

The Number of Love

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Books by Roseanna M. White

LADIES OF THE MANOR

The Lost Heiress

The Reluctant Duchess

A Lady Unrivaled

SHADOWS OVER ENGLAND

A Name Unknown

A Song Unheard

An Hour Unspent

THE CODEBREAKERS

The Number of Love

Roseanna M. White, *The Number of Love*
(Unpublished manuscript—copyright protected Baker Publishing Group)

To David,
who always knows the question to ask
to make me see my own heart
and who never lets me get away with the easy answer.

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The Codebreakers

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This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

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In the day of my trouble I sought the Lord;
My hand was stretched out in the night without ceasing;
My soul refused to be comforted. . . .

And I said, “This is my anguish;
But I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.”

Psalm 77:2,10 NKJV

There were others—a brilliant confederacy—whose names even now
are better wrapt in mystery.

Winston Churchill in *The World Crisis*, on Room 40

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Old Admiralty Building London, England 25 September 1917

The numbers marched across the page in a glory all their own. Margot De Wilde stared at them for a long moment, looked back at the German telegram sitting on her desk, and then scratched a new number onto the column. Almost there. Almost. She darted a glance out the window.

The sun grew mockingly brighter. When last she'd looked up, it had been only the slightest glimmer beyond the buildings of Whitehall. Now it had cleared them. Soon the day shift would arrive, and if those on night watch hadn't cracked the new codes, there'd be an insufferable amount of jeering.

Her lips twitched. She did her own share of jeering when it was another team that failed to crack the Germans' new codes between midnight and eight in the morning. And her fair share of shoulder slapping and approving nods when she came in of a morning to find the night watch happily asleep at their desks, the new cyphers waiting.

"Come on, come on, come on." At the desk beside her, Nigel de Grey fisted his fingers in his hair. Months ago, he had been the star of the office, having been the one to hand the Director of the Intelligence Division the telegram from Zimmermann that had brought America into the war. The Germans had thought themselves quite clever, trying to strike a deal with Mexico to bring them into the war on their side. But the Americans hadn't taken too kindly to it when they were informed that *their* territory was to be Mexico's reward.

But that wouldn't matter today, not if their night shift failed to break the daily code for the second night in a row.

"We'll get it." Remington Culbreth indulged in a long stretch, squeezing his eyes shut. "We're too close not to." He'd grown more serious over the last three years, his smiles less frequent. He'd never said why, but Margot suspected it had something to do with the photograph in his wallet that he didn't take out to look at anymore.

She heaved a sigh and let her eyes slide shut. Let the intercepted telegram that had come zipping up the pneumatic tubes just after midnight play before her eyelids. Let the numbers she assigned to correspond to each word go from marching to jumping.

"That's what we said last time. I'll not go out hanging my head again. Dilly didn't stop mocking me about it all week. I—"

"Got it!" Margot surged forward as those beautiful digits settled at last into her mind in the proper order. Ignoring the rustling of her colleagues as