? How could he not understand the terrible burden he placed on her soul with those words?

Only the moon lit her path as she navigated over the granite, toward that opening too small to rightly be termed a cave. There were legends about it, here on the islands. Legends about the artifact she'd found too. Legends that, praise God, had led her here first.

She'd known the moment her finger touched metal that she must protect him from it. She must keep him, at all costs, from discovering what she had. Otherwise, the same curse from heaven that had swallowed Lyonesse would swallow him too. She'd lose him to the waters. Forever gone. Swept away. Drowned.

John, my John. The words sing-songed through her mind the same way they'd been doing for decades. Because despite it all, she loved him. It was a burden, but one she gladly bore for his sake. Perhaps if she prayed hard enough, if she interceded enough, as Trevelyan had done for his people, then God would have mercy on him. Perhaps someone else would reach his stubborn heart for the Lord—little Eben, perhaps, with his heart of gold.

Lizza, my Lizza. She heard his echoing song in her heart, and it made her smile into the darkness. Her husband may be, as Mother had declared twenty years ago, a drunken, ambitious fool, but he loved her. His first thought was always for her. He took her with him everywhere he dared—not like so many other seafaring men who just looked in each port for a new woman to warm their bed.

And he even brought Eben, his cabin boy, home for her to dote on. She a woman with no child, he a child with no mother.

John had his strengths. His good qualities. He was brave, he was clever, he was loyal—to those he deemed worthy.

Her fingers went tight around the leather wrapping she held. Would he be angry if he discovered what she'd been hiding from him all this time? So angry that he'd toss her aside? *Nay*. He loved her more than silver or gold or legend. Didn't he?

Regardless, it was done now. Tomorrow she would leave Tresco. Now that Charles was back on his rightful throne, these waters wouldn't yield the bounty they once had. No more preying on East Indiamen. If John was to continue to make his fortune with piracy, he'd have to go somewhere else with the king's commission.

The Caribbean, he said. But he didn't know enough about it to know if it was safe for her to come, and the journey would be so long. He'd said, sorrow in his eyes, that they'd better not risk it, not yet. She ought to return to London. Stay with her sister, or use some of the silver he'd put away to buy a tidy little house of her own.

Her teeth clenched. Her sister, yes. Spend his stolen, bloodstained silver, *never*. She hadn't said it, but he knew her answer to his suggestion. It was why his eyes had flashed, why he'd slammed his tankard onto the table too forcefully. "*I only did any of it for you!*" he'd roared. "*Will you turn your nose up at all I've provided?*"

It wasn't how she'd meant to spend their last evening together before he left.

There it was. She stopped, stood for a moment, just stared at the black streak in the rock, darker than the night around it. The moonlight glinted off lighter bits, and she sucked in a breath. John's mark. He'd carved it there, into the granite, marking it as another possible place to store what pieces of booty he didn't see fit to turn over to the prince. She dropped to her knees and felt around inside, but it was empty.

Her breath heaved out in a rush. Good. He'd have no reason to check it again, then. And if he found treasure in the Caribbean, he

wouldn't come back to the Isles of Scilly to stash it; he'd bring it to London. This crevice, where the artifact had been at home for centuries already, would be its home again without worry.

She slid the leather-wrapped treasure, long and slender, back into its place and scrambled to her feet. And she stared at it, then out at the sea.

Her fingers curled into her palms. "You won't have him," she told the vengeful waters. "Not if I have anything to say about it."

The waters laughed upon the rocks.

1



20 AUGUST 1906

ST. MARY'S, ISLES OF SCILLY

Lady Emily Scofield had become an expert over the years at blending into shadows. Or wallpaper. Or furniture—she could hide herself quite effectively beside a nice armoire. And crowds—crowds were the best camouflage of all.

She tilted her head down a few degrees, so that her wide-brimmed hat would not only shade her face but also keep the beacon of her scarlet hair out of view of the cluster of gentlemen standing in a knot outside the telegraph and post office. And she kept moving slowly, haphazardly, just like all the other tourists ambling along the cobblestone street of Hugh Town. As if she were just one more of the carefree throng.

The note she meant to send to her mother in London weighed a stone in her pocket. Why bother, anyway? It wasn't worth the risk. If she pushed through that crowd of trustees from the British Museum, one of them might recognize her and she'd lose her anonymity. Point her out to her father or, worse, her brother. Then they'd remember she was here, and they'd remember her betrayal, and she'd pay for it a thousand times over.

No, better to let them forget her.

They were good at that. And she at encouraging it. Being forgotten by the Scofield men was a far better alternative to being thought of by them.

Her brother's thoughts inevitably left her with scars—emotional ones, if not physical ones.

Her father shifted in the crowd, coming more fully into sight. He was laughing, booming out his mirth at something one of the other gentlemen said. Light covering darkness, that's what his laugh was. A mask. To look at him, hear him, one would never guess that he had no heart in his chest.

No, that was unfair. He *had* a heart. It was just that he'd never granted her a place in it.

Two more steps, three, and then she was past them. She wanted to let her shoulders sag, but that wouldn't do. She had to keep walking like every other visiting lady on St. Mary's, shoulders square and posture impeccable.

Emily was good at the mask too. And in order for it to be effective, to ensure she blended in with the crowd of her peers, she had to make certain it didn't slip for even a moment.

She had no idea where she meant to go now that her actual errand had been circumvented, so she kept trailing the half-dozen white-clad ladies she'd made herself look a part of. They had the posh and polished accents of London educations, and she caught a few wisps of conversation here and there that made her think they'd been in Town just a few days ago. This soiree and that ball and whether Lord So-and-So would be hosting a house party over Christmas again.

She hadn't at all minded missing most of the Season this year. In London, she had endless acquaintances but few true friends. And it was impossible to ignore, there, the truth of her part in the Scofield family—just a box to be ticked off. *Lovely daughter, check.* And then foisted onto the most advantageous potential husband. Father hadn't decided yet what match would best suit him. But he would. Soon. She'd heard him grumbling not two months ago to her

mother that he tired of wasting good silver on the hats and shoes and gowns necessary for her.

What he'd meant was that he was tired of wasting time and energy on *her*.

The gaggle of women was leading her to the quay, she realized a minute later. Emily checked the watch pinned to her sash. How long could that knot of men stay tied up in front of the telegraph office? If she turned back now, would they be gone?

Better to give it a few minutes more.

The ferry was just tying up, which meant a new passel of holiday-goers was debarking. How many, she wondered, were here just for the day, and how many had cottages let in their name or rooms at the hotel ready to receive them?

Her gaze drifted to the two yachts anchored in the deeper waters. She hadn't been brave enough, in this last week since the British Museum's team had shown up, to ask around to see where they were all staying. Perhaps on the yachts—heaven knew they had room enough.

“But I don't *want* to go home yet, Mama!” A small lad's whining voice snatched her attention. She looked over to see a sunny-haired boy of perhaps six tugging on the hand of a woman who didn't look to be quite of the London-society ilk but who wore last year's fashions well.

The woman chuckled. “I know you don't, Charlie. But with the amount they gave us for those rooms, we can holiday for weeks more on the mainland. You wanted to explore Land's End, didn't you?”

Or maybe they *weren't* staying on the yachts—at least not all of them. Emily sighed. She didn't much care where Lord Wilhelm or Mr. Scott were staying. But she needed to find out where Nigel and Father were. Otherwise, how could she continue to avoid them?

She checked her watch again. If she dawdled much longer, Briggs would grow worried and come in search of her. Emily had assured her maid she needn't interrupt her letter writing to accompany her—the post office was just a few doors down from

their flat above the hat shop, after all. But she'd already been gone twenty minutes.

Lifting her gaze, she scanned the newly arrived visitors for another likely group she could tag along behind, back into town.

There—two gentlemen, but they looked like the family sort. There was a woman between them dressed in the pinnacle of fashion, ushering two older girls along. The eldest of the girls looked to be only a few years younger than Emily, and the younger had a mahogany tint to her hair. Emily could blend in well enough with them. She would simply look like the eldest of three, or perhaps a cousin or friend.

As the family strode along the planks of the ferry's dock, Emily fell in behind them, which meant she couldn't help but catch snippets of their conversation.

“. . . I *live* on the seashore, Mary. I have no need to *holiday* at one.”

The mother of the group let out a gusty sigh. “Really, Ambrose, it isn't at all the same. You can't exactly bathe in the waters in North Yorkshire, can you?”

The younger of the girls caught the man's hand. “I'd try it! Let's do, Uncle. Next time we visit you there.”

The man—Ambrose—chuckled. “You'd catch your death, then I'd never hear the end of it from your mother.”

The other man—the girls' father, from the looks of him—tugged lightly on the girl's braid. “Which is his only concern, of course. He'd feed you both to the sharks without a wince if your mother wouldn't whine about it.”

As the girls squealed a protest, the first man let out a snort of laughter. “Watch yourself, Ram, or I'll decide to spend Christmas with you after all, to punish you.”

Christmas. Emily let a few more feet come between them, so that the wind snatched their conversation from her before she could hear it. The holiday was still four months away—but where would she be then? She couldn't go home. Not until either Father relented or she apologized to Nigel.

Her throat went tight, and she lifted her chin. She wouldn't. Couldn't. It may have taken her twenty years, but she'd finally stood her ground, and if she backed down now, he'd never learn. Never change. And he *must*. If her brother continued on this path, it would be his end. She knew it would. He was worse even than their father in his dealings, thinking he could walk all over whomever he pleased and just pay them off when they objected.

He had to stop. And if he wouldn't of his own volition, then he had to *be* stopped.

Why would he listen to her, though? He never had before.

Father God, help me to reach him—them, she amended when the telegraph office came into view again. Surely Mother, at least, would soften. Surely. She wouldn't remain silent forever . . . would she? Eventually one of these wires Emily sent every other day, or one of the letters she penned twice a week, would be answered. Mother still loved her. Mother would take her side. Mother would . . .

Do whatever Father told her to do. Just like she always had.

“Scuse me!”

Emily leaped out of the way just in time to avoid being run over by a massive cart full of steamer trunks and hat boxes. She backed up as far as she could, which was farther than she'd anticipated, given that a narrow alley was behind her.

A narrow alley with an awning stretched between the buildings, closing it in. It wasn't exactly dark. Certainly wasn't threatening. But those facts, which she went so far as to mutter under her breath, didn't keep her palms from going damp or her breath from tangling up in her chest.

The walls were bending toward each other, closing in on her, threatening to topple. She squeezed her eyes shut and rested one hand on the summer-warm stone of the nearest building. Proof to herself that it wasn't moving. And that it was *stone*, a building, not that stupid wardrobe. *You're not five, Emily. You're not locked in anywhere. Chin up. Stiff upper lip. Move on.*

The pep talk didn't calm her racing heart, but the familiar words

convinced her to open her eyes again and focus her gaze on the brilliant sunshine just a step away.

The cart of trunks and boxes had lumbered its way past, so Emily dragged a breath into her stubborn lungs and moved back into the street. Much as she tried, she could never explain to anyone that when she took one step away from close, dark spaces, it made her feel as though an elephant had been moved from her shoulders.

The gents had moved on from the telegraph office, praise the Lord. She was able to slip inside, give a polite smile to the man behind the counter, and send her wire to Mother without any more close calls.

And it was probably her imagination that the chap looked at her with pity. For all he knew, she wasn't even waiting or hoping for a reply from the many messages she sent.

She'd just stepped out into the street again and set her sights on the hat shop when familiar voices brought her feet to a halt and inspired her to look around. If Oliver Tremayne was here, then chances were good that her best friend, Beth, his little sister, was too. She hadn't expected them today. Yesterday evening when Beth sailed her back to St. Mary's from the Tremayne family home on the island of Tresco, they'd said Emily would join them again on Tuesday. Tomorrow.

She spotted Oliver's dark head, and though a blond one was beside him, it wasn't petite, energetic Beth. Emily drew in another fortifying breath. Lord Telford. A fine enough fellow, to be sure . . . if one liked being in the company of just *fellows*. Which Emily most decidedly did not. Because, granted, the only fellows she ever had the opportunity to be with until this summer were her brother's friends or their father's peers, all of whom seemed bent on reminding her that she was nothing but a marriage pawn—whose ideas were worthless, whose purpose was to be pretty, and who could otherwise be either ignored or insulted at will.

These gentlemen were a different sort, but still. A few examples

of different gentlemen were not enough to overcome her deep-seated impulse to avoid being caught alone by them.

There was no help for it, though. Oliver was even now lifting a hand in greeting and calling out, “Lady Emily, hello! We’ve been sent to fetch you and the Howe sisters.”

Oh good—they weren’t only looking for *her*. Emily scanned the space behind them, but the fashion-forward figures of Lady Abbie and Lady Millicent were nowhere to be seen. Emily must have been their first stop. She pasted a smile onto her face. “Has something come up?”

Lord Telford’s lips twitched in that way they did—the way that said he was trying, for some reason, not to smile, even though he wanted to. “So says Mr. Gibson. He’s called a family meeting and won’t breathe a word about why until everyone has gathered—everyone involved in the search for pirate treasure included, not just actual family.”

Emily glanced at Oliver, but he offered no more insight into what his maternal grandfather had to tell them. He was scanning the space behind her. “Briggs with you?”

“She’s in the flat.”

Oliver’s gaze went toward the windows above the hat shop at that pronouncement. Telford’s did not. He was still looking over her shoulder, and it seemed something had seized his attention—and not in a good way. His face went as hard as Scillonian granite. “Close ranks,” he muttered to Oliver. Not that he waited for Beth’s brother to sort out what he meant—he grabbed him by the arm, and the two of them shifted around her.

She had no idea what they were about until she realized they were now completely blocking her from the view of passersby. And just in time. A moment later, a chill went up her spine when she heard Nigel’s laugh. Her back stiffened, and she dipped her head, just in case he peered around the gentlemen’s shoulders.

Father would simply ignore her—it was his usual way with her. But Nigel . . . she could never tell what Nigel might do. Sometimes it suited him to follow their father’s example, but other times he

delighted in calling her out, forcing her along on whatever business he was about. So he'd have someone to berate, as best as she could tell. Or just so that he could leave her wherever he took her, alone and vulnerable, no doubt in the hopes that she'd never be seen again and he'd finally be rid of her.

She'd had to find her own way home from so many unfamiliar parts of London that at this point she knew the city as well as she knew the family manor. And she'd learned never to go anywhere without a reticule filled with change enough for the Tube or cab fare.

This time, though, Nigel didn't seem to spot her. A sigh of relief eased out once he was gone around the corner, and she offered Telford a more sincere smile. "Thank you."

Telford motioned her toward the hat shop. "*Some* of us know how to be good brothers."

Her own lips played his twitching game, and she pressed them together to avoid grinning, which would only invite a scowl from him. To hear his sister Libby tell the tale, Bram Sinclair, Earl of Telford, thought being a big brother meant protecting his sister even from the experiences she craved and seeking her safety even when it would make her miserable. The prime example being that he'd tried to arrange a marriage she didn't want with a man she didn't like—Telford's best friend, Lord Sheridan.

But his heart was in the right place, at least. And once he saw that Oliver Tremayne would make Libby happy and Lord Sheridan would not, he'd relented. Which was a good thing, since Sheridan had tumbled head over heels in love with Beth the moment they met, more or less. Emily would go so far as to say that Telford and Oliver were becoming quite good friends at this point, even.

She spun on her heel and hurried toward the back entrance and the flight of stairs that would lead her to the flat she and Briggs had been calling home for the last month. Both Libby and Beth may complain about their brothers not being understanding enough, but when it came down to it, her friends had no idea what a lousy brother was like. Theirs, whatever their faults, loved them.

What must that be like? she'd wondered over the years, especially after becoming friends with Beth at finishing school. When she heard her talking about all the teasing and fun and memories she and her brothers had . . .

Emily had always resorted to silence at those stories. What could she possibly share in return? *"When I was five and my brother thirteen, he said we were going to play hide-and-seek with the nurse. He led me into a wardrobe and then laughed as he locked me in. Oh, just a joke, you'll say. But he left me there for over twenty-four hours. I screamed until I was hoarse, but no one could hear me in that part of the manor house. I cried until I was so dehydrated I had no more tears. And he never did tell anyone where I was. They found me the next afternoon because of the smell coming from the wardrobe."*

Her fingers curled into her palm in the remembered shame, even as she reached with the other hand to unlock the door, praying the gentlemen waiting below didn't notice the way she trembled. Was it any wonder she hated small, dark spaces after that?

She'd learned that day what she meant to her father, though. *Nothing*. He hadn't been relieved that she'd been found—only disgusted at the mess she'd made of herself. He'd berated her for getting into the situation, as if she'd locked *herself* in that wardrobe, despite such a thing being impossible with the way the lock was fitted. When she'd told him it had been Nigel, Father had slapped her and told her not to blame her brother for her own mistakes.

And that was the story of Lady Emily Scofield's family life, in a nutshell. Nigel could do no wrong, and her only important task was to keep from shaming her father.

"There you are, my lady!" Briggs surged forward, relief upon her countenance, the moment Emily opened the door. "I was about to go in search of you. I was beginning to fear you'd stumbled into your brother."

A fear Emily knew so well that she had no difficulty covering it up with an empty smile. "Nearly, but I avoided them at first, and then Lord Telford and Mr. Tremayne saved me from a second encounter."

She waved a hand toward the door. “They’re waiting below. Apparently Mr. Gibson has something new to show us.”

Briggs nodded but didn’t immediately reach for their hats. “Shall I come with you, my lady, or do the grocery shopping as originally planned?”

“Oh.” Emily darted a glance to the small kitchen Briggs had been putting to use daily. She’d never had to think of such things before, truth be told. She knew how to run a household, but that just meant empowering a servant to take care of all those details, not making direct decisions about them herself. She felt her brows knit. “We’ve enough to get through another day or two, haven’t we?”

“I believe so, my lady.”

“Then you should come, of course.” Briggs seemed to enjoy the company to be found at the Tremayne home on Tresco. And if by chance the Howe sisters didn’t want to return at the same time as Emily later, Briggs’s company would ensure she wasn’t left alone with any of the gentlemen, if someone other than Beth volunteered to sail her back to St. Mary’s.

Briggs nodded and gathered up her hat, reticule, and wrap.

Emily kept her blank smile in place. She’d gotten to know more about her lady’s maid in this last month than in the entire term she’d been in service up until now—and the knowing made her stomach go tight with dread. Beth had looked at her as though she were half monster when she realized Emily had no idea about any bits of Briggs’s personal life, but it was self-preservation.

Her maids never lasted long. Oh, they always seemed happy enough to serve her while Nigel was away, off gallivanting about the globe in search of fame. But within months of his return, they always resigned.

Always.

One didn’t have to be a genius at mathematics to realize that one plus one equaled two in those cases. Emily didn’t know exactly what he did . . . but something. Clearly. She’d tried to get an explanation from her last two maids, but neither would say. Did he threaten them? Harass them?

Were she braver, she would ask Briggs point-blank whether Nigel had ever hurt her in any way. With Libby, he'd shoved her, bruised her arm. With Beth, he'd arranged a rather complicated failure of a stone to try to crush her—cruel in the worst, but also distant. He hadn't struck her, hadn't done direct violence. So what sort would he turn on her maids?

And did it really matter? The point was that he'd likely done *something*, which meant that Briggs wouldn't be with her much longer. Which, in turn, meant that if Emily got to know her, came to rely on her for more than the duties any hireling could perform, it would only mean another chip out of her heart when she finally left.

But Beth couldn't understand that. How could she? The Tremaynes had only one family in their employ, and the Dawes had been serving them absolutely forever and always would. Beth couldn't fathom maids coming and going like the tides whenever a brother snarled at them—or perhaps struck them?

Briggs looked up at her now, her smile cheerful but every bit as blank as Emily's, her freckled nose and warm brown hair all but screaming that, at least before she was hired by the Scofields, she was all brightness and innocence.

What would it be like to be friends with her? Like Libby was with Mabena Moon? Like Beth was with Senara Dawe?

Don't be a fool, Emily. She'd already asked too much of Thomasina Briggs by having her leverage her connections with the other servants in the Scofields' employ to spy on Emily's father and brother. Briggs would never want to be her *friend*.

It would have to be enough to have her as an ally.

"Ready, then?" Briggs tied her hat into place even as she asked.

Emily could only nod. And pray, as she led the way back to the waiting gentlemen, that somehow, at the end of all this, she wasn't left absolutely alone.