

The Unlikely Spy
By Sophie Schiller
SAMPLE CHAPTER

From the moment she left the telegraph office, Emma had an eerie feeling that someone was following her. It stayed with her all the way back to the hotel. She felt someone was watching her every move although she was quite certain she had slipped past the German in the lobby.

When she returned to her hotel room, she waited impatiently for Smith's cable. She called down to the front desk numerous times to ask if any message had arrived for her, but the answer was always no. With no other recourse, she went to bed, tossing and turning half the night, fearing that something terrible had happened to Allendorf and now she was all alone. This was completely unexpected. For several agonizing hours she pondered what she should do, but couldn't come up with a viable plan. The Germans were watching her every move. She was basically trapped in her hotel room, and Smith was counting on her to complete the mission. But no one could have foreseen such a reversal.

As the hours ticked by, she had an ominous feeling she couldn't shake, a feeling that her life was hanging in the balance. The hairs on the back of her neck stood up and she had an unsettling feeling that would not quit.

When she could no longer tolerate her insomnia, she picked up the phone and ordered a chamomile tea from room service, hoping it would calm her jangling nerves. When the drink arrived, she splashed a bit of rum in it from her trusty flask. Yet she had a nagging feeling that something was wrong.

Her eyes fell on her purse. It sat on the nightstand near her bed, just within her reach. She opened it, took out the pistol, and rehearsed priming it so she could use it in a tight spot. She needed to have the movements go like clockwork. There was no room for failure in this business. Luckily it only weighed two pounds. That made slipping it into her pocket easier. The magazine was already loaded with seven bullets. Seven chances to save her life. She gripped the pistol in her right hand and racked the slide, then added a bullet to the barrel. Now it was ready. She flicked the lever to "safe" and set the pistol down on the nightstand. Perhaps now she could sleep.

She lay down, pulled the sheet around her, and turned off the light. She closed her eyes and tried to relax, but she could not fall asleep.

Outside, the moon cast a luminous glow on the surroundings. Crickets croaked their nightly serenade and the stars lit up the heavens. The palm fronds billowed in the breeze. The waves crashing on the rocks sent an ominous warning. Emma found it difficult to sleep in a different bed, and impossible to relax when she had so much on her mind, so much responsibility on her shoulders.

She got up and peered outside. Despite the late hour, there were still people milling about, laughing and heading to restaurants and casinos. Horse carriages trotted past while motorcars meandered down the streets, their glowing lights like the eyes of a puma. Sounds of amusement

echoed from the restaurant below. Lights shone from the ships in Manzanillo Bay, creating a scene that was idyllic, almost peaceful. Further out, she could see the lights on the ships waiting to enter the canal. There was a long line of them that suspended off to the horizon. Each one had its own purpose and destination. Each one could be sunk at any time by German torpedoes or hidden bombs. She shivered. An explosion along the canal would cause chaos for the Allies. The Kaiser would gloat in his victory. His generals and their underlings would launch even more attacks. Emma could picture Luckner in his office toasting his triumph, patting himself on the back even as the embers of the canal still glowed.

She went back to bed and covered herself with the sheet, trying to block out her worries. But it was impossible. She had a sense of impending doom. And for some strange reason, the hairs on the back of her neck stood up.

Suddenly she heard a scratching noise near her door. A man's footsteps shuffled just outside. She froze and listened, not daring to move. Someone was fumbling with the lock, trying to break in. She sat up in bed, listening. She felt her heart stop. Yes, somebody was trying to break in.

She fumbled in the dark for her pistol. She grabbed it, flicked the safety to "fire" then eased herself off the bed. Crouching down on the floor, she listened as the noise continued ever so slightly. It was barely detectable. She sat behind the bed, aiming the pistol, not daring to breathe.

The latch turned and the door opened slightly, allowing just enough light from the hallway to illuminate the figure of a man entering her room. When he was inside, he closed the door behind him and latched it. Her eyes widened. He tiptoed toward the bed and raised his hands as if to attack. Emma's heart pounded as she released the pistol break and held her breath.

The man started toward the bed, with hands poised as if to strangle the sleeping figure. Quickly, Emma aimed and pulled the trigger.

A blast rang out like an explosion of cannon fire.

Stunned, the man clutched his chest, took two steps backwards, then dropped to the floor.

Emma stared in shock. She was gasping for breath, every muscle tense. She dropped the gun and reached for the lamp, fumbling for the light switch. When the light came on and she saw the man lying there in a pool of his own blood, she cried out in horror. His face was twisted in a horrifying death mask.

She stood motionless, not daring to approach the body, not daring to touch him. Down the hall, doors started opening and guests rushed from their rooms, crying out. They were looking for the source of the gunfire, their voices full of panic. Someone yelled for the police and there was a clattering of footsteps past her door. Soon the police would be there. She had to act fast.

Emma's mind raced. Her limbs were trembling. Where could she hide? She got dressed, brushed her hair, pulled on her stockings and shoes, then she grabbed the pistol from the floor and slid it into her dress pocket. She had to escape before the police got her. She could not risk being put in prison. They would say she had killed her lover in a fit of jealousy, then what would happen to her?

She opened the window, but she couldn't risk falling. She had no choice but to exit through the door. Tentatively, she opened it up and peeked out. A few people were milling about at the end of the hall, waiting for the police. Others were standing in their doorways, dazed and confused, and still others were heading downstairs to the lobby in robes and slippers. Everyone's face reflected fear and outrage.

Taking advantage of the chaos, Emma slipped out into the hallway and crept downstairs, gripping the hand rail as if her life depended on it. Then she dashed out through the service entrance where the servants were all in a panic. She raced out into the steamy, tropical night, fueled by the fear of capture, her senses on high alert. She had just shot a man. Would she be next?