

JOHNNIE ALEXANDER

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*Where Treasure Hides*

*a novel*






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*Where Treasure Hides*

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# CHAPTER *One*

AUGUST 1939

The stringed notes of “Rule, Britannia!” grew louder as the crowd quieted, eyes and ears straining in their search for the violin soloist. The patriotic anthem echoed through Waterloo Station’s concourse, and as the second chorus began, sporadic voices sang the lyrics. Travel-weary Brits stood a little straighter, chins lifted, as the violinist completed the impromptu performance, the last note sounding long after the strings were silenced.

Alison Schuyler gripped her leather bag and threaded her way through the crowd toward the source of the music. As the final note faded inside the hushed terminal, she squeezed between a sailor and his girl, murmuring an apology at forcing them to part, and stepped onto a bench to see over the crowd. A dark-haired boy, no more than seven or eight, held the violin close to his anemic frame. His jacket, made of a finely woven cloth, hung loosely on his thin shoulders. The matching trousers would have slipped down his hips if not for his hand-tooled leather belt.

Either the boy had lost weight or his parents had purposely

provided him clothes to grow into. Alison hoped for the latter, though from the rumors she'd heard, her first assumption was all too likely. She stared at the cardboard square, secured by a thick length of twine, that the boy wore as a cheap necklace. The penciled writing on the square numbered the boy as *127*.

Other children crowded near the young musician, each one dressed in their fine traveling clothes, each one labeled with cardboard and twine. Germany's castaways, transported to England for their own safety while their desperate parents paced the floors at home and vainly wished for an end to these troublesome days.

"Now will you allow him to keep his violin?" A man's voice, pleasant but firm, broke the spell cast over the station. The children fidgeted and a low murmur rumbled through the crowd. The speaker, dressed in the khaki uniform of a British Army officer, ignored them, his gaze intent on the railroad official overseeing the children.

"He better," said a woman standing near Alison. "Never heard anything so lovely. And the lad not even one of the king's subjects. I'd take him home myself—yes, I would—if I'd a bed to spare."

Alison mentally sketched the tableau before her, pinning the details into her memory. The officer's hand resting on the boy's shoulder; the official, a whistle around his neck, restlessly tapping his clipboard with his pencil; the dread and hope in the boy's eyes as he clutched his prized instrument. The jagged square that tagged his identity.

The travelers at the edge of the children's irregular circle collectively held their breaths, waiting for the official's reply. He shifted his glance from the nervous boy to the expectant passengers, reminding Alison of a gopher she had once seen trapped between two growling mongrels. The memory caused her to shudder.

"He might as well. Don't know what to do with it if he left it behind." The official waved a plump hand in a dismissive gesture. He certainly hadn't missed many meals. He blew his whistle, longer than necessary, and Alison flinched at its shriek.



“Get organized now. Numbers one through fifty right here. Fifty-one through a hundred there. The rest of you . . .”

The show over and the hero having won, the onlookers dispersed, their chatter drowning out the official’s instructions to his refugees.

Alison remained standing on the bench, studying the man and the boy. They knelt next to each other, and the boy carefully laid the violin into the dark-blue velvet interior of its case. His slender fingers caressed the polished wood before he shut the lid. The man said something too softly for her to hear, and the boy laughed.

The spark flickered inside her, tingling her fingers, and she *knew*. This glimpse of a paused moment would haunt her dreams. It rarely occurred so strongly, her overwhelming desire to capture time, to freeze others within movement. She quickly pulled a sketch pad and pencil from her bag. Her fingers flowed lightly over the paper, moving to a rhythm that even she didn’t understand. Tilting her head, she imagined the notes of the violin soaring near the high ceiling, swooping among the arches.

Her pencil danced as she added determination to the man’s jawline and copied the two diamond-shaped stars on his collar. She highlighted the trace of anxiety in the boy’s eyes, so at odds with his endearing smile. What had he left behind? Where he was going? She drew the cardboard square and printed the last detail: *127*.

The man clicked shut the brass hinges on the violin case and, taking the boy’s hand, approached the station official. Alison hopped down from the bench and followed behind them, awkwardly balancing the pad, pencil, and her bag.

The brown hair beneath the officer’s military cap had been recently trimmed. A pale sliver, like a chalk line, bordered the inch or so of recently sunburned neck above his crisp collar. Alison guessed he was in his midtwenties, a little older than she. Identifying him, from his bearing and speech, as gentry, she positioned herself near enough to discreetly eavesdrop.

“Where is young Josef here going?” asked the soldier. “Has he been assigned a home?”

The official gave an exaggerated sigh at the interruption. He lifted the cardboard square with his pencil. "Let me see . . . number 127." He flipped the pages on his clipboard.

"His name is Josef Talbert."

"Yes, of course, they all have names. I have a name, you have a name, she has a name." He pointed the eraser end of his pencil, in turn, to himself, to the soldier, and to Alison.

The soldier looked at her, puzzled, and she flushed as their eyes met. Flecks of gold beckoned her into a calm presence, sending a strange shiver along her spine. She turned to leave, but her stylish black pumps seemed to stick to the pavement. She willed her feet to move, to no avail.

When the soldier turned back to the official, Alison thought the spell would break. She needed to go, to forget she had ever felt the pull of his calm determination, to erase those mesmerizing eyes from her memory. But it was too late. The Van Schuyler fate had descended upon her, and she was lost in its clutches. Her heart turned to mush when the soldier spoke.

"My *name* is Ian Devlin of Kenniston Hall, Somerset. This lad's *name*, as I said, is Josef Talbert, recently come from Dresden. That's in Germany." He stressed each syllable of the country. "And your *name*, sir, is . . . ?"

The official scowled and pointed to his badge. "Mr. Randall Hargrove. Just like it says right here."

Ian nodded in a curt bow and Josef, copying him, did the same. Alison giggled, once more drawing Ian's attention.

"Miss?"

She flushed again and almost choked as she suppressed the nervous laughter that bubbled within her. "So sorry. My *name* is Alison Schuyler."

"You're an American," said Ian, more as a statement than a question.

"Born in Chicago." She bobbed a quick curtsy. "But now living in Rotterdam, as I descend from a long and distinguished line

of Dutch Van Schuylers.” Her fake haughtiness elicited an amused smile from Ian.

Mr. Hargrove was not impressed. “Now that we’re all acquainted, I need to get back to sorting out these children.”

Ian’s smile faded. “Mr. Hargrove, please be so kind as to tell me: where are you sending Josef?”

“Says here he’s going to York.” Mr. Hargrove pointed at a line on his sheaf of papers. “He’s got an uncle there who has agreed to take him in.”

Ian knelt beside Josef. “Is that right? You’re going to family?”

“*Ja*,” Josef said, then switched to English, though he struggled to pronounce the words. “My father’s brother.”

“All right, then.” Ian patted the boy’s shoulder. “Keep tight hold of that violin, okay?”

Josef nodded and threw his arms around Ian’s neck, almost knocking him off balance. “*Danke. Tausend dank.*”

“You’re welcome,” Ian whispered back.

Alison signed and dated her sketch, then held it out to Josef. “This is for you. If you’d like to have it.”

Josef studied the drawing. “Is this really me?”

“*Ja*,” Alison said, smiling.

Josef offered the sketch to Ian. “Please. Write your name?”

Ian glanced at Alison, then put his hand on Josef’s shoulder. “I don’t think I should—”

“I don’t mind,” she said.

“You’re sure?”

“For him.” She whispered the words and tilted her head toward Josef.

Borrowing Alison’s pencil, Ian printed his name beside his likeness. He returned the sketch to Josef and tousled the boy’s dark hair. Ian opened his mouth to say something else just as another long blast from the official’s whistle assaulted their ears. They turned toward the sound and the official motioned to Josef.

“Time to board,” he shouted. “Numbers 119 to 133, follow



me.” He blew the whistle again as several children separated from the larger group and joined him.

“Go now, Josef,” Ian urged. “May God keep you.”

Josef quickly opened his violin case and laid the sketch on top. He hugged Ian again, hesitated, then hugged Alison. They both watched as he lugged the violin case toward the platform and got in the queue to board the train. He turned around once and waved, then disappeared, one small refugee among too many.



At just over six feet in height, Ian was used to seeing over most people’s heads. But he couldn’t keep track of little Josef once the boy boarded the train. *Watch over him, Father. May his family be good to him.*

“I hope he’ll be all right,” said Alison.

“I hope so too.”

“So many of them.” She gestured toward the remaining children who waited their turn to board.

Ian scanned the young faces, wishing he could do something to take away the fear in their anxious eyes. “Their families are doing what they think best.”

“Sending them away from their homes?”

“Removing them from Hitler’s reach.” Ian turned his attention to the American artist. He could detect her Dutch heritage in her features. Neither tall nor slender enough to be called statuesque, she wore her impeccably tailored crimson suit with a quiet and attractive poise.

“It’s called the *Kindertransport*.”

“I’ve heard of it. Are they all from Germany?”

“A few come from Austria. Or what used to be Austria before the *Anschluss*. The lucky ones have relatives here. The rest are placed in foster homes.”

“Jewish children.”

“Most of them.”

While he spoke, he held Alison’s gaze. She reminded him of

a summer day at the seashore. Her blonde hair, crowned with a black, narrow-brimmed hat, fell in golden waves below her shoulders. Her pale complexion possessed the translucent quality of a seashell's pearl interior. The gray-blue of her eyes sparkled like the glint of the sun on the deep waves.

"Josef played beautifully." Even her voice felt warm and bright. "He's very talented."

"So are you. Your sketch was skillfully done."

"That's kind of you to say." A charming smile lit up her face. "At least I'm good enough to know how good I'm not."

Ian took a moment to puzzle that out and chuckled. "You made me better-looking than I am, and I appreciate that. For Josef's sake, of course."

"I assure you, Mr. Devlin, there was no flattery."

Ian smiled at her American accent and tapped his insignia. "Lieutenant. But please, call me Ian."

"Ian." Alison tucked away her pad and pencil. "I suppose I should go now."

Her words burrowed into Ian's gut. He couldn't let her leave, not yet. "To Rotterdam? Or Chicago?"

She glanced at her watch. "Apparently neither. I found myself so inspired by a young boy and his violin that I missed my train."

Ian felt as if he'd been handed a gift. Or had he? Suddenly aware of an absence, he looked around expectantly. "Are you traveling alone?"

A twinge of her apparent impropriety tensed Alison's mouth and chin but didn't dim the sparkle of her clear eyes. "Quite modern of me, don't you think?"

"Rather foolish," Ian began, but stopped himself. "Though it's not for me to say."

"You're perfectly right, of course. My great-aunt accompanied me to Paris, but she became ill and I couldn't stay away any longer. So I left her to recuperate within walking distance of all the best dress shops on the Champs-Élysées, and *voilà!* Here I am. Alone and unchaperoned."

Ian drew back in surprise and raised a quizzical eyebrow. "Wait a minute. You're traveling from Paris to Rotterdam via London? Most people take the shortcut through Belgium."

"Yes, I suppose it is a bit of a roundabout way." She avoided his gaze, and the awkward moment pressed between them.

"It's really none of my business."

"Perhaps not. But there's a simple explanation." Her voice sounded too bright, and Ian sensed the nervousness she failed to hide. "I had a . . . a commission. A portrait."

Her expressive eyes begged him to believe the lie they both knew she had just told. With the slightest nod, Ian agreed, though he was curious to know her secrets. He suddenly pictured the two of them wandering the fields and woods on his family estate, talking about everything and nothing, Ian capturing her every word and safeguarding it deep within himself. But he doubted a woman who traveled alone across northern Europe, especially in these unsettled times, would enjoy the quiet boredom of country life.

He had tired of the unchanging rhythms of village traditions himself in his teen years. But after several months of combat drills and facing an uncertain future, he had been looking forward to a few days of idleness and local gossip.

Until now.

"I feel somewhat responsible," he said.

"That I missed my train?" She shrugged. "A small inconvenience. I'll leave early in the morning and be home in time for supper."

"What about supper tonight?"

Alison chuckled. "It's too early for supper."

Ian glanced at his watch. "Though not too early for tea. A British tradition, you know."

Conflict flitted across her features. She wanted to say yes, but something held her back.

"I'm not exactly a damsel in distress."

"It's only tea."

"May I ask you something?"

“Please do.”

“Would you have taken Josef to, what was it? Kenniston Hall? If he hadn’t had an uncle waiting for him?”

Ian hesitated, not wanting to tell this beautiful woman how his father would have reacted if he had arrived home with the young Jewish boy. True, he could have made up some story to explain the boy’s need for a place to stay. Even if his father suspected the truth, he’d have the story to tell those neighbors whose thinly veiled anti-Semitism skewed their view of what was happening in Germany. As he so often did, Ian wondered how long the blindness would last. What would Hitler have to do before his insatiable thirst for power was clear for all to see? “I don’t know.”

“He played that piece so magnificently. No one who heard it will ever forget this day.”

“I don’t think Mr. Randall Hargrove was too happy about it. But at least Josef got to keep his violin.”

“Why wouldn’t he?”

“Hargrove wanted to confiscate it. He insinuated Josef had stolen it, that it was ‘too fine an instrument’ for a child like him to have in his possession.”

“So you stood up for him.”

Ian flushed with sudden embarrassment, but smiled at the memory. “I asked the lad if he could play. And he did.”

“You are a chivalrous knight, Lieutenant Devlin. I will never forget you.”

“That sounds too much like a good-bye.”

“Just because I missed my train doesn’t mean you should miss yours.”

“My train doesn’t leave till late this evening.”

“But I thought—”

“I only arrived in time to see Hargrove making a ninny of himself.”

“Surely there’s a train you could take without waiting till this evening.”

Ian glanced around as if to be sure no one was paying attention to them and leaned forward. “True,” he said in a conspiratorial whisper. “But my commanding officer entrusted me with a secret commission. I’m to deliver an important message to a lovely young woman who lives in the West End.” With a flourish, he pulled a pale-blue envelope from his jacket pocket and handed it to Alison.



The thick envelope, made from high-quality paper, had been sealed with gold wax and embossed with two *M*s entwined in a scripted design. Alison guessed that the stationery inside would be of similar color and quality. The commanding officer was evidently a man of good breeding and taste. She turned the envelope over and read the broad black strokes written on its face: *To My Darling Trish*.

“His girlfriend?”

“His wife,” Ian whispered with a furtive glance around them.

Alison played along. “Your commanding officer must think quite highly of you to trust you with such an important mission.”

He slipped the envelope back into his pocket with a slight shrug of his shoulders. “He knows I wouldn’t pass through London without seeing Trish.”

“Oh?” A slight tremor in the simple syllable betrayed her interest.

“I loved her first, you see.”

A thousand questions raced through her mind. But it didn’t matter. After today, she would never see him again. His past didn’t matter. Whom he loved didn’t matter.

Except that it did.

Aware that the man who had unwittingly, almost negligently, captured her heart couldn’t seem to take his eyes off her, Alison found one safe response. “But she chose him instead.”

Realizing her failure to achieve just the right amount of non-chalance and pity, she tried again and found herself asking the very question she wanted to avoid. “Did she break your heart?”

Again, Ian leaned forward as if divulging a great secret, and Alison

bent her head toward his so as not to miss a word. “Something so personal shouldn’t be discussed in the midst of Waterloo Station. But there’s a little place near the Westminster Bridge that serves the most delicious cherry scones you’ll ever eat.”

“You mean Minivers?”

“You know it?”

“My father took me there for my sixteenth birthday. He ordered a cherry scone for each of us and stuck a pink candle in mine. Then he sang ‘Happy Birthday’ to me.” She remembered closing her eyes before she blew out the candle and wishing that every birthday, every holiday, could be spent with her father. That he and her grandfather would make up their quarrels so that she no longer had to choose between them. But she had hugged the futile wish to herself, telling it to no one, and laughed at her father’s clumsiness with the dainty teacups and miniature pastries. The cheerful memory felt as perfect, yet fragile, as the pristine white linens and delicate china that graced Minivers’ cozy tables.

“He felt awkward there, I think. It’s not exactly a gentleman’s place of choice, is it?”

“The scones are worth a bit of discomfort.”

“What about your secret mission?”

His eyes twinkled. “Trish isn’t expecting me, so she won’t know if I’m late.”

The corners of Alison’s mouth twitched and she turned from Ian’s hopeful smile toward the entrance of the station. She couldn’t see the telegram office from where she stood, but it was there, looming before her like a scolding parent. Missing the train had been foolish, but spending the rest of the afternoon with Ian was sheer stupidity. He was a soldier on the eve of war. That was reason enough to guard against any romantic entanglements.

But worse, she was a Schuyler. He couldn’t know how his warm hazel eyes affected her, how drawn she was to his confident demeanor and gallant charm. Or the sting of jealous curiosity she endured when he spoke of this other woman. Though she felt his



mutual attraction, it was better that he never know that he already held her heart in his hands. The Van Schuyler fate may have destined him to linger forever within her, but she could still make her own decisions.

She squared her shoulders and faced him.

His smile charmed her as he offered his arm in a boyish gesture. “Shall we?”

Alison hesitated, then tucked her hand within the crook of his elbow. “I should exchange my ticket first.”