

Foreword

My name is Rose, Ramblin' Rose. I'm a spy. Well, maybe not like James Bond, but I do work for the Agency. So do my parents; they're spies, too. And my Aunt Susan, my uncle Stephen and my chauffer/bodyguard, Richard are all spies as well.

Then, there's my dog, Samson The Great, Sam for short. He's my best friend and probably the only one in our house that is not a spy.

Some of you know these things already, but if you are just tuning in to my Internet Newsletter, you'll need some background information to understand what's going on.

Now, I didn't always work for the Agency. In fact, until I was kidnapped and taken to Russia, all I knew was that my dad worked for the government, my mom was President of her own company and they called me Ramblin' Rose because I talked a lot!*

Actually, it was Sam's fault that I found out about all the spy stuff. Well, I guess if I hadn't been playing Tug-O-War with his slimy dog toy I wouldn't have slipped and crashed into the china cabinet in the first place. And who knew that one of my Mom's collector plates was encoded with some

*See *The Porcelain Mines in Russia*.

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very important information that just had to get into the right hands?

What would you do if you knew your parents would kill you, or worse, ground you for life? I called my Aunt Susan. Thanks to her and a very special computer named, Zip, we headed for New York to pick up a duplicate.

Everything would have been great if only we weren't being spied on.

Well, you probably figured out that we finally made it home and things did work out along the way I learned some pretty neat things, too. Like who my parents really were, what the Agency does -- No, I can't tell you but you can guess -- and the truth about the crazy stories my grandfather used to tell me when I was six.

There I go, ramblin' again. Anyway, now that I'm twelve, I'm beginning to find out that Grandpa's stories weren't so crazy after all. And, as the youngest-ever editor of *The Brookhaven School for Girls* newsletter, I am well on my way to winning a Pulitzer Prize.

Well, I don't have enough time to tell two stories, so I hope I've given you enough background to get started on the current mission. If not, you can look up the previous installment and get all, (well, most) of your questions answered.

By the way, they call me Ramblin' Rose for a different reason now -- but you can find that out for yourself...

Prologue

I remember Grandma and Grandpa's house. It was a big white house by the sea, with a white picket fence and a "widow's watch" where Grandma used to sit watching the ocean, waiting for Grandpa to come home.

"Just like the sailors in the old days," Mother had said. "Of course Grandpa wasn't on an old sailing ship. He owned the shipping company. But your grandmother used to wait up there anyway. Sometimes we would sit with her, and watch her work, embroidering fancy quilts, table covers and pillowcases. She still does beautiful work."

"I know," I had said, thinking of the handmade pillowcases on my bed and the quilt on my wall as we drove up to the old house. I was six years old, and this would be the last time I would see it, as well as the last time I would hear them both tell me a story.

We had come to spend the weekend, and as soon as the car stopped, I jumped out and ran inside. The servants were gone now. Grandpa preferred it that way. He was retired, and wanted nothing to interfere with his time with Grandma.

I remember the smell of his workshop: pipe tobacco, sawdust, and the smell of soldering wire. It was a mysterious and fascinating place.

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“Grandpa, where are you?” I hollered as I bolted through the big wooden door.

“I’m in the basement,” grandpa yelled up the stairs. I followed his voice as my parents unloaded the car.

The light was on, and I held the painted railing, carefully navigating the open steps.

“Grandpa. We’re here.” I informed him again.

“Is that my favorite girl?” he called out as I approached.

“Depends,” I said. “Is that my favorite Grandpa?”

“Well, why don’t you come in and see for yourself?”

“Okay, I will.” I said, jumping through the doorway as if to surprise him.

“Well, I’ll be darned. Sure looks like my Ramblin’ Rose.”

“Sure looks like my Grandpa.” I said, hopping onto his lap as he sat on the stool in front of his workbench.

Hugs and kisses followed and Grandpa added a warning. “Careful, Rose. Don’t touch the soldering iron, it’s hot.”

“What are you doing, Grandpa?”

“Working on my ham radio.”

“I didn’t know radios were made out of ham!” I said.

Grandpa chuckled. “They’re not made of ham, Rose. People just call them that because they ham it up when they talk to each other.”

I didn’t really understand, so I just said, “Oh.”

I watched him solder a small wire into place. Looking around the bench, I noticed lots of different colored ones wrapped on little metal spools. There were yellow ones, blue ones, green ones, and red ones, too.

I looked above the workbench at a picture of a sailing ship.

The Wire Forests of Peru

“Grandpa,” I asked, always curious, “where does wire come from? Do people make it? Why are there so many colors?”

He smiled and unplugged the hot iron. Setting it on a flat metal tray, he re-lit his pipe.

“Peru,” he said. “Wire comes from Peru. It grows on trees in the wire forests just like bananas do. The different colors are for the different sizes, and only one size grows on each tree. It looks like a rainbow fell on the forest. The natives cut them down with big blades and roll them onto large wooden spools. Then they send them to the USA and other countries where people put them on smaller spools so I can use them to fix my radio.”

I laughed. “Oh, Grandpa. You’re so silly.”

“Why, Rose, you don’t believe me?” He looked hurt. “Remember, there is always some truth to every story.”

“Okay, Grandpa. Maybe I believe you about the wire, but there is no ham in your radio.”

“Tell you what, come on upstairs and ask your Grandma about our adventures in the wire forests of Peru.”

I slipped off his lap as he stood up, and we climbed the painted stairway into another world.

Chapter One

“Here we go again, Sam.” I said as I packed the open suitcase on the bed. The big, black Newfie sat in the doorway, his tail thumping loudly against the door frame. He had picked up on the excitement in the house, and had not quite realized what it meant.

“Doesn’t seem like very long since I unpacked.” I continued. Sam thumped his tail again as I rambled on.

“But this time it’s different. We’re going as a family. A ‘working vacation’ as Mom calls it. Two weeks in Peru. Machu Picchu, the Andes Mountains, great stuff for my newsletter. Of course, there will be things I can’t write about, like the real reason we’re going.”

Sam whined at my tone. I think he was catching on. I wished Sam could go. But Mother said, “No. Sam is used to traveling for the dog shows, but the hotel won’t allow him. Besides, your Aunt Susan and Uncle Steven have volunteered to watch him while we are gone.”

That was another exciting thing about this trip. Aunt Susan and Uncle Steven were not only taking care of Sam, but they would be staying in our house while we were gone. Richard, our chauffeur and bodyguard would be coming with us.

The Wire Forests of Peru

A lot had happened since I returned from Russia. I was home-schooled now with a private tutor the Agency had recommended. She was a nice lady who reminded me a lot of my grandmother. At least from the pictures and all the stories I had heard about her.

My Internet newsletter went toward my English credits, and Mom and Dad had moved into the private sector with Aunt Susan and Uncle Steven, who were married now.

After my kidnapping, my parents vowed we would work together as a family for all our sakes. I felt good about it because I was included with the adults.

I missed the kids at The Brookhaven School for Girls a little, though. But I was still able to participate in home school events and get-togethers.

As I zipped the bag shut, I smiled, remembering the passwords the Agency had used: The suitcase is open, but the bag is zipped.

Zip would be coming with us again. We still had access to him and the Agency. Dad was excited about our first contract with them. So many senior agents had left or been cut that they were contracting out assignments to former agents and private agencies. Budget problems, they called it.

This trip was about computers. The new Office of Homeland Security had called for the Agency's computers to be updated. They were at least fifteen years old and needed replacing.

Something had happened along the way, and the new computers were six months late. The Agency said there was a danger that terrorists may be planning another big strike. The problem had been traced to the wire needed for the computers. Power cords, mice, and other cords were needed to

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run the computers for the Agency. A lot of wire was needed to replace every computer in the Agency.

We were being sent to find out what was holding up the wire. Aunt Susan and Uncle Steven would have gone, but Mother wanted this trip for us. It was a good way to get our feet wet, she had said.

I looked out my window as I lugged the big suitcase off the bed, and set it on the floor. A car had pulled up and Aunt Susan and Uncle Steven stepped out. Aunt Susan looked up at my window, smiling and waving as Uncle Steven unloaded the bags.

Samson the Great cocked his head at the sound of the car in the drive. He thumped his tail twice, and started to make a run down the steps, but whined and sat back down.

He had figured it out.

This was going to be the hardest part, saying goodbye to my best friend. I bent down and hugged his neck, feeling the stinging of tears on my cheeks. I patted him a few times, and stood up.

“Now Sam, you know I’ll be back soon. You’ll have lots of fun with Aunt Susan and Uncle Steven. And Grandpa will be watching too! Right Grandpa?”

I looked into the air, as if seeing him there. Wiping the tears from my eyes, I let the butterflies of excitement take over my stomach.

“Well, Grandpa, I guess I’ll find out if there really are wire forests in Peru.”