



AN ANNALEE SPAIN MYSTERY

ALL THAT IS SECRET

PATRICIA RAYBON

PRAISE FOR PATRICIA RAYBON

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PROLOGUE

NOVEMBER 1922

The little baby was four hours old. Still unwashed. Barely crying. But Joe Spain's old ears recognized the sound. A human infant. Somebody's mistake left in the Colorado cold to die.

He twisted his mouth, pulled the reins on his cutting horse, Barrel, and turned into the freezing wind. Barrel's ears stood straight up, trembling. The horse heard it too. On the cold, open plains, the wide early morning silence rendered every sound bigger, as if magnified.

The cry was half a mile away. But Spain still heard it clear as a bell.

"C'mon, girl," he said to Barrel. "We best go see."

He let the big horse pick her way through the frozen scrub and prairie grass. A light snow the night before had dusted the ground, leaving a far and white horizon under the blinding blue sky.

The horse was fresh and eager, but already both of them were breathing hard, their breath turning to white vapor in the sharp, bracing frost.

Spain, a part-time cowboy, stood up in his stirrups and

scanned the prairie with narrowed eyes, peering in all directions. His lean body, still skinny after sixty-odd years, steeled itself against the cold. As a Negro man, he knew some considered him out of place in such environs. But he had known no place better or longer than these High Plains, and the pure respect he felt for the rough landscape bordered on its own kind of adoration, if not sheer awe.

Scanning the terrain, he stood in the freezing wind, the brim of his worn wool Stetson pulled low and humbled in the shining, cold glare.

Then he saw the tracks. Footprints in light snow. He looked beyond the traces and saw the county road. Right away, he figured what had happened. Before daybreak, somebody drove their vehicle down the road until it turned to dirt. Then they hopped the low, barbed-wire fence that bordered the road, trekked a cold mile into Lazy K pastureland, and looked for a dip in the flat landscape.

There in the open, in a draw in the middle of the range, they left the child. No attempt to bury it. Coyotes would eat the evidence. Or a family of foxes.

As for the snowy footprints, they would melt in the dry air and blazing sun—just as they were doing right now. By noon, the cold prints would all be gone.

Spain nosed the horse to follow the tracks toward the sound. If the child was going to make it, he'd have to find it now.

Sure enough, the cry was growing fainter. Barely a whimper now. But finally he saw the bundle, wrapped in a torn piece of dirty tarp.

The horse saw the dark bulge and pulled up, dug her hooves into the cold ground.

“It’s okay, girl,” Spain said. He patted the animal’s neck, slid out of his saddle, and dropped the reins. Barrel stood alert, agitated but waiting.

Sighing, Spain crunched across the frozen grass and looked down at the tarp. He pushed the hat back on his head and knelt in the snow. Pulling back the tarp, he felt his gloved hands go cold.

It can’t be. Not again.

The tiny child was wrapped in a man’s white dress shirt and nothing else. Blood on its slick black hair had started to ice. The baby was shivering, lips almost blue. A low moan, no longer a cry, emerged from its tiny, perfect mouth.

“*Lord Jesus*, pretty little baby,” Spain said.

He reached down, picked up the child, flicked the bloody ice off its head, letting the tarp fall off. “Good grief, what a hateful way to enter this ol’ world.”

He opened his old shearling jacket, pressed the baby onto his chest, breathed hot breath on its face, took off his gloves with his teeth, and rubbed his large hands on the baby’s ice-cold back. Coaxing it. Scolding it. “C’mon, little bit. Ol’ Joe’s got you.”

For half a second, he considered how easy it would be to leave the child and turn back. Nobody would ever know. These were bad, bad times. He didn’t need the bother. Besides, he was leaving by train tonight to visit his only daughter, his Annalee. In fact, after too many years, they finally were making some kind of peace. His own sweet “little bit” girl, as he called her—grown now and working hard and smart at barely twenty-three. Why start trouble now with somebody else’s child?

He sighed and cradled the infant, letting the rank newborn

smell fill his nostrils. He buttoned up his jacket as far as he could and turned toward the anxious horse. But at the last minute, he turned back for the tarp. The boss might want to see it. Or the police. Or *somebody*. He wasn't sure. But Spain bent down to bunch up the tarp in his arms.

Then, just as quick, he shook it out again, looking for—what? A hidden note, a tarnished locket, some last-minute trinket tucked in by the baby's mother, trying to make a wrong thing right? Hoping to leave a piece of herself with the child that others said must die?

But there was nothing, so Spain balled up the tarp again. Holding the baby against him with one arm, he strapped the tarp on his saddle with the other.

He mounted the horse, grabbed the reins, and clicked his tongue. With a fast trot, Barrel carried him and the baby across the open prairie to the ranch house.

It was a large and impressive adobe, set on the highest point on the 2,800-acre spread. The owner, Lent Montgomery, was busy inside. Spain figured as much. A sleek black car was parked in the gravel yard next to the sprawling house. The entire ranch and acreage were for sale. Everybody in Denver knew that. Fancy cars with bidders and bankers had been coming and going for weeks.

But Spain knew his place. He didn't like interrupting.

Still, he tied up the horse and walked across the gravel to the big front door. Pulled the bell. Knocked twice. Not too hard.

After a while, a young Mexican girl barely opened the door. The cook's daughter.

Spain pushed back his hat. "Need to see the boss. Hurry, little bit, and go get him."

The girl looked him over, her gaze stopping at the bulge in his jacket. She shook her head. Started to close the door.

Spain stuck his grimy boot in it. "This can't wait."

The girl considered this. Looked over her shoulder. Looked back at Spain. Saw he wasn't backing down.

"*Sí, señor,*" she whispered. "Okay."

She moved to close the door, but Spain pushed his worn boot in farther. "I'll wait inside."

The girl frowned for a second but yielded.

Spain stepped into a wide foyer and looked to his right down a hallway. The carved door at the end was closed, voices rising on the other side.

The girl wrung her hands. Fretting and sighing, she rushed down another hallway. In a few minutes, she came back, not with the boss but with a woman. Her mother the cook, Rosita Montez. The woman looked annoyed. She wiped her hands on her apron.

"What now, Joe?" she whispered. "Mr. Montgomery's in a meeting."

Spain shifted the cold baby inside his jacket. "I know, Rosie, but I really need to see him."

"Well, you can't! He's in a big meeting!"

"But I found something. Look here . . ."

Spain yanked open his worn jacket. The baby's bloody head emerged.

The girl moaned, jumped back. "*Mamá, Dios mío.*"

But the woman took one look and understood immediately. She shouted to the child in Spanish and the girl ran off.

Together, Rosita and Spain pulled off his coat. He held on to the baby as they knelt on the slate floor of the foyer. Rosita

bunched Spain's jacket into a bundle and reached for the baby. She laid it in the leather nest.

But they both knew. It was too late.

The baby's limp, dead body sank into the folds of the coat.

Spain sighed. He closed the baby's eyes. "I'm so sorry, little bit. I'm so god-awful sorry."

Rosita shook her head and started to weep, loudly blessing the child in Spanish, caressing its little hands, kissing its bloody forehead, not worrying about silencing her sobs. The daughter, returning with blankets and a metal basin, dropped them in a clanging heap, water sloshing all directions. She, too, started to sob.

Spain reached out to comfort.

A door slammed open. "For the love of . . . !"

A tall, silvery man stormed down the hall into the foyer.

Spain looked up at his angry boss, Lent Montgomery, and clambered to his feet. He pulled off his hat, pointed to the bundle. "A little baby, boss."

The boss looked down at the bunched-up jacket, the dead infant, the bloody white shirt, the mess on his foyer floor. He cursed. "Where'd you find it?"

"South end, boss. In a shallow draw."

Montgomery squeezed his forehead, cursing again. He spoke in Spanish to Rosita. The cook nodded, wiped her eyes with her skirt, and left for the back of the house.

"Wait here, Joe, and then—"

"So this is how you turn me down, Lent?" A city gentleman in a well-cut black suit and city shoes walked with importance through the hallway door and into the foyer. He looked down at the floor. His face went white.

“Sorry about this,” Montgomery tried to explain. “Joe here found a baby. All this blood . . . a dang mess.”

The city man looked at Joe Spain. Looked back at the baby.

“Well, curious . . . a colored baby.” Thus, the man spoke what they all had observed but hadn’t mentioned. He gestured to Spain, turned to Montgomery. “You don’t mind me asking, Montgomery: is this cowboy ours?”

Montgomery frowned. “*Ours?* With all respect, Senator, you haven’t bought the ranch yet.”

“Of course. I’m trying to get an understanding. So I’m asking—is this cowboy part of the ranch?”

Lent Montgomery squared his back, peered at the man. “What difference does it make who he is? He works for me and he found a baby on my property. I’ll take care of it from here.”

But the city man wouldn’t back down. “A colored boy finds a colored baby. Dead. And that doesn’t seem strange to you? I know this is still your property, Montgomery. But the Douglas County sheriff is going to find this very strange.”

Montgomery pulled to his full height. “What’s strange is you standing in my house questioning how I handle my business! And you want to buy a ranch? You don’t know a rat’s tail about what it means to own a ranch. Or keep loyal ranch hands. In fact, you can get your—”

“You threatening me, Montgomery?”

Lent Montgomery stepped over the baby. “Get out of my house, Grimes. And get that big, ugly car off my property!”

The city man turned up his collar and pushed through the open doorway. He looked over his shoulder. “I’ll be back to finish the contracts.”

Montgomery slammed the big front door. But all in the

house could hear the car spin on gravel and ice, then squeal onto the ranch road leading back to Denver.

Spain looked to his boss, knowing what he must be thinking. It *was* curious that Joe Spain, a colored cowboy, had found on his property a little colored baby. Dead.

But Lent Montgomery didn't mention it.

In fact, that morning was the last Joe Spain would ever see of his boss. Or Rosita. Or the city man. Or anybody else.

Because by morning the next day, Joe Spain, too, was dead.



CHAPTER 1

*“Perhaps I have trained myself
to see what others overlook.”*

SHERLOCK HOLMES, A CASE OF IDENTITY

CHICAGO, NOVEMBER 1923

Sunday night and she was late beyond redemption. Professor Annalee Spain grabbed her bulging satchel off her desk, stuffed in her notes, checked the streetcar schedule, brushed lint off her good black suit—actually her only suit—and dared turn back to . . . what, to *pray*? As if prayer, of all things, would get her what she needed, let alone what she wanted.

But no time to bother over that. She'd do better to answer the knock rattling the devil out of her splintered, freezing, rent-by-the-week rooming house door.

Tap-tap-tap-tap.

“Hold on, little bit,” she called out. One of “her kids.” They pestered her all hours, begging for pencil stubs, scraps of paper,

even her Sherlock books. The Tyler boy downstairs had scarfed down every Holmes story twice. “Coming!”

No answer.

Curious.

It was quarter past eleven on the last November Sunday in a merciless year. She’d lost her rainy-day job, was barely getting by with her half-paid first. Then, in the cold way of hard life, she’d opened her door one year ago—expecting her hard-luck father finally coming to visit—but instead was handed a crumpled telegram. He was dead. “Regrettably.” Or was Joe Spain killed?

Lord, that question. It never released her—insisting that she had loved him. And that was why she still missed him? But every regrettable day?

Tough questions weren’t her business tonight. Instead, she despaired for the forty-five minutes and counting left to deliver her latest paper—*God, let them approve it*—to a British publisher’s Chicago office by midnight. Hard deadline. But her stipend for it, despite the trouble, would be waiting in a narrow envelope at the publisher’s first-floor desk.

Tap-tap-tap-tap.

But first, that *infernal knocking*.

She tossed down her satchel, jostling india ink, riled to see thick dribbles soak into her piles of papers, her notebooks and newspapers, her table, the satchel. She groaned, knowing she could scoff at her mishap if she weren’t so desperate. Instead, she threw a ragged towel across the inky trail and trudged to her cold door. Then she heard the warbling voice.

“Professor Spain?” Her name, but muffled.

“Who’s there?”

No answer.

“State your business!”

“Western Union!”

She tensed. This late on a Sunday night, in a brawny Chicago snowstorm, not even Western Union would dare to deliver—even if she’d wanted the insult of another telegram.

Why no good news? she pondered. A thank-you note. An early Christmas card. She eyed the door. Even a love letter? She glanced in her cracked mirror, winked at herself but shook her head, jostling her wild black curls. What a foolish idea. She’d never known “love” or received such a letter. She couldn’t even imagine what one would say.

Instead, she took in a hard breath, faced the door, pressed her young shoulder into the crumbling frame, unlatched all but one cheap lock, then opened with caution her warped door.

A thin sliver of watery light edged into the pitch-black hallway.

What stood on the other side looked drowned or half-dead. Or maybe both.

A shrunken figure—half a foot shorter than her and wrapped in too many moth-eaten coats, plus knee-high work boots, thick leather gloves, a worn plaid scarf, a soiled knit cap pulled low—stood before her.

“Professor Spain?” The muffled voice again.

She peered at the coat pile. “What on earth?” she whispered.

As if in response, a grimy hand unwrapped and unwrapped and unwrapped and *unwrapped* the scarf and finally a small face emerged.

A boy.

A white boy.

Annalee stepped back. *Lord, not tonight. Clock still ticking?*

But maybe he isn't white? Or surely he is white. But should that even matter?

Because the boy was sniffing and shivering, his chapped cheeks raw, his red lips peeling. His nose dripping and running, his eyebrows iced, his gray eyes blinking and alert. His skin grimy and unwashed.

Then the unexpected. The boy grinned.

Rotten front teeth and all.

“Telegram for Professor Spain!” He covered his bad teeth with his scarf. From inside his layers, he retrieved a thin yellow envelope—cold as ice—and thrust it at her.

Her full name, Professor Annalee Jane Spain, was typed on the front.

“You’re just a child,” she said, half-scolding. “In a blizzard.”

“Message came at ten,” the boy rushed to explain. “But the storm slowed me down.”

She fingered the envelope, not trusting it. Surely not wanting it. But she held on to it, thinking, waiting, ignoring whatever she was trying not to feel.

The boy stood and waited, stamping his oversize boots, watching caked ice fall onto her warped wooden floor. Then, just as quick, he stood stone-still, showing regrets for his mess. Annalee looked down at his feet. The boots would be his father’s. A dead father, for certain.

She narrowed her eyes, looking harder at the boy, knowing, suddenly, exactly who he was: He was like her. Some kind of orphan. Caught up with a tangle of ordeals and questions. Probably his sick mother’s lifeline. Father long dead in some Chicago bar brawl. So the boy peddled his matches. Delivered his telegrams. Scraping together pennies and nickels to help his

young mother put food on their table—on the rare day she felt like cooking it.

Annalee slipped the telegram into her fraying sleeve, deciding it could wait. She sighed silently, not thinking of the theological analysis she'd spent one grueling month wrestling over for the British journal, aware that for some reason the highbrow paper no longer seemed so distinctive—or so urgent, if it ever mattered at all. “The Theology of Teaching”? But what if your hungry student just needed a gracious piece of kind bread?

She looked the boy directly in his alert, gray eyes. “Had any supper tonight?”

The boy blinked, peeked past her shoulder into her room—searching her desk, hoping to see some dinner, which, of course, she didn't have. He shrugged under his pile of coats.

She tried again. “I've got roast meat and some crackers.”

The boy licked his lips, but he kept his dignity. “I can't go in rooms.” He looked past her shoulder again. “And I got another delivery.”

“Won't take long,” she said, turning her back on the pestering clock. “Come stand by the fire. I won't report you.” She gestured him inside. “The people who write those rules never worked all night, slogging through three feet of snow to deliver a message.”

“Thankin' you, miss.” The boy shuffled into the room as she stoked her cold embers. He pulled off his late father's gloves, warming his small, chapped hands at the bare fire. Looking around, he would see her riotous desk, her cluttered floor, her piles of books, her stacks of journals. Towers of newspapers. Writing pens and bottles of india ink. Her life, if she had one, occurred in this place, right there at her rickety desk.

She pushed back one of her wild curls, knowing he wanted to ask, “*You? The professor?*”

But his father, it seemed, had taught him manners. So she answered for him.

“I teach downtown,” she said, “at the Bible college.”

The boy’s gray eyes showed he was listening. Thinking. *The Colored Professor? The one in the newspapers?* Looking even younger in person, amber face aglow, bright eyes sparkling?

“Downtown?” He nodded.

“Theology,” she told him, eyeing him directly, testing him. He seemed uncertain. “New Testament,” she added as if he understood. “Well, prayer.” She said that not wondering if he’d read those newspapers or their raves about her “delightful” research—the hidden “prayer codes” in “original” places such as the detective stories she devoured. “*What an original, clever mind,*” one paper declared.

“*Despite her race.*”

The boy was frowning, weighing, pondering. She could see his mind working, swirling, considering. “Like in religion,” he finally said.

She nodded, smiled, knowing her lopsided dimple emerged. “Probably close enough.”

An astute boy, she concluded. Observant and discreet. His father would be proud. Then she guessed: the boy’s late father was a preacher. Yes, of course. This was a dead preacher’s boy—and from the poor looks of the child, a Methodist preacher, at that.

So Annalee wrapped her cold-meat-and-crackers meal in waxed paper. Wrapped it again in newspaper. Tied it with a string. From her bulky teacher’s satchel, she pushed past her

papers to dig out a dime. Looked harder at the boy, then decided on two. Then, because it was proper, she gave him all three—all the little money she had left, until that stipend. She counted the tip into his shaking hand, her own hand shaking at giving away her all.

“One for the Father. One for the Son. One—”

“For the Holy Spirit,” the boy whispered.

“And may it be so,” she whispered in return, adding another quick smile.

The boy nodded under his dirty scarf. Then he smiled back, covering his teeth again.

“Blessin’ you, Professor,” he said, clumping toward the door, pocketing the dimes. He looked back at her cold room, letting his gaze stop at something. The big Stetson—hanging on a nail on the cracked-up plaster wall. But he didn’t ask. So she didn’t explain. He started out the door.

“Don’t forget your food.” She handed him the bundle. As he took it, stowing it in his coats, she added, “Merry Christmas.”

The boy laughed. He would know it wasn’t Christmas. Not for him. Not for her. But as he clump-clumped in his father’s boots to the stairs, he turned at the landing and gave a small wave. “Merry Christmas.”

She waved back, certain she’d never deliver her paper on time. If ever. Why, indeed, would she?

Instead, she stoked her small stove, turning to her iced-over window—scraping away a patch to watch the boy disappear into the black November night. But for some reason, it felt like it could be more. Maybe even Christmas.

Until she opened the telegram.

A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

THANK YOU SO MUCH for reading Annalee Spain's first mystery. I grew up in Colorado, so I'm sharing some historical notes that grounded her fictional story.

Denver's Rossonian Hotel, a Five Points landmark, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. At the time of this novel, it was known by its original name, the Baxter Hotel. I used the Rossonian name to honor what the hotel became—"one of the most important jazz clubs between St. Louis and Los Angeles," according to the Denver Public Library's Western History Collection.

Jazz greats such as Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington stayed there because they were refused lodging by downtown Denver hotels, even after performing there. At the Rossonian, however, Black musicians were welcomed, often staying up "till all hours" playing in the Rossonian lounge.

The Ku Klux Klan's 1920s revival, meantime, was legendary in Colorado, where membership was the second largest per capita in the United States (after Indiana)—claiming between

55,000 and 75,000 members, including women. The Grand Dragon of Colorado's Klan was not Eddie Brown Sr. (my fictional name), but a homeopathic physician named Dr. John Galen Locke, who engineered a hate campaign against Jews, Blacks, Catholics, and immigrants, declaring that only native-born, English-speaking, white Protestants were 100 percent American. Cross burnings, bombings, threats, and economic boycotts of "non-Klan" businesses drove home this philosophy. Sowing such seeds of discord pitted "neighbor against neighbor, friend against friend," as one dismayed opponent described it.

Locke's "hood and the cross" comprised a powerful voting bloc that came to include Colorado's governor, the entire lower chamber of the Colorado state legislature and almost half of the upper, Denver's mayor and police chief, as well as judges, sheriffs, police departments, jury commissioners, and other elected officials across the state.

Locke's influence began to wane when he was charged in the kidnapping of a white nineteen-year-old high school student, forcing the boy to marry a younger girl whose honor, Locke claimed, the male student had offended. Many white Coloradans already were actively opposing Klan discord, including Sidney Whipple, managing editor of the *Denver Express*, and Denver's district attorney, Philip Van Cise, whose campaign against Colorado's Klan made him their political target. (In my novel, the character Sidney Castle, described as a former DA, isn't meant to represent Van Cise. But some of Van Cise's well-known traits of fairness and integrity are seen in Castle's better actions, including his kindness to Annalee Spain and Eddie Brown Jr.)

Colorado's Black community, meanwhile, was resolute in

fighting Klan hostility through its network of business owners, church leaders, educators, medical professionals, and Negro women's clubs. Earlier during World War I, some 350,000 African American men had joined the US Army to fight for democracy but were assigned to menial tasks, labeled unqualified for combat. The French, however, had fought with Senegalese sharpshooters in other wars and welcomed American Blacks into their ranks, including the famed 369th Infantry Regiment from New York City—known as the Harlem Hellfighters—whom the French awarded their Croix de Guerre for their gallantry on the front line.

Sadly, after the war, Black soldiers returned home to the sting of mounting discrimination. Lynching of Black citizens increased from fifty-eight in 1918 to seventy-seven in 1919. At least ten of those victims were war veterans, and according to the Army Historical Foundation, some were lynched while in uniform.

Black women, meantime, were barred by the US Army from serving overseas in World War I. Yet thousands volunteered to serve in Europe in various relief organizations, including the American Red Cross and the war council of the YMCA, but were restricted to segregated units.

Amid this hostility, my character Annalee Spain found respite in stories of Sherlock Holmes, the iconic fictional detective created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. All of the Holmes epigraphs featured in *All That Is Secret* are from stories first published in *The Strand*, a popular British periodical, including the first Holmes story, "A Scandal in Bohemia."

Annalee doesn't solve crimes like Holmes, famous for creative solutions using deductive reasoning. She affirms his belief,

however, that a woman's instincts are valuable crime-fighting skills. So I enjoyed letting Annalee deploy her instincts to unravel the mystery in this novel. How will she grow as a detective? Her next mystery, coming soon, offers intriguing answers.