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Opening extract from

Rose of No Man's Land

Written by

Anne Perry

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ROSE OF NO MAN'S LAND

ANNE PERRY

A Timepiece Novel

To Scuff



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Chapter 1
Back Again

Mr Jones' voice droned on and on about the politics and events that had led to World War One. Maybe some people in the class could follow what he was saying, but Rosie was almost in tears trying to make sense of it. It was complicated, so Mr Jones had put all the names and places and stuff on the whiteboard to help. Of course, that didn't help Rosie at all, as she couldn't read any of it.

Something amazing had happened to Rosie when the class had studied the Tudors. It must have been a dream, but at the time she was

convinced that she had gone back in time to the Spanish Armada and met Queen Elizabeth the First. That seemed a million years ago now. Here she was, back in history class, lost and stupid because she couldn't read.

Gary Hodder had started to twist around at his desk and flick bits of old chewing gum at one of the girls. One bit missed and sailed past Rosie to land on Mr Jones' shoes. Mr Jones turned round and glared at Rosie.

"Rosie Sands!" he said. "You will stay after class to pick that up. And you can clean the desks while you're at it to show you're sorry."

"But, sir, it wasn't me!" Rosie protested.

"Of course it wasn't," Mr Jones replied, in a voice that made it clear he thought it was. "It never is you, Rosie. As I said, you can stay behind."

Stacey Summers pulled some new gum out of her pocket and gave it to Rosie. "Go on," she said. "If you have to stay anyway, you might as well really hit him."

Everyone laughed.

"That's enough from you, too, Stacey," Mr Jones said crossly. "Any more lip and you'll be staying as well." He turned back to the board.

The rest of the class was awful for Rosie. She wanted to cry but instead she had to sit and listen to even more facts about the silly arguments that had led to the war. Then, when the bell went, the others left and she had to stay behind.

Stacey waved at Rosie on the way out the door. "See ya, babe," she said.

Zack Edwards was the last to leave. He stopped at the door and turned to look at Rosie.

"That was a bit rough, Rosie," he said. "It was obvious it wasn't you."

Rosie went red. "Thanks," she said. "It doesn't matter, really."

"Maybe catch you later," said Zack.

Rosie didn't know what to say. Zack was the hottest boy in school – and he had stopped to talk to her! He was really clever, too, and he normally only went out with the clever

girls. Well, there was no danger he'd want to go out with Rosie. She couldn't even read, and she turned into a red-faced, stammering loser any time he spoke to her.

As Zack left, Mr Jones came back in.

"So what are we going to do with you, Rosie?" he asked. He didn't look cross any more.

"I'll clean the desks," Rosie said. "But it really wasn't me."

"I know," Mr Jones said.

"What?" Rosie asked, confused.

"I know you didn't throw the gum," said Mr Jones. "I'm sorry I pretended that I thought you did. But I wanted a word with you and I didn't want to do it in front of everyone else."

Rosie frowned. "What about?" she asked.

"I've noticed that you try to get away without answering questions in class," Mr Jones said. "And I know you're a clever girl – just think about that talk you did about Queen Elizabeth. So I started to wonder if there's

another problem that's stopping you from taking part."

Rosie went red again. "What do you mean? There's no problem."

"Do you know that lots of people find it hard to read?" asked Mr Jones. "Some were just off school and missed something and then have never had a chance to catch up. A lot have dyslexia, which can make it hard to remember what words look like. Whatever the reason, there are lots of ways to help."

Rosie felt tears sting her eyes. Her whole body was hot with shame. "What's that got to do with me?" she asked. "I'm not some retard."

"That's not a nice word, Rosie," said Mr Jones, but he didn't sound angry. "And just because you have a problem with reading, it doesn't mean you're stupid."

"I can read fine, thanks," said Rosie.

Mr Jones looked at her for another minute, then he smiled. "Well. I think you can go now. But remember, I'm always here if you change your mind."

Rosie grabbed her bag and ran out of the room as fast as she could. Before she had made it to the door there were hot tears streaming down her cheeks.

