



The

SPY KEEPER

of

MARSEILLE

A Novel

ROSEANNA M. WHITE

Praise for Roseanna M. White

Exciting and romantic! With a strong baseline of little-known history, a sweet melody for Marcel and Zelig's building love, the rich harmony of Zelig's personal growth, and jarring notes of danger and betrayal, *The Spy Keeper of Marseille* thrills. Roseanna M. White has written another stellar World War II novel.

SARAH SUNDIN, bestselling, Christy Award-winning author of *Mists over the Channel Islands*

Rich with tension and tenderness, *The Spy Keeper of Marseille* captures the quiet ferocity of a woman and mother who lives out the dangerous beauty of doing what's right—even when it could cost her everything. Roseanna M. White delivers a story as brave as its heroine, proving that love and courage can change the course of history.

JANYRE TROMP, bestselling author of *Darkness Calls the Tiger*

Brilliantly written. . . . [*The Collector of Burned Books*] captures the volatile intersection of art, academia, and authoritarian control, with the spark of unexpected romance bringing warmth to an unforgettable novel.

BOOKLIST STARRED REVIEW

Propulsively plotted and richly detailed. . . . A captivating historical romance and a resonant ode to the power of literature in dark times.

PUBLISHERS WEEKLY on *The Collector of Burned Books*

The Collector of Burned Books is a powerful and emotionally resonant story. It delves into themes of censorship, cultural expression, and the enduring power of the written word in dark times, highlighting how literature can both resist and reveal the truths behind oppression.

HISTORICAL NOVEL SOCIETY

Courage, honor, and sacrifice born of great love overflow the pages of *The Collector of Burned Books*. Rarely have I read a book with such perfect tension. . . . Roseanna M. White has written a book I could not put down, one I will not forget.

CATHY GOHLKE, Christy Hall of Fame author of *This Promised Land*

A heart-pounding historical that kept me riveted from beginning to end. Roseanna White, a brilliant storyteller, weaves together a gripping plot about the many dangers of distributing prohibited books during the Nazi regime. . . . *The Collector of Burned Books* should be read by every lover of a life-changing book!

MELANIE DOBSON, award-winning author of *The Lost Story of Via Belle*

With her signature blend of page-turning storytelling, fascinating historical details, and enduring themes, Roseanna M. White draws readers into the dark days after Paris falls to Nazi occupation. . . . *The Collector of Burned Books* is a stirring and inspiring tribute to the powerful bond between literature and freedom.

AMANDA BARRATT, Christy Award-winning author of *The Warsaw Sisters*

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— *of* —
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The Spy Keeper of Marseille

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One

23 APRIL 1941

ORTHEZ, FRANCE

BORDER OF THE UNOCCUPIED AND OCCUPIED ZONES

Zelie Bellerose shuffled another step forward, careful not to look at the two Nazi soldiers at the head of the queue. Careful not to reach up to fuss with the blonde wig she'd donned to match the photograph on the falsified papers she carried. Careful not to dart her gaze to her colleague who had already made it through the checkpoint and ambled toward the depot's cafeteria.

He was just as careful not to look at her, but she felt Henri cast one fretful glance her way before he disappeared inside. She knew why his brows would be creased with worry—those soldiers had been blatantly staring at her for the last five minutes. And at a checkpoint as strict as this one, one that led from the dubiously dubbed Free France into occupied territory, attention was never a good thing.

She wore a dowdy suit that had seen better days even before the war. The borrowed hat perched askew on her head, as if she hadn't the fashion sense to pin it on straight. The wig, a dark honeyed blonde, lacked luster.

She hadn't dared to pad out the clothing, not with the likelihood of a pat-down. And there was little she could do about her face. In general, she had an easier time evading suspicion than her male counterparts, given the German habit of dismissing women as useless. But sometimes the knife cut the other way. Sometimes, the soldiers noted the high cheekbones she'd inherited from her mother, the slender nose that had come from her father, the eyes that were too bright a blue to go unnoticed for long.

Her fingers tightened around her suitcase. Why today? Why did *these* soldiers have to notice her?

"Next," one of the Nazis called out as they let the old gentleman at the front of the queue pass, the man's wife taking his place at the inspection table. The last person between them and Zelig.

She drew in a deep breath, making herself focus on the scent of the blossoms that adorned the trees. The touch of the sun on her shoulders, blessedly warm after a cruel, cold winter. The sound of birdsong trilling over and above the hustle and bustle of the station and the monotonous drone of the soldiers' harsh German.

All too soon, the elderly lady was permitted to join her husband, and Zelig stepped up to the table.

Give the world a smile, ma petite belle, her mother had always told her, *and you could charm it into spinning backward*.

Sometimes, charm was exactly what she relied on to get her way. But charm didn't match the frumpy suit, the dull hair, the crooked hat. She offered only a close-lipped tip of the corners of her mouth, which she hoped looked frazzled and appropriately subordinate.

"*Ausweis*," the Wehrmacht soldier on the left said, holding out a hand.

She already had the German-issue pass ready and handed it over. But the soldier didn't look down at it. His focus remained on her face.

"What brings you into the occupied zone, *fraulein*?" the one

on the right asked in heavily accented French. He was younger than his cohort by about a decade, if her guess was right. And his expression stopped just short of leering.

Frau, she corrected him mentally. But the papers denoted her as unmarried. Just as well. If they knew her husband had been killed defending the Maginot Line, they'd no doubt look at her even more closely.

"My uncle's funeral," she said, keeping her too-blue eyes trained on the table as she spoke. "In Paris."

If they asked, she had a name ready to give them for this fictitious, unfortunate uncle, one whose just-as-fictitious obituary had run in a Paris newspaper yesterday. Lies as carefully woven as the silks she hadn't worn in over a year, the ones still hanging in her Paris armoire.

But they didn't ask. Their eyes roved over her, no doubt noting that the boxy suit jacket hung loose on her frame. She had to forcibly keep her knuckles from going white with strain.

"We'll have a look at what's in your bag," the younger said. A smirk settled on his mouth that she'd have loved to slap off. "And under that ill-fitting jacket."

Henri, if he was watching from inside the station, wouldn't like this one bit. Hopefully he'd think to offer up a prayer for her. On a good day she never gave a second thought to such things, but under duress, her convent-school education always reared its head.

She wasn't convinced prayer would help . . . but it couldn't hurt.

Her chin ticked up a notch. She let challenge light her eyes. "You have female auxiliaries, I trust?"

Oh, there it was. The blaze of resentment in their eyes. But they couldn't argue. The Nazis kept females on staff at these checkpoints for this purpose. It wasn't proper, after all, for men to search women. And the Nazis liked to give the appearance of propriety.

Laughable. Had she not asked, she had no doubt these two

would have put their hands all over her under the guise of searching for contraband. But the older jerked his head in a nod as he stood, calling out, “Werner, Schmidt!”

Two stern-faced “gray mice”—matrons whose gray uniforms looked even worse than Zelig’s borrowed suit—emerged from a door of the station, one of them motioning her to follow.

Her pulse pounded in time to the step of her wooden-soled shoes’ clumping on the pavement.

Unlike the soldiers, these two made no pretense of speaking French and clearly didn’t assume she’d know any German. One used hand motions to direct her to put her bag on a table, and the other mimicked taking off her hat and clothes.

Her hands trembled a bit as she reached for the hat, but they’d expect that. Even the innocent were unnerved when searched by their occupiers. Zelig slid the pin out, set it and the hat itself on the table, and quickly unbuttoned the jacket so she could sling it over the hat. The loose skirt soon followed.

Her slip she left in place. She had to *try* to maintain a bit of dignity, didn’t she?

The brown-haired mouse unlatched Zelig’s suitcase and tossed out all the clothing. Unzipped her bag of cosmetics and dumped them onto the heap, opening each compact, rolling up each tube.

Cold hands lifted her arms parallel to the ground and then patted down her sides—as if she could hide anything under the threadbare slip. Zelig pressed her lips. Mouse Two wouldn’t find anything hidden on her person. Mouse One wouldn’t find anything in her bag.

But that didn’t mean she’d make it through the gauntlet. Throat tight, she could only pray this routine stop wouldn’t be the thing to unravel years of careful work.

When Mouse Two stepped away, nodded, and motioned toward her pile of clothing, Zelig barely kept the sigh of relief

from rushing out. Measuring her exhale, she slipped back into the skirt, the jacket, and then reached for the hat.

Mouse Two wasn't even paying attention as Zelig pinned it back into place. She was helping Mouse One finish riffling through her suitcase. When they found nothing but the usual toiletries and clothes, they went to work on the case itself, ripping the lining away and running those cold fingers all along the shell. Zelig kept her teeth clenched tight.

Once satisfied her suitcase held nothing incriminating, they crammed her belongings back in, leaving the lining to drape over it—where was the precision the Germans were so famous for *now*? Couldn't they at least refold her dresses? Repin the cloth? Apparently not. A click of the latch, and they shoved the suitcase at her and led her back outside.

A third soldier had joined the first two, this one clearly some sort of officer, given the more formal uniform. He stood behind their chairs, an easy smile on his lips as he said something about expecting to be in Vichy for a few weeks. He glanced her way, along with the two underlings, as she approached with the mice.

That's when she saw the black tie, the skull and crossbones on his hat. *Ciel*, he was SS. Zelig dropped her gaze to the ground.

Mouse One said in her crisp German, "Nothing. She's clean."

With the officer looming, the soldier who'd all but leered at her before only gave a nod. "On with you, then," he said in his accented French.

Zelig hustled to the gate. And she stepped out of "free" territory and into occupied.

As if it were really all that different. In fact, ironically, she breathed easier as she hurried into the station, the nerves turning into a simmer of frustration as she bypassed the table where Henri Boutron sat and strode straight to the ticket counter. She bought her ticket to Paris, went to the platform to wait for the train, and was one of the first to push her way into the car.

She chose a seat in the rear, not surprised when Henri soon took up the seat nearest hers. It hadn't been the plan. He was supposed to simply pass by her seat at some point to retrieve the papers from her. But he'd be panicking over the search, she had no doubt.

Still, he contained himself as the car filled, as the conductor shouted the last call for boarding, even as the train chugged its way forward. They'd sat in silence for nearly half an hour, all told, when Henri finally leaned closer to her, his fedora pulled down to shadow his face.

"All well?"

Funny how the simple question unraveled her careful composure. Her hands shook again, and she knew her friend would see the rage on her face. "Those witches tore everything out of my bag and made me strip for them."

Henri lifted a brow in an unspoken question. He was a handsome man, not much older than her own thirty years, and as brash as they came. For half a heartbeat when Navarre had introduced them, she'd wondered if this naval officer would be the one to help her forget her complicated grief for the husband who had barely been a husband to her even before he was sent to defend France and died for his trouble.

Perhaps Henri would have been that one, if he didn't remind her so much of her little brother. And if they had time for such nonsense. But he did and they didn't, and over the eleven months they'd been working together, they'd struck up a friendship as deep as it was platonic.

Henri had been more than a little dubious in their initial meeting last year, when he'd realized that Navarre did indeed intend for him, a former naval man, to answer to a woman—unthinkable to anyone in the military. But after being ordered to stand down and turn over his fleet to the Nazis, he'd returned to France looking for a way to resist. Any way. Even if it meant accepting Zelig's role.

As to his unasked question, she took off her hat, slipped a finger between the layers of the double lining she'd carefully pressed into place last night, and pulled out the papers she'd hidden there.

Henri groaned. "Zelie!" He snatched the questionnaires from her. "Are you mad? What if they'd checked the hat?"

She lifted a single shoulder in a shrug, letting slide away the dull expression she'd been wearing to match the increasingly itchy wig. "They could have searched *anything*. It was as safe as any other hiding place—and clearly safer than the others, given that they checked the lining in my suitcase and had me down to my knickers."

Henri snorted a laugh. "I should have been the one to smuggle them in. They didn't search me at all."

She shook her head. "This time. Usually it's the other way around." Knowing that at this point he was the one who needed the paperwork in his possession, she fixed her hat and put it back on. Soon, they'd separate. Henri would get off at Bourdeaux, she would continue to Paris. And while, yes, she'd be dodging the Gestapo every day she was in the city, it was Henri's task that had her worried.

A glance at the papers as they disappeared into his suit jacket, and she asked, "How do you intend to go about your sleuthing?"

MI6 had given them very specific requests for this mission, so specific they'd had to risk making those questionnaires to be filled out. They couldn't afford to neglect even one of the answers. The British needed information on the U-boats based near Bourdeaux as badly as she needed a trip to Cannes.

Henri, the fool, grinned. "Easy enough. I'll get a U-boat crew member drunk, liberate him of his uniform, and board a sub."

She blinked at him, not sure if this was one of his harebrained schemes or one of his inappropriate jests. "I do hope you're joking."

His lack of response did nothing to reassure her.

She huffed out a breath. "Need I remind you, Boutron," she

muttered under her breath, “that you’ll do no one any good if you get yourself killed?”

Technically, she could call him off. Make him come up with a safer way to get the intelligence on the submarines.

But there was no *safe way* to do the jobs they’d been assigned. And if anyone had a hope of succeeding with such a brash plan, it was Henri.

He repositioned his fedora as the train slowed for the Bourdeaux stop. “I’ll be fine, and then I’ll proceed to the naval base. If anyone questions my presence there, I’ll claim I’m creating a report for Vichy. They’re looking for one, so it should hold water.” He shot her a grin. “You’re the one who trusted me with this. You can’t start questioning me now.”

A return smile overtook her mouth. He was no more reckless than she was, to be honest. It was one of the reasons they’d become such fast friends. “Start now? I’ve been questioning you since the moment we met.”

He was laughing as he disembarked, and she chose to think of it as a good omen. He’d survive this. Get the information England needed. Radio it to MI6, who would pass it along to the powers that be in London.

They’d prove themselves. Now, tomorrow, next month. They’d prove that the Allies could trust them. Prove they were worthy of the funds, the gadgets, the secrets Britain had promised them.

Somehow, they’d do it. Even if it required a few harebrained schemes.

She sighed and settled back into her seat for the rest of the trip. Back to Paris, the city she’d fled last June before the Germans arrived. The place where she’d once been so happy, and so furiously *unhappy* too. The place where her marriage had crumbled when she couldn’t mold herself into the useless army wife Jacques had expected her to be, wanting nothing but picnics and theater shows and talk of the latest theories on child-rearing.

Her eyes slid closed as familiar countryside blurred past. She'd tried. She'd *tried* to be what he wanted. Tried to forget all the dreams she'd given up to marry him when she was twenty, tried to content herself with his world, despite knowing how big a one was beyond it. Tried to be content with the memories of her childhood in Shanghai and the adventures she'd had as the daughter of a diplomat, with the early years of their marriage, when they were stationed in Morocco. Tried to be happy with the memory of having *been* happy.

We could have fixed it, she told herself, as she always did. They could have gotten back to their first love or found something better, deeper. They could have found a compromise somewhere between his desire for the staid and the steady and hers for the next excitement, the next adventure. They could have, if nothing else, continued to pretend, for the sake of Blaise and Elise.

She hugged her suitcase to her chest as the train slowed, signaling the outskirts of the city. She hadn't packed any of their photographs—hadn't dared. If she'd been caught, the last thing she wanted was for the Gestapo to have pictures of her children in their possession. But in Paris . . . in Paris, she'd have a few reminders of them, anyway. The baby pictures framed and hanging in her flat. The toys and clothes they hadn't had time or space to pack when she fled with them last June.

Four months. Four months had passed since she'd last been able to sneak onto the grounds of her family's villa outside of Cannes, for Christmas. Since she'd driven her Citroën up the hill to the old farmhouse Maman had moved them into—they'd decided to rent out the villa. Since she'd gathered Blaise and Elise to her chest and held on so tightly they'd squirmed in protest.

How much had they grown? Blaise was nine—was his face losing more of its baby softness? Had he sprouted up again, making her mother mutter about keeping the boy in trousers? And sweet little Elise . . . had her hair darkened more from its original

white-blonde? Was learning to read still frustrating her so much that she threw tantrums and stomped from the room?

Tears burned, but she squeezed her eyes against them. She should be the one teaching her stubborn little girl how to read. She should be the one measuring her son's height against the old doorframe. She should be the one fussing about letting down their hems and insisting she wasn't hungry so they could have a bit more.

It should be her. But it couldn't be. She was a hunted woman, even if the Germans didn't yet know that *she* was the one they were after. They'd figure it out eventually—she knew that. They'd realize that she was right hand to Jean Loustaunau-Lacau, code-named Navarre and leader of France's largest organized intelligence network. They'd discover that she was the one the Brits knew as POZ 55, the one organizing, encoding, and passing along information to help the Allies keep fighting one more day. They'd connect all the dots, and when they did, she could well meet her end.

But if so, she wouldn't take her children down with her.

"It'll be worth it," she whispered to herself as the train screeched its way into the station. She was giving her children a France worth growing up in. She was fighting for their freedom, their future. She was making a sacrifice that would *count* for something.

Clutching the handle of her suitcase, she drew in a deep breath. And took her first steps off the train and into Nazi-held Paris.

She thought she'd prepared herself for the differences—the streets empty of automobiles, since petrol could only be gotten from the Nazis, the swastikas hanging and flying, the green-brown uniforms of the German Wehrmacht on so many of the men she passed by. But it was the sameness that slowed her feet a turn away from her flat. Parisians still sat at bistro tables outside restaurants. Men in suits still strode along, briefcases in hand. Women still pushed their prams and talked about what new show they'd see that weekend.

How? They had Nazis surrounding them, filling their cafés,

manning checkpoints. How in the world did they move on as if life hadn't changed?

Someone rammed into her from behind. "Oh! Pardon!"

At the familiar voice, Zelie spun, eyes going wide. "Marguerite?"

For one moment, her best friend's face stayed blank as she glanced from the horrible hat to the dull blonde hair to the ugly suit. Then her gaze shot back up to Zelie's face, and her eyes went round.

"Shh." Zelie pivoted to Marguerite's side and nudged her to keep walking. "Don't draw attention. I'm not officially here."

Marguerite huffed and tucked a lock of her forever-unruly black curls behind her ear. "You shouldn't be here even unofficially. The Gestapo has stopped by half a dozen times, looking for you."

It took all her training to keep from glancing over her shoulder. "I won't stay in the flat. I just need to fetch a few things. Did they search it?"

Marguerite shook her head. "They're playing by the rules, so far. You're only wanted for questioning because of your association with . . . Navarre?" Her friend wrinkled her nose. "Is that what Jean is going by now?"

Zelie shot her an exasperated glare. "It rather ruins the point of it if you still use his real name."

Her friend rolled her eyes. "As if calling him *Jean* would tell anybody anything, as common a name as it is." She pushed through the door to their building and led the way up the stairs.

Zelie drew in a long breath. She was trusting Marguerite with her secrets, with her life, with the lives of her children. But one slipup, one missed someone lurking in a shadow, and it could all be over. "Humor me."

"So dour." Marguerite fished the key to the flat out of her pocket. She opened the door, held it open for Zelie, and then quickly shut it behind them and locked it again. "If they follow the pattern, they'll be back tonight."

“I don’t intend to be here.” She set her suitcase down by the door and turned to face her friend. “They believe your story, though? That you’re my employee, seeing to the place?”

Marguerite nodded as Zélie took off her hat and the itchy wig and shrugged from her spring-weight jacket. “Why would they doubt it? Given my family’s fall from fortune, it makes sense that you offered me a job out of charity.”

Far from it—Marguerite had saved her, not the other way round, and it had nothing to do with money. Her old school chum had been the only one Zélie could talk to as things with Jacques crumbled. Setting aside her wariness, Zélie drew her into a tight embrace. “I’ve missed you.”

Marguerite squeezed her back. “You have no idea how I worry. The risks you’re taking . . .”

“They’re necessary.” She pulled away, gave her friend a grin. “Now. Tell me everything while I pack. Have you heard from your brother?”

Zélie listened as she dashed into her old bedroom. There was nothing here that was incriminating—she’d taken anything having to do with her work when she fled Paris—but she’d left behind plenty of valuables. She opened her jewelry armoire, nostrils flaring at the dangling chains of silver and gold, the strings of pearls, the glinting gems.

Marguerite went still. “What are you going to do with those? Wear them as you parade around Vichy?”

All of the pieces on this side had been gifts from Jacques, a few from her parents for birthdays. Nothing heirloom, nothing too sentimental. She scooped them all out and tossed them onto the bed. “I’ve finally convinced Navarre to abandon our base in Vichy—it’s too dangerous, parading right under Pétain’s nose and using his own ministry’s money to fund our endeavors. Everything is being moved to Pau or Marseille.”

“Good.” Sinking down onto the bed, Marguerite still frowned. “So these things . . . ?”

“I’ll sell them. And don’t look at me like that. They’re just *things*.”

But tears welled in Marguerite’s eyes. “They’re all you have left from Jacques. They’re . . . they’re a whole era.”

“I have Blaise. Elise.” She opened the other side but paused before scooping anything out. Most would go, yes, and perhaps buy food for a while. But not everything. She reached for the lacquered lotus blossom comb, ran a thumb over it. It was the last gift Pappa had given her, when they lived in Shanghai. Before he was struck by the tropical fever, before he was suddenly gone, ending the fairy tale her life had been.

The comb would *not* go the way of the necklaces. She tucked it into her pocket and then scooped out the rest. Fetched a bag from the closet, deposited the valuables inside, and then turned back to the hangers and shelves to choose a few dresses. “When the Gestapo return, tell them I came back to Paris for my uncle’s funeral, but that I’ve already left again. All right? Tell them you don’t expect me to return.”

Marguerite wiped at her cheeks. “Where will you go?”

She’d already worked this through. “Areg Grigoryan gave me a key to his house and said I could use a maid’s room there whenever I needed a place to stay and lie low.”

Her friend’s still-damp eyes went wide again. “Grigoryan—the millionaire industrialist?”

“He’s been financing any number of Resistance projects.” He was even paying the salaries of dozens of Jewish workers he’d had no choice but to dismiss, officially. She wouldn’t be surprised to learn he had several hidden in his various estates, either. She sat beside Marguerite and reached for her hand. “I’ll be safe at his house, as long as I’m in Paris. I’ll leave instructions for you on how to find me there, if you need me.”

Marguerite summoned a smile. “Good. What else are you taking with you?”

The most precious things, she couldn't. As she walked through the flat, she ran a hand over the polished wood of her piano, stood and memorized the enormous Chinese painting that hung over the mantel. She buried her face in the outgrown clothes her children would never wear again and told herself she could still smell the lavender from their soap.

Then, with one more hug for Marguerite and a promise to be in touch soon, she picked up the suitcase she'd come in with and what she could fit in that one bag. She fished out the key Areg had given her from the drawer in the kitchen. And she left the last claim she had on her old life, knowing she'd never come here again.

Not as long as France belonged to Germany.