



# ROSIE RATA

UNDERCOVER  
CODEBREAKER

SUFIYA AHMED

BLOOMSBURY

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## Chapter one

June 1942

There's a full moon tonight, and my stomach is performing somersaults. Normally, the upside-down feeling of my insides happens when I'm frightened.

I'm not frightened now. Far from it.

At this moment, it's excitement I feel. And I've never felt so alive.

I clutch the safety belt that is tied across my chest as the Royal Air Force co-pilot staggers towards the door of the plane. He grips the handle and pulls it down with all his might. The steel slides open to reveal the night sky, and the gust of cold air that hits my face makes me gasp out loud.

The upside-down feeling has given way to a hammering heart.

This is it.

“Rosina.”

Papa rarely calls me by my full name. I suppose being strapped to him for a parachute jump qualifies for a formal name call.

“Yes, Papa,” I shout over the roar of the plane’s engine.

“This is it,” he shouts. “Are you ready?”

As I ever will be. I press my lips together and lean into him. I can’t help thinking that I’m like a puppet. I have no control over my limbs as I can only move in the direction that he does.

“Yes!” I shout back.

“Good. I love you!”

“I love you too, Papa.”

“Let’s go!”

We step forward to the doorway together and are just about to jump when the nose of the plane lifts into the air. Papa grabs the side rail to steady himself. The co-pilot hand-signals to us and I feel Papa’s sharp intake of breath before he throws us both backwards into the plane. Papa lands on his back, and although

I am cushioned against him, my right elbow feels as if it's smashed against a brick wall.

"Ow..." My cry of pain falls away as the plane performs a full-circle manoeuvre.

We're turning back.

Why are we turning back?

I don't ask the question aloud. This is a highly dangerous mission that Prime Minister Winston Churchill's own agency, the Special Operations Executive, has ordered.

A few minutes later, the plane starts to descend.

"Come on," Papa shouts. "Second attempt."

We stagger back to the open door and, without warning, Papa gives me a little push and we're falling through the night sky.

"Aaargghhh!" I scream.

The gravity is unrelenting as it pulls us down at breakneck speed. Whoever said parachuting out of planes is like soaring like a bird was wrong. I don't feel like I'm flying. I feel like a bird with broken wings.

And then the sensation changes. Papa has pulled the parachute cord and we are now floating in the night sky, high above the Belgian countryside.

"This is the best feeling ever!" I shout.



“We’re landing,” Papa shouts. “Remember what to do with your legs.”

Papa and I hit the ground running. It’s a perfect stop. The training Papa made me undergo in the grounds of Camberwell House, our family home, was worth it.

I, Rosie Raja, Churchill’s Spy, have landed in Belgium!

“Rosie, fold the chute,” Papa instructs as he unbuckles his flying suit.

I nod and get to work, remembering the last time I had been in a foreign field, in the middle of the night. It was last year, on my first mission in France, and I had been with my friend Jean. Our task was to collect the weapon canisters that had been dropped by British planes to aid the French Resistance. We’d even met a British spy who had parachuted down, like we’d done tonight.

“Hello.”

I look up from the tangled mess that I’ve made of the parachute. A woman stands over me. She is tall with broad shoulders and red hair that is styled into shoulder-length curls. She must be our undercover contact for the SOE’s Section T. That’s what they call the spy department that works in Belgium.

Papa steps out from behind a tree. He must have seen her approach and taken a cover position in case she wasn't one of ours. "Password."

"Operation Bumblebee."

Papa holds his hand out. "Henri."

That's his code name for this mission.

"I'm code name Brigitte," the woman draws in an American accent as her eyes flick over me. She chooses not to say anything either directly to me or about me, and I'm not forthcoming either. "I didn't think you were going to make it. Your plane flew over the landing spot the first time."

"The pilot miscalculated," Papa explains. "Thankfully he realised he'd flown too far and came back to the correct coordinates."

"It's a good thing he did," Brigitte says. "Or you'd have landed in a Nazi training camp – it's just thirty kilometres from here."

Papa mutters under his breath. Words that are probably not suitable for my ears. He looks over Brigitte's shoulder into the distance. "Where's the SOE agent you're meant to be shadowing?"

"He was swept up in a raid," she replies. "A Belgian collaborator gave his name and description to the

Nazis, and they arrested him and several others at a local Resistance meeting. I'm sorry."

Papa's jaw clenches and his eyes narrow. This is not good news. "When?"

"Two nights ago."

"And you didn't report it to headquarters?" Papa's voice is barely controlled.

"I'm still available to assist with the mission," Brigitte says in a matter-of-fact voice.

"And the canister?" Papa demands.

"It was dropped yesterday." Brigitte knows what he's referring to. "I have it."

Papa drags a hand through his hair. "So, you're working on your own now?"

"Yes," Brigitte confirms.

"Do you not see the danger you're in," Papa demands. "If your partner's tortured, he might betray your name and description. You must leave Belgium immediately."

Brigitte nods. "Thank you for the concern. I will depart just as soon as we have completed this mission."

Papa isn't happy with her answer. He doesn't want a woman who could be on the Nazi hit list hanging around with us. It puts us all in danger.

“Which American agency do you belong to?” Papa wants to know.

“Now that would be telling,” Brigitte says in a soft but firm voice.

My mouth falls open. I am not used to seeing agents or soldiers refuse to answer Papa’s questions. They never openly defy him.

“Then tell me how long you’ve worked as a spy,” Papa says. “I need to know the level of experience I’m working with.”

“Seven years in a top agency,” Brigitte answers. “Roosevelt isn’t sending amateurs.”

She’s talking about the president of the United States.

Papa’s mouth tightens into a grim line. I can tell from his expression that he’s not best pleased. This is an important mission. So important that he allowed me, his twelve-year-old daughter, to parachute with him into a Nazi-occupied country so that he could have a convincing cover story.

Is this woman going to ruin everything?