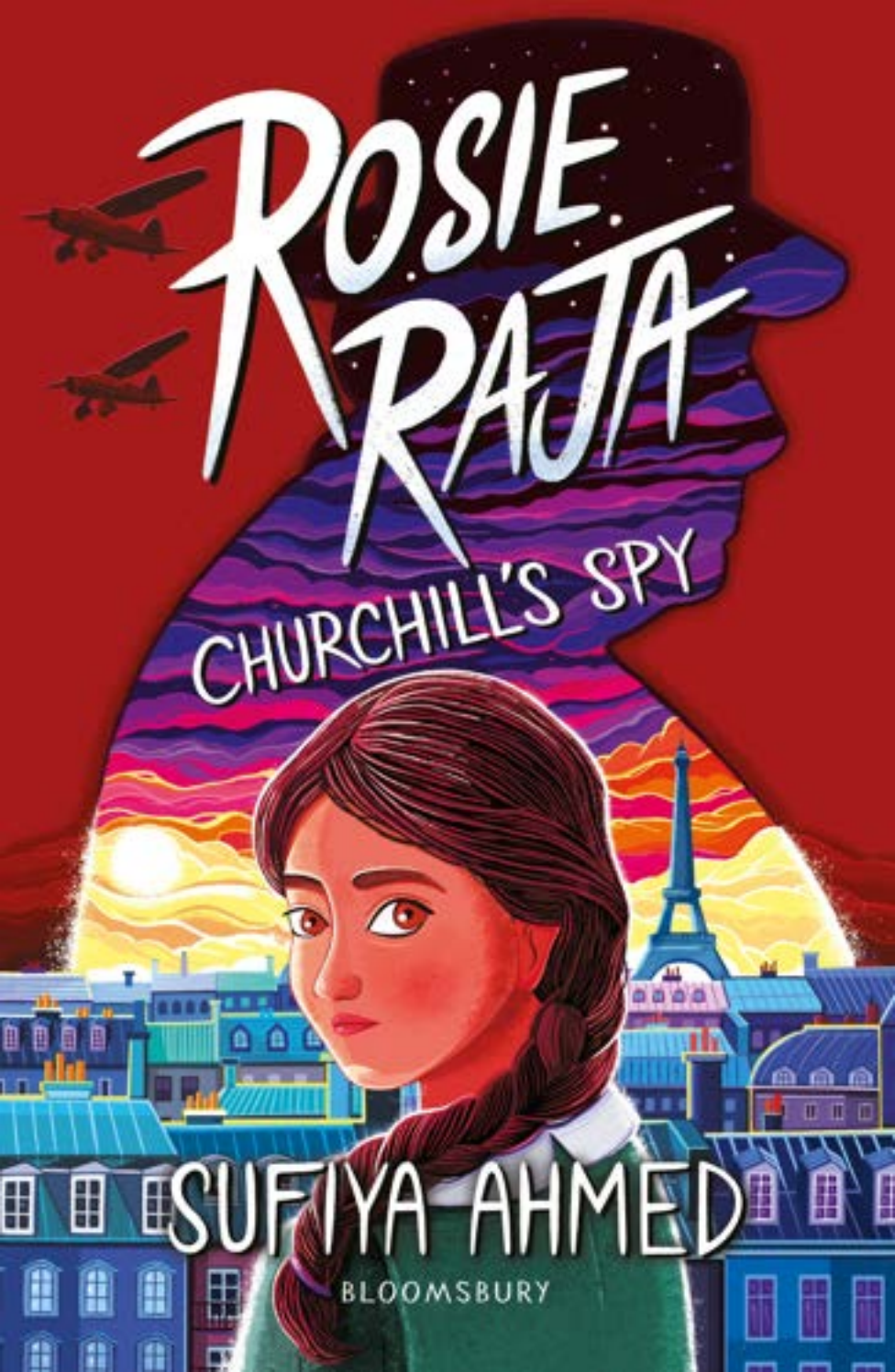

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Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London, WC1B 3DP, UK
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

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First published in Great Britain, 2022 by Bloomsbury Publishing Plc

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: PB: 978-1-80199-005-9; ePDF: 978-1-80199-007-3; ePub: 978-1-80199-006-6

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1 (paperback)

Typeset by Newgen KnowledgeWorks Pvt. Ltd., Chennai, India
Printed and bound by CPI Group (UK) Ltd, Croydon, CR0 4YY



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LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY



Chapter one

July 1941

I stare at the rain out of the enormous window.

The glass spans all the way from the floor to the ceiling to overlook the garden of Camberwell House. Even now, after three months of living in England, I find it incredibly strange that the garden of this big country mansion is a flat field. The palace I grew up in has four separate gardens that are divided by walkways into squares.

They are called *char-bagh* or 'four gardens'. My favourite lies in front of the Taj Mahal.

I love that white marble building with its large, round dome and four minarets on each corner. The Taj Mahal is a mausoleum that holds the earthly remains of

the Mughal emperor Shah Jahan and his wife Mumtaz. They say that the emperor was so devastated by his wife's death that he built her a palace to sleep in forever.

Suddenly my breath catches and I make an effort to push Empress Mumtaz from my mind. I don't want to think about a young woman dying before her time. It triggers thoughts of my own mama.

Biting my lip, I continue to stare at the rain pelting down. A sigh escapes me. They did warn me about the rain before I travelled to England but I never imagined it could be this gloomy. In my kingdom, the rain brings a freshness to the air, which makes everything seem new again. Mama used to say it was because the heavens washed away the dust.

I used to play in the downpour with my friends, and after we'd dried off we would rush to the kitchen from where the delicious smell of pakoras drifted. The palace chefs fried tasty dough balls sizzled to a golden brown and speckled with onions. I would gobble at least four and wash them down with hot, sweet tea. The thought of pakoras makes my mouth water. I close my eyes and imagine the scent …

"Princess Rosina!"

My daydream of pakoras is interrupted by the shrill voice of my governess. Miss Maryland has a habit of

spoiling the little pleasures that make my day bearable. I open my eyes and force myself to turn towards the tall, slim woman at the other end of the table. Miss Maryland's pale blue eyes peer over the rim of her reading glasses.

"What is so interesting outside the window?" she asks in a stern voice.

I lift my chin. "The pitter-patter of raindrops."

"Will the pitter-patter complete your equations?" Miss Maryland snaps.

"I can do these sums with one eye closed!" I retort. "I keep telling you I know this already."

"Rosina Camberwell!" Miss Maryland is on her feet now.

I notice that she has dropped my royal title so she can look down at me. It's rather difficult to scold someone who has a higher status than you. I am the granddaughter of a maharajah – a king – of a small kingdom in India. That makes me a princess, even if my papa is English.

"Miss Maryland," I shoot back. "The correct way to address me is Princess Rosina, and my full surname is Camberwell-Raja."

"Well, if you were a real princess …" her voice drifts off, but her meaning is clear as daylight. Miss

Maryland doesn't consider me to be worthy of the title because although we are the royal family of our Indian kingdom, it is the British Empire that rules over us. The British Raj to be precise.

I refuse to rise to the bait and instead keep the focus on her own failure, rather than her perceived one of my family.

"I already told you," I say, with as much ice as I can manage in my voice. "You are teaching me what I already know. The queen of my kingdom is my aunt, and she ensured that I had the best teachers!"

Miss Maryland looks like she's going to erupt. I'm sure I can see steam coming out of her ears, but I suppose that's just wishful thinking on my part.

She finally finds her voice. "Follow me."

I drag my feet behind Miss Maryland's stiff walk. Her back is so straight that I wonder if she has a ruler strapped to her spine. She heads to the library, which doubles up as Papa's office. He will be in there going over his papers at the large mahogany desk that once belonged to his father and his father before him. Papa is a captain in the British Indian army, but I don't really know what he does. Or why it was so important for the British India Office to recall him from his post in India.

“Come in.” Papa’s deep, baritone voice responds to Miss Maryland’s knock.

My head is held high when I enter the library. I have nothing to be ashamed of. If anything, I should be the one complaining about Miss Maryland’s waste of my time. Who teaches children what they already know?

“Captain Camberwell, do you have a moment?” she asks in a saccharine voice.

I roll my eyes. No wonder Papa refuses to believe my complaints about how horrid she is. Miss Maryland is all sweetness and sugar in front of him.

“I am actually rather busy,” Papa says without lifting his head from his desk.

“It is a matter to do with your daughter.”

“What else would it be?” Papa glances up, irritation all over his face. “You have full responsibility for her.”

“Responsibility that I cannot carry out, for she is most rebellious,” Miss Maryland announces rather dramatically. For a moment, I think she is going to produce a delicate handkerchief and dab it to her eyes.

“Really?” Papa does not look impressed. “She is an eleven-year-old girl. How difficult can she be?”

“She says I am wasting her time by teaching her maths.”

Papa's eyes find mine. They are bright blue and so different to my own.

"Rosie!" He calls me by my nickname. "Is this true?"

I do not hesitate. "Miss Maryland is teaching me maths I already know."

Papa draws a long, steadying breath, as if he is trying to master his supreme irritation. "Miss Maryland, why don't you test Rosie's knowledge? If she scores top marks, then you know you can move on to more advanced teaching."

Miss Maryland looks horrified. "She's eleven years old!"

Papa's brows pull together. "And your point is?"

"I am teaching her maths that is suitable for her age."

"But if she's advanced for her age, then …" Papa's voice drifts off and his eyes find mine again. I raise my brows as if to say, "See what you make me deal with every day?".

Papa straightens in his chair. "Miss Maryland," he says firmly. "Let us call it a day. You have been here for two months and in that time I have heard complaints about my daughter at least twenty times. If by now you have not learned to get her onside, then I don't know when you will. I believe your probationary period is over."

Miss Maryland's mouth falls open. She reminds me of a fish trying to breathe. Then she abruptly turns and walks out.

I want to run to Papa and fling my arms around his neck, just like I used to when we were back in India. I fight the urge to do so. Things are not as they once were. I'm not ready to forgive him for not being with Mama when she passed and then dragging me from my home. Instead, I step to the side and sit primly on the couch.

A flicker of surprise crosses Papa's face. He too expected me to run to him in gratitude for getting rid of my hated governess. I decide to voice it instead.

"Thank you, Papa."

He drags a hand through his hair, causing the wispy brown strands to stand on end. Papa is so different to me. The only thing I have inherited from him is his pale skin. Mine is so fair that I had to keep out of the sun in India.

"You're like those Scottish wives of the Raj officers," Mama used to moan, soothing my burnt skin with the home-made butter known as ghee. The rest of me looks like her, though. I have the same dark eyes, high cheekbones and silky black hair. Ours is a Mughal face, made up of genes that are inherited from Central

Asian ancestors that date back to Emperor Babur, the Uzbek who made his way through Afghanistan to rule Delhi.

I think of her as Papa continues to pull at his hair. If she were here now, she would tidy his hair with her fingers. She hated it when the strands stood in different directions.

"Papa, you will go bald if you keep doing that," I say.

He stops as if stung and drops his hand. Perhaps my words remind him of Mama. Even if they do, he makes no mention of her. Instead, with a twinge of regret in his voice, he says, "Perhaps I acted a bit rashly with Miss Maryland."

"You did the right thing," I assure him quickly. I can't have him changing his mind about her employment.

"But who will take care of you now?"

My heart begins to hammer in my chest. If he is asking that question, then surely it means he is going to disappear again.

"Papa …" my voice is a whisper.

Something like guilt crosses his face. "I'm sorry, Rosie, but I need to go away on some business."

I want to scream at the top of my lungs. I can't believe this is happening. He left me with the servants three days after I arrived here. What I thought was

going to be a weekend away in London for him turned out to be five weeks!

"It won't be for long this time." Papa flashes his wide smile, all perfect white teeth set in his handsome face.

Papa can charm people into doing his bidding with that smile. Not me, though. I learned not to trust that smile the hard way.

"I don't want to be alone again," I burst out.

"Now, Rosie." Papa's smile falters. "You won't be alone. All the staff will be here too."

I say the words I know he will refuse. "Send me back to India. Send me back to live with Rani-K. She will look after me." My voice softens at the mention of Mama's older sister, Samia. *Rani* means queen and the K stands for *kala*, which means 'maternal aunt'. After my grandfather's death two years ago, Rani-K became queen of our kingdom, even if it was in name only because of the Raj.

"Rosie …"

I am not above begging. "Please, please, please return me to Rani-K."

The shutters come down on Papa's face. "You know that's impossible and I don't need to tell you why."

I bite my lip. Yes, he doesn't need to tell me.

"If I can't return to India then I want to come on your trip," I announce.

He shakes his head. "I wish it were as simple as that."

"Why is everything so complicated with you?" I demand, now very close to tears.

"Rosie, for heaven's sake," Papa snaps. "You know our country is facing the deadliest threat since William the Conqueror invaded these shores. I am playing my part to defend it."

"But why do I need to be here?" I cry. "Why do I need to be locked up in this horrid old house?"

"Because it's too dangerous for you in India."

"How can you say that?" I splutter. "You've dragged me to live in a country that's at war with Adolf Hitler! How can that possibly be safer?"