



LADIES OF  
THE MANOR

*The*  
L O S T  
H E I R E S S

ROSEANNA M. WHITE



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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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*To Pappap* was my dedication when I  
first penned this novel at age thirteen.  
After I finished my first rewrite at fourteen,  
it said, *In loving memory of Pappap*.  
Your life taught me to laugh in every possible moment;  
your death taught me to trust Him with all my might.  
You helped make me who I am,  
and I'll always love you.

CWM

# CHARACTER LIST



## Brook's Family

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- Brook Eden** The lost Eden heiress. Full name Elizabeth Brook Eden. Also called Baroness of Berkeley and Lady Berkeley (title inherited from mother).
- The Earl of Whitby** Brook's father. Given name of Ambrose Eden, but called Whitby or Lord Whitby, nicknamed Whit.
- The Countess of Whitby** Brook's mother, deceased; the previous Baroness of Berkeley. Given name of Elizabeth Brook, but called Lady Berkeley before her marriage and Lady Whitby afterward.
- Mary, Lady Ramsey** Brook's aunt, Whitby's sister. Brook calls her Aunt Mary but everyone else calls her Lady Ramsey.
- Lady Regan** Brook's first cousin, the elder of Lady Ramsey's daughters.
- Lady Melissa** Brook's first cousin, the younger of Lady Ramsey's daughters.
- The Marquess of Ramsey** Brook's step-cousin, Lady Ramsey's stepson and her daughters' half brother. Called Ram.
- Lady Catherine Rushworth** Brook's second cousin on her mother's side, called Lady Catherine formally, Kitty by her friends.
- Lord Rushworth** Brook's second cousin on her mother's side, Lady Catherine's brother and guardian. Given name of Crispin, called Lord Rushworth or Rush.
- Lord (John) Rushworth** Brook's mother's first cousin, deceased; the previous Lord Rushworth and father of Lady Catherine and Rush.
- Major Henry Rushworth** Brook's mother's first cousin, brother of John Rushworth, uncle of Lady Catherine and Rush.

## Justin's Family

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- Justin Wildon** Brook's childhood friend in Monaco. Also called Lord Harlow or Harlow. Upon his father's death, becomes Marquess of Abingdon, sometimes called Bing. Upon his grandfather's death becomes Duke of Stafford.
- The Duke of Stafford** Justin's paternal grandfather. Given name of (with subsidiary titles of Marquess of Abingdon and Earl of Harlow) Samuel Wildon but called Stafford or Duke.
- William Wildon** Justin's father. Called Lord William. He inherited the courtesy title of Marquess of Abingdon after his older brother's death but refused to use it.
- Georgiana Wildon** Justin's mother, deceased.
- Edward Wildon** Justin's uncle, deceased; the oldest son of the Duke of Stafford, so the Marquess of Abingdon until his death.
- Caroline, Lady Abingdon** Justin's aunt, Edward's widow, Georgiana's sister. Justin calls her Aunt Caro but everyone else calls her Lady Abingdon.
- Susan, Lady Cayton** Justin's aunt, daughter of the Duke of Stafford, mother of Lord Cayton; Justin calls her Aunt Susan, everyone else calls her Lady Cayton.
- The Earl of Cayton** Justin's first cousin, Susan's son. Called Cayton, though Justin occasionally calls him James.

## Other Characters

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- Deirdre O'Malley** Lady's maid to Brook.
- Earl Thate** Justin's best friend, called Lord Thate or Thate.
- Viscount Pratt** Neighbor to Brook and Whitby, very distant cousin to Whitby on his mother's side. Called Lord Pratt or Pratt.
- The Marquess of Worthing** Brook's friend. Given name of Brice Myerston, son and heir of the Duke of Nottingham. Called Lord Worthing, Worthing, and occasionally Brice.
- Lady Ella Myerston** Brook's friend, Worthing's younger sister. Called Lady Ella or Ella by her friends.





MONTE CARLO, MONACO  
LATE AUGUST 1910

**T**emptation sat before her, compelling as the sea. Gleaming silver, green leather, the nearly silent rumble of engine . . .

Brook trailed a gloved hand along the door, cast one glance over her shoulder, and let herself in. She couldn't stop the grin as she gripped the wheel of the Rolls-Royce. And why should she? Only a fool would leave such a car running right outside her door and not expect her to do something about it.

“Don't even think it.”

His voice brought laughter to her lips, and she looked up to find her dearest friend at the opposite door—her first sight of him in five months. The warm Riviera wind had tousled his hair, making her wonder where his hat had gone today. “Teach me to drive it, Justin.”

He glared at her with an intensity to match the Mediterranean sun. All manner of men flooded Monaco in pursuit of its casino, and none could glower like the British. Well, perhaps the Russians, but theirs were more scowls than proper glowers.

Though, if he expected her to be cowed by the look, he had taken leave of his senses.

He leveled an accusatory finger at her nose. “I’m happy to take you for a drive in my new car, *mon amie*, but *I* will be behind the wheel.”

“Come, Justin.” She said his name as it was meant to be said. In French. Soft J and long U, emphasis on the second syllable, the N silent—as she knew no one in his native country did. “Your gift will soon be back in England. We mustn’t waste a moment of its time in Monaco. Get in and teach me.”

“A moment of *its* time?” But he laughed and slid into the left side of the car, shaking his head. The sun caught his hair and burnished it gold, caught the angles of his face and made it all the stronger. “The prince will have my head for this.”

Brook grinned at him. Once upon a time, she had dreamed that they would fall in love and live happily ever after—before she realized a future duke could never be more than friends with a nobody without a past. Before she came to understand Prince Albert wasn’t really her grandfather. “He will be jealous, you mean. He must always have a chauffeur behind the wheel.” Brook gripped the wheel tighter, until she could feel the thrum of the 40/50 engine in every cell. “Perhaps I will borrow one of the chauffeur’s jackets and surprise him one day—after you’ve taught me.”

Justin pressed a hand to his brow, dark blond hair falling over his fingers. “Heaven help me. I’ll be executed. My poor grandfather will expire from the shock of it, the dukedom will go extinct, and it will be all your fault. All because you grin at me and I can’t say no.”

She grinned all the brighter now. “I don’t intend to race in Grand-père’s road rally—I only want to learn the basics.” She made herself comfortable on the seat, positioning her feet on the pedals on either side of the steering column. She had read books and articles about the advances of the automobile, but



the pages hadn't come close to conveying the power that came coursing through the floorboard. It was almost as heady a feeling as having a spirited horse under her. Almost.

Justin slid closer, casting her a sideways look she couldn't read—making fear knot in her chest. She'd been waiting months for him to return, had begun to worry he never would, that his family would succeed in keeping him forever in the Cotswolds of England, and he would forget his promises to investigate the seal on the old, yellowed envelope she had pressed to his palm five months ago.

She cleared her throat. “Did you learn anything? In England, I mean?”

Justin adjusted the position of her hands on the wheel. “Of course I did. Literature and mathematics—”

“Justin Wildon.”

“—philosophy and science.” He ducked his head as if to make sure her feet were where they ought to be. Or to avoid her gaze. “I came across the papers of a German not long ago. Fellow by the name of Albert Einstein, a physics professor. Have you read him? He has interesting theories—”

“Lord Harlow.” She narrowed her eyes at him, but he still didn't look up.

“—about Newtonian physics and something called *special relativity*, which I know you'd find interesting.” He straightened, focus still on her feet. “There are pedals for clutch, brake, and accelerator. Throttle is on the steering column. You must press upon brake and clutch to begin.”

“I know.” She pushed them without taking her eyes off his strong profile. “And *you* know well what I mean.”

He finally swung his face her way again, jaw set. “We can either talk about that or you can learn to drive. Choose one, for I don't intend to open such a conversation with you behind the wheel of my very new, very expensive automobile.”

“Bad as all that, is it?” She prayed again she could live with the answers she’d asked him to find. For eight years now she had known only who she *wasn’t*—not the illegitimate daughter of opera star Collette Sabatini and Prince Louis Grimaldi, heir to the throne of Monaco. Not the *petite-fille* of the reigning Prince Albert, as his wife, Princess Alice, had shouted for all the palace to hear before she left him. So if not a daughter or granddaughter to the only family she knew . . . then who?

“Release the hand brake, first of all. There by the wheel, on your right.”

Drawing in a long breath, she gripped the wooden handle and moved it as she had seen their drivers do, then checked for carriages or cars in the street. Seeing none, she mimicked the pedal work she had observed, moving her foot from the brake and aiming it at the accelerator.

“Brook!”

“*Quoi?*” She jammed her foot back on the brake.

Justin ran a hand over his face. “*Attends!* Please—wait for my instruction.”

Another grin tickled her lips and pushed away the phantoms of the unknown. “When have I *ever* awaited instruction? But did I not let my first arrow fly with admirable accuracy? Am I not a better shot with a pistol than you? Can I not out-fence any young lord?”

At last a breath of laughter relaxed his shoulders. Then he caught her gaze and held it, his eyes as deep as the ocean. “You think I don’t know the thoughts rampaging through your mind? But I assure you, you’ve nothing to worry about. The news I bring is good.” He gave her fingers a reassuring squeeze. “But it will change everything. You shouldn’t try to digest it when behind the wheel of a car.”

She nodded and pushed the questions aside. For now. “Now I check the street *again* and transfer my foot from brake to accelerator while easing off the clutch.”

“A statement rather than a question, I see.” His fingers left hers as he turned around to look at the street. “All clear. Angle the wheel hard to the left and gently—*gently*—press that foot to the accelerator.”

She obeyed, reveling in the increased thrum of the engine. Easing the car forward, a laugh slipped from her lips. She straightened the wheel and headed for the opera house. She could get the hang of this, given a bit more practice. Perhaps she could even convince Grand-père to let her drive one of theirs.

Assuming she remained in Monaco. Risking a glance toward Justin, she barely kept from taking one hand off the wheel to play with the two pearls dangling from the gold filigree of her necklace. “You did verify I’m English, then?”

He shot a look at the fingers she had nearly lifted. As if he knew exactly what habit she’d nearly indulged. “We already knew that.”

She sighed and let off the accelerator when they came upon a slow-moving barouche. “We knew Maman said so, but she was hardly in her right mind those last weeks.” And for so many years, Brook had hoped and prayed that *that* had been the lie, as Grand-père so often assured her.

“It was right enough. You are indeed English. Which, assuming you’ve looked in a mirror now and again, oughtn’t to surprise you.”

Right on cue, the wind cast a tendril of her pale hair before her eyes. She certainly had nothing in common with the rest of the Grimaldis. How many times had she wished for their rich dark hair and fathomless brown eyes? The skin that the sun could kiss yet not burn? A delicate snort was all the response she could manage.

Justin loosed a sigh nearly lost under the purr of the engine. “The story she told seems to be true—she was in York with the opera at the time but did *not* have a child of her own.”

Had Brook been anywhere else, she would have let her eyes slide closed so that she could summon the image of beautiful Maman, try to conjure the sound of her sterling soprano. But the memory had faded over the years, until now it was little more than a crystal echo.

“So Prince Louis was right to keep me always at a distance—I am not his daughter.” At least she wasn’t another cause for scandal in the Grimaldi line. But it also meant Maman was not her mother. And Grand-père . . . He hadn’t wanted her to ask these questions. She was, he had said, the only member of his family who acted like family, and what would he have if she left?

But she had to. She couldn’t live her life as a pretender. The people were already shouting against him, how much worse would it be if he continued to support her when she had no real claim to him, other than a bone-deep love?

The barouche they followed turned down a side road, and Brook pressed on the accelerator. “What am I, then? A farmer’s daughter? An abandoned waif?”

His chuckle helped ease the band around her chest. “*Mais non*. It is as we imagined—you are a nymph from the fairy world.”

“A naiad you mean, ruling over a—”

“—a brook. How could I have forgotten?” He captured the curl that obscured her vision and gave it a playful tug. “One of my favorites of our recent stories—‘Brook of the Brook.’ And where is my fairy princess taking us?”

She smiled, but even the thought of the stories they created and picnics atop the ramparts overlooking Port Fontvieille couldn’t erase the questions. “The theater. I have a ballet lesson. I keep threatening to join the Ballet Russes—Sergei says I am as talented as his Russian dancers.”

“An imp more than a naiad, surely.” He tugged again on her

curl and tucked it behind her ear. “I can only imagine how mad that drives the prince.”

“It hardly matters what I do.” She slowed as her turn approached and prepared to wrestle the wheel around. Her heart thudded, but she drew in a deep breath. If she slipped, Justin would catch the wheel, would keep them from harm.

“You will not take the stage.” Justin sounded far harsher than Grand-père had. Perhaps her tone had been too blasé.

Still, she could hardly resist teasing him—and fishing for more information. “Excuse me, your lordship, but why not? My mother was on the stage.”

“Collette would have been the first to tell you not to follow her example. And she was not your mother.”

“Quite right—I am an orphan, an unknown. Lizette Brook—a nobody.”

“You most certainly are *not*.”

“Who am I, then?” She glanced his way, brows arched.

“Eyes on the road!”

Hopefully he saw only that she turned her face square to the windscreen and not that she rolled those eyes in the process. “Was I right about the envelope? The seal?”

Maman had left her with boxes upon boxes of correspondence, faded letters from faded loves. But one box of them had been different—they were in English. The tone was different too—not at all what amorous patrons had usually sent to Collette. And more, as she’d searched through the letters in the flat she’d shared with Maman before moving to the palace after her death, Brook had seen a variation of her own name on the ones on the top of the stack. *Give Little Liz a kiss from her papa*. But it had been signed only with *Yours Forever*, and the one envelope with the seal upon it had no address.

Yet again she had to resist the urge to touch her necklace. The necklace Maman had confessed with her last breath had

belonged to Brook's true mother. The woman killed in the carriage accident from which Collette had rescued Brook. The *my love* those English letters were written to?

"The seal was helpful. Brook." He sighed again and rested a hand on her shoulder. "It led me to your mother. I saw a portrait of her, and it might as well have been you in a bustle. We found her. We found *you*."

Her fingers curled around the wheel so tightly she feared she'd leave an impression in the wood. "Who, then? Who am I?"

"We're nearly to the theater—pull over here. Foot off the gas, press the brake and then the clutch. Turn, turn." His fingers covered hers as he helped her guide the Rolls-Royce into an open spot nearer the casino than the theater. The moment the car halted, he reached over her to engage the hand brake and then switched off the magneto. The absence of the engine's noise barely made a difference with all the chatter from the street.

But Brook didn't look at the gaily clad aristocrats making their way into the Casino Monte Carlo—she looked at the muscle gone tense in his jaw. "Justin." Her voice came out in a whisper so soft she couldn't be sure he heard her. "Tell me."

He leaned against the green leather of the seat, elbow atop it, and rested his hand on her shoulder again. "You are a baroness."

"A . . . *what*?" She knew the title—one couldn't be the friend of a duke's grandson without getting lessons in the British peerage. Which was why she knew she shouldn't have such a title unless by marriage. "How could I be a baroness?"

The wind tried to toss that curl into her face again, but he caught it and tucked it away once more. "From your mother, who was a baroness in her own right. Passed from her mother, and her mother before her. You are Elizabeth Brook Eden, Baroness of Berkeley—one of only a handful of peeresses whose

title is by right and not courtesy. And the heiress to a large estate.”

*Little Liz.* Maman had kept her name, just made it more French—Lizette Brook. Choosing to go by her middle name after Collette’s death had been one of Brook’s many small rebellions. Her eyes slid shut, her fingers found the warm pearls dangling from her necklace. Her mother’s necklace. Her mother. “What was her name?”

“Elizabeth as well, born with the surname Brook, which is where your middle name came from. Countess of Whitby.”

“Countess?” Her eyes flew open again. “My father was an earl?”

Justin’s free hand found hers, and he linked their fingers together. “*Is an earl, Brooklet.*”

Had she been standing, she would have had to sit. “My father . . .”

“Is very eager to meet you.” He squeezed her hand and ran his thumb over hers. “It’s time to come home, Lady Berkeley.”

Brook drew in a long breath seasoned with fruit from the markets, the spice of Italian cooking, and the salty tang of the Mediterranean Sea.

All her life, all her memory, this had been home. All the world she’d needed. “I . . . I must absorb all this.”

“Of course you must.” He lifted her hand and kissed her knuckles as he had done ever since they played knight and damsel as children, back when she had dreamed it was real. But his eyes remained locked on hers now. “I know you have been praying about this as much as I have been. This is the answer to those prayers, *mon amie*. This is where the Lord wants you. And I will be with you every step of the way.”

No doubt he was right. And no doubt when her thoughts stopped crashing like waves in a tempest, the peace of the Lord would descend. But right this moment . . . “I must go. *Au revoir*,

Justin.” She leaned over, kissed him on either cheek, and let herself out of the car.

A warm breeze gusted up the street. Brook touched her hat to make sure it was secure, then let her fingers fall to her necklace. A baroness, daughter of an earl. Of all the scenarios she had entertained, that had never been one of them.