

Thief

Underground

by
H.T.King

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Editing done by Alice May and Rose King

Thief Underground

Also by H.T.King

Book One: Undercover Thief



Pamela Torres has been breaking the law since she was nine years old. Left alone in London, needing to steal to survive, Pamela has managed to make a life for herself.

Then, one day, Pamela's parents turn up again and turn her whole world upside down. They enroll her in a school, but this school is unlike any school that Pamela has ever heard of before. The Victoria Institute isn't just any school. It's a school for spies!

Acknowledgements

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And a shout out to Ella for all the help you've shown me throughout the year! This one is for you.

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Chapter One

"How you doing there Pammie?" came Leah's voice over the coms unit. I rolled my eyes.

"Pam, if you don't want to do this, just say," said Jerry for the millionth time. I sighed and repeated the answer I had told him over and over.

"I'm a part of this family Jerry, and we solve our problems together."

I was beginning to feel like a broken record.

I was sat outside a gorgeous little café in the beautiful Minsk, Belarus. In front of me was a half-eaten breakfast from the extraordinarily overpriced café. I wasn't eating here by choice this morning. Oh no, even though the eggs benedict was really good, I was waiting. Waiting for a mark.

It was early, a strange time for me to be awake in my holidays. Only a job could get me out of bed at this hour. The streets were almost empty as the sun poked it's golden head over the surrounding rooftops. It was like a small, perfect slice of paradise.

I picked up my coffee, taking a long draft, hoping the caffeine might wake me up a little bit. After all, in the middle of a con was not the time to be catching up on sleep.

"Pam, you're always going to be a part of this family. You don't have to pull off cons with us in order to prove that! It's not how it works. We know that your heart isn't in it any more. Feel free to just say no!"

"Jerry. I will say so the moment I do something I find uncomfortable," I lied. Uncomfortable was already here.

I wasn't used to feeling this way. There were butterflies in my stomach and tingling in my fingers as I prepared to break the law. It wasn't normal. I could only assume that the Victoria Institute was starting to succeed in installing in me a sense of respect for the law. Oh the horror!

"That stupid school. I know you're lying but I still feel I should believe you!" growled Jerry. "You've gotten to be a better liar Pam and you were incredible before."

"I know. It's talent. Either you have it or you don't," I smiled and batted my eyelashes at the van where they were watching from.

"Oh how humble you are Pam," snorted Leah.

"Yeah, I struggle with the concept," I agreed raising my coffee to my lips again.

"Ok, here comes your mark. Get ready everyone," Leah's voice changed into a business manner, cutting out the cheerful tone of banter that it held before.

It was the Easter holidays and I was spending some holiday time with the Sklar's. My parents had been asked to work something rather important and - gritting their teeth - they had asked me to spend a few extra days with my other family. I had been only too delighted for extra time with them, although of course I feigned disappointment when they had phoned. Jerry, Leah and Micah had been so enthusiastic when I had suggested the idea we decided we deserved a holiday somewhere nice.

So we decided on Minsk, and while we were here, the opportunity for a job had reared its head. It was long

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past time that we pulled off a job, considering how dry the well had run in the recent weeks. But that wasn't the only reason we needed to pull off jobs.

If the Sklars were going to keep up their reputation, then they had to be seen to be working. Especially after we had been accredited for taking down the Brittle family last Christmas. It was more important than ever to the Underground that we maintained our criminal appearances after we rocked that particular boat – the Brittle family had been a big name, a very influential one. It was one of the top six after all, certainly the most dominant in America. By taking it down our name had almost replaced theirs in the lime light, and put us under scrutiny.

The Underground community was one that you didn't want to mess with. The repercussions of doing so were always terrible. Of course, no physical harm would come to a perpetrator; the Underground didn't condone that kind of mindless violence as a punishment. But they know how to hit you where it hurt. They would ruin lives in other ways, make it so that you couldn't show your face anywhere in the civilised world again. So, not only were we easing our financial worries some, we were also making sure that no one felt the need to do that.

"Show time Pammie!" came Jerry's voice.

I spotted my mark as he sat down at his usual table. Thanks to our careful research his usual table just happened to be the one next to mine. He picked up his paper and read the headlines then turned straight to the business section, or rather, our modified version of the business section.

The main story was about Lady Lucinda Barrington, (AKA yours truly) wanting to invest a lot of money in a new stock market. There was a wonderful picture of me with pearls and a cat. Leah had insisted that there be a cat in the picture for some daft reason.

I waited for him to absorb the story properly. Now was the time to draw attention to myself.

"Um! Waiter!" I called, raising my hand and emphasising my natural British accent. The waiter hopped over and I saw my mark look up and do an almost comical double take.

"Can I have another coffee? This one has gone cold."

"Of course ma'am," The waiter smiled politely and walked off to carry out my wishes. The mark stared at his plate for a moment before speaking.

"Hello there," He said, "You're Lady Lucinda right?"

"That's me," I said giving him a raised eyebrow and a cold stare.

"Right," He said getting up and walking over to my table uninvited and sitting down.

"I'm Harry Arlton – the Harry Arlton."

I didn't really like him the moment he opened his mouth. He was an obnoxious man, you could tell by his words. What was with emphasising the word 'the' implying he thought I should know who he was. Urgh, he wound me up from the word go. Nevertheless, liking marks wasn't a requirement, in fact it was frowned up. So I turned my lips into a generous smile.

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"As you know who I am and I now know who you are, I suppose I should ask what brings you to come sit with me this morning," I said as my coffee was brought back.

"Everyone knows your looking to invest in a new market. That's a very tricky business you know. And as you're in Minsk, I can go head and assume you're considering investing around this city somewhere. This place of full of sharks and flying monkeys wanting to steal your money, you get me? So you need a guide through the wilderness as it were. As it happens, I could be that guide."

What was with that accent? It was awful! Did he not know how to speak properly?

"You are?" I asked my hands going to my necklace, drawing his eyes to the sapphires and diamonds I was wearing. It was something to assure him of my fake social status.

"Oh yeah. I'm the best in the business out here in the Minsk Jungle."

What was up with the mixed animal/jungle metaphors? Was this guy really successful? He just got on my nerves a lot! How would anyone do business with this man?

"Well, that's very forward of you."

"In this business, that's the kind of guy you want handling your money. One that doesn't wait for an opportunity, but creates it."

"I'm an opportunity?"

"Yes. And I am yours,"

Ok, so his bolshie attitude was a little familiar. And that opportunity line was a good one, but he still made me very uncomfortable.

"My how interesting-" I almost choked over the last word as I saw two people round the corner across the street.

Two people very familiar people.

Two people I was completely not expecting.

Two people I would be able to pick out of any crowd with ease.

The reverse was also true, which meant I had no chance of getting away unspotted. That messed up this job completely.

"I'm afraid I really must be going," I said standing up, hoping I could make a swift exit before they spotted me.

Unfortunately, I had no such luck. I knew the exact moment my father spotted me. I saw his face fall when his eyes zeroed in on mine and alerted my mother. Damn, I needed to move.

"But your ladyship-"

"If you are truly interested in working with me then you can prove it by waiting for me. I will be back here tomorrow for my breakfast. I have grown quite fond of the place and it seems I am late for another appointment. I will see you then. If you're worth my time then I am worth the wait," I said picking up my bag and delicately pulling it over my shoulder.

"Pam, what's going on?" demanded Jerry, "this isn't the plan." I subtly gestured in the direction of my parents and put money on the table for my food.

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"Alright. I'll speak to you then your ladyship," Arlton smiled and waved goodbye as I swiftly walked away from him, in the direction of my parents to potentially stop a disaster mid-con.

"What are they doing here?" Jerry demanded, "I thought you said we had a few more days?"

"That's that they told me! I don't think I even mentioned that I was in Minsk!" I hissed at him in answer as I met my parents.

"Pam!" my father started to speak but I held up a hand.

"Not here. Come on," I told them urgently walking away. They followed me.

"Pam, what are you going to do?" Jerry asked.

"I don't know! Would you give me a minute to think? It's still ridiculously early and I'm still throwing off creep vibes from Arlton over there!"

"Pam, we didn't say anyt- wait, are you on coms?" my father's eyes burned with anger.

"Yes I am. Ok, this two conversations thing is going to do my head in. Jerry, Leah, take a breather or something ok? I need a word with my folks."

"Pam! Are you doing one of your jobs?" hissed my mother in outrage as we rounded the corner. She grabbed my arm, pulling me closer, "illegal jobs!"

"What on earth are you doing here?" I scowled deciding to skip the question.

"Us? We're working! What are *you* doing here? We thought that you would be in London!" growled my father, "You said you were going to London."

"Well, we booked these last-minute flights out here, you know, for a change after you said I should stay for longer. The tickets were cheap and we know a guy that can get us discounted hotel rooms."

"And what, you just happened to pick the same town that we're working in?"

"Well it wasn't deliberate!"

"Pam," came Jerry's voice over coms, "are you alright? Do you need an exit?"

"No! They're my folks, I'm fine! I am not having two conversations at once. So you can either turn off the speakers for a minute or listen in like the earwigs you are. Either way, would you keep your traps shut for a bit? Sorry Micah, that's you too."

"Ok Pammie!" his voice piped up from the back of the van.

My mother held out a hand and wiggled her fingers, telling me to hand over my ear bud.

"No! My ear bud, get your own."

"Pam! Give me the ear bud!"

"No! You won't give it back."

"Give me your earpiece, I want to talk to them."

"No, I know that look. You don't want to talk to them, you want to rant at them!" I folded my arms stubbornly. My father looked over his shoulder.

"We have to go Izzy," said my father putting a hand on her back. He looked antsy.

"I know; I can hear your sister too. But our daughter takes priority!"

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"Hang on a minute! You are on coms too? Sister? What sister? Are you telling me I have an aunt?" I demanded.

"You didn't know?" asked my father, slightly thrown by the question.

"Yeah! Because this is the face of someone who knew they had an aunt!" I rubbed my forehead, "Are there any other family members that I should know exist? Cousins or the like?"

"I'm a twin, but there aren't any cousins," my dad said dismissively because something more urgent was on his mind. "Izzy, we have to go."

"Identical?" I asked curious and he nodded. My mother glared at him.

"We are not leaving! Shut up Rachel, this is my daughter!" Growled my mother.

"I think you might have an Aunt Rachel there Pammie," said Leah lightly.

"Yeah, thanks Leah. I made that connection," I groaned, "So why is my aunt here and why haven't I met her before?"

"You did when you were small Pam. Right now she's our back up," My mother explained.

I unobtrusively looked around the building and nodded slightly towards one of the taller buildings.

"Roof top?" I asked. My mother nodded rubbing her forehead.

"Can she hear me?" I asked.

"Of course."

"Hi Aunt Rachel!" I said brightly, "I'd wave but apparently my parents are working. No need to draw the eyes."

"I'll trade you," offered my mother reaching for her own ear bud.

"No go," I said shaking my head, "No way are you going to yell at my family--"

"Pam!" shouted Jerry moments before the gun fire started.

I instinctively gave my father a sharp shove, and the two of us fell to the pavement, rolling as we hit the floor. When we managed to get to our feet, the three of us set off sprinting down the streets of Minsk.

"Working! You could have said it was this kind of job!" I shouted at them, "That would have been nice to know! What is it with guns and you guys?"

"What did you think we meant when we said working?" shouted back my father.

"Well I assumed you'd tell me if it was something that involved high powered assault rifles!"

"It's classified!"

"Jerry!" I yelled, "get me something I can work with."

"On it Pam!" said Jerry.

"Snipper?" I asked as we ran. Another hail of bullets started. I had to skid to a stop and throw myself down an alley in the opposite direction to my parents to avoid getting hit. I picked myself off the floor and sprinted all the way down.

"Pammie!" screamed my mother.

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"I'm fine!" I shouted back, not sure if they heard or not over the gun fire.

I dived around the corner, pressing my back against the wall and breathing heavily. I muttered a stream of very rude words and tried not to think about Micah listening at the other end.

"Sit tight Pammie!" shouted Leah in my ear.

"Nah, I thought I'd do some cartwheels!" I snapped sarcastically, "Just get Micah out of here now!"

"Will do Pammie, we'll also get you out of this!" said Jerry, "Leah, steal a car and drive back to the hotel with Micah. Leave me the van."

"Pam!" My heart froze as I saw my father launch his way out of his hiding place and sprint down the alley under the gun fire. I thought he'd been hit several times, but he somehow managed to round the corner unharmed.

"It's alright. I'm here. Are you hurt?" he panted, putting his hands on my shoulders and checking for damage.

"No, I'm fine! What the hell were you thinking!"

"I know what I'm doing Pam!"

"Great! Then what's the plan to get out of here?"

"Working on it," he said daring to poke his head out of the alley.

"Dad! No," I squealed grabbing him and pulling him back.

"Pam, I need to see!" he protested.

"Use my phone!"

"Phone?"

"Reflection," I said handing it to him.

"Good idea Pam," He held it out the side of the alley to try and see around. There wasn't any gunfire at the moment.

"Where's mum?" I asked.

"She's up the other end of the alley, behind a large bin."

"Is she alright?"

"Looks it."

"Pam, I have an idea!" said Jerry, "I'll drive past, you and your folks jump in the back of the van."

"That's a horrible idea! Our van is a hire van and totally not bullet proof!"

"What's a horrible idea?" asked my father.

"Dad, what's going on?" I asked, I needed all the facts.

"Two gunmen. Rachel has dealt with the first, so now we just have to deal with the one on the ground."

"Any chance my Aunt has a gun and can take a shot?"

"Not from her vantage point, but she's working on it."

"Ok, by that time we'll all be shot where we stand."

"Not going to happen, here," He said bending down and pulled another gun out of his pocket and thrust it into my hands. I held it out at arm's length, pinched between two fingers like it was a dead ferret and wrinkled my nose.

"What on earth am I supposed to do with this?"

"Have you never shot a gun before?"

"Do I look like I've shot a gun? No!"

"Well, now is the perfect time to start Pammie."

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"You've got to be kidding me! I can't shoot someone!"

"Pam! It's shoot someone or die!"

"I'm with your dad here Pam. Shoot away," agreed Jerry.

"Urgh, right now I wish I was just a thief. The part spy thing has too many highspeed bullets attached to it," I sighed spotting a little hide away. A plan came to mind, but it was not a very good one.

"So, all we need to do is draw the fire so you can get a clean shot?" I asked dad, "If so I have a horrible plan but it might just work."

"Yeah – don't you dare Pammie!" my father realised what I planned to do and tried to grab me.

"Too late! Remember to shoot!" I ran out from behind the corner and made a bee-line straight for a bunch of boxes; I threw myself to my knees and skid behind them, waiting. The trail of bullets that followed me abruptly stopped. My father had jumped from behind the corner and shot the gunman to the floor.

"Dad!" I shouted.

"Yeah, you can come out Pam!" he said walking into the alley. I stood up, searching the scene. My eyes zeroed in on my mother, and the ugly red stain on her shoulder, spreading down her arms.

"Mum!" I screamed, horrified.

"Izzy! Izzy talk to me!" shouted my father as we reached her.

"Pam? What's going on?" yelled Jerry.

"My mum's hit," I sobbed. She was still conscious.

"Scratch," She mumbled. My father pulled the gun from her fingers.

"We need a ride Pam. This is one time where I'll condone you stealing a car or something," said my father, voice tinted with panic as he gently lifted my mother off the concrete floor.

"Jerry, give me the van! You can just drive up, it's safe."

"Sure thing," said Jerry. The van skidded to a stop outside the alley moments later. Jerry jumped out of the van the moment he could.

"Thank you, I'll see you later...maybe."

"Don't worry about it. Take care of your mum," he said, turned and ran away, to find Leah and Micah. My father came out of the alley carrying mum as I climbed into the driver's seat.

"Buckle up! I drive fast!" I shouted as he scrambled in with her. I slammed my foot to the accelerator.

"Ok, we're still tracking you Pam. Take a left, then next right and third left," said Leah in my ear, "that should be a hospital."

"Thanks Leah," I said skidding past beeping traffic and stationary items. I weaved in and out of the cars and people. My driving was beyond dangerous today. My father held onto Mum, putting as much pressure on the wound as he could. I skidded to a stop outside of the hospital.

"It's ok Izzy, we're at the hospital," said my father carrying her out of the van and through the doors.

"Help!" I shouted running ahead. Emergency medical staff surrounded us and soon my mother was whisked off to

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be stabilised. Dad and I were dragged away from following her through certain doors.

"Mum," I cried as my father hugged me close.

"Shh, it's alright Pam. She's going to be fine. Look's worse than it is," My father tried to soothe.

"Don't lie to me dad!" I sobbed.

"Shh, come on. Let's find a coffee somewhere and wait until we hear something more," he reassured. "Rachel, can you tie things up out there....no, I'll look after Pam and Isabell...thanks Rachel."

My father pulled me over to two chairs and sat me down.

We waited.

Chapter Two

I didn't leave the hospital once. Not while my mother was there. My father had been right, it was more superficial than we both had initially thought, a lot of blood but very little actual damage. She'd fallen unconscious from blood loss rather than pain itself. Not sure whether that was a relief or just more to worry about.

Either way, she was awake with her arm in a sling before long, and had a full-blown rant at me about telling them which country I was going to be in from now on. After the events of this particular trip, I could hardly refuse her.

We took her home, straight back to the Victoria Institute. I didn't have a chance to meet my mysterious aunt; she was busy tying up whatever my parents had been there to do. It was a shame; I would have liked to meet her. Dad promised that they would set up a date soon, but unfortunately, she worked a lot – even more than they did.

The car pulled up in front of the school slowly and came to a gentle stop. My father was driving, after winning an argument with my mother about who would have better reflexes in the event of a crash (I'd decided to keep my head out of this conversation knowing that me behind the wheel was never going to happen).

I immediately hopped out of the backseat. Miss Price was waiting for us and looked past me as I helped my mother out of the car – much to her annoyance.

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"Pam, I can get out of the car without one arm. I'm in a sling not a wheelchair!" my mother growled as Miss Price hurried down the steps, relief evident on her face.

"Izzy, are you sure you're alright? We can have the doctors here look you over. Yasmin swears she knows of natural pain relief remedies that really work if you're still refusing the stronger pain killers."

"No, no, I'm fine Sally," My mother answered no completely able to keep the annoyance out of her voice as she hugged her best friend. Miss Price shot a questioning look at me and I rolled my eyes. My mother would tell everyone she was fine, even though it was clear to everyone else that she wasn't.

"Pammie!" I turned to see Ronnie sprinting down the steps, "you look terrible!"

"Well thanks Ron!" I laughed as she launched herself at me and got me in a strangling hug.

"Can't breathe!" I managed to gasp and she let me go laughing.

"Sorry Pam. Just so glad to see you."

"Hey, oxygen is overrated anyway. I missed you too Ron."

"How are you feeling Miss Torres?" asked Ronnie of my mother.

"Just fine, thank you Ronnie," my mother smiled graciously, but I could hear a little bit of the grit behind it.

"I'll take our bags up Iz," My father said kissing my mother. Ronnie folded her arms and looked at me expectantly.

"What?" I squeaked, knowing that look meant trouble, "What have I done now?"

"Minsk? You said you were just going to go to London for a bit!"

"Last minute tickets are cheaper," I shrugged, "And Minsk is supposed to be lovely! Next time I promise to tell you guys where we go on holiday."

"A little bit of notice would be really appreciated," my mother sighed and put her good arm around my shoulders.

"I'm sorry," I mumbled, seeing her wince no matter her effort to try and hide it.

"It's all right. It's just a bullet," My mother tried to reassure in vain. "Go on, you and Ronnie probably have some catching up to do."

"You sure?"

"Yes Pam, I'm not fragile! I'm not about to break in a thousand china pieces! If you and your father keep going on like this I will go insane and throw a fit!"

"Oh please!" I said holding up my hands in mock terror, "not a fit! I can't handle a fit!"

"Then go! Now!" she said and struck up a conversation with Miss Price about a trip she wanted to organise with the fourth years.

"Something on your mind Pam?" asked Ronnie.

"Little bit. Never mind," I said brightly, slipping an arm through hers and pulling her towards the school building.

"What's bothering you?"

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"Tell you in HQ," I said and discretely pointed behind me as a way of explanation. My mother was a very nosey woman.

"Oh! Alright. I suppose that's a good enough excuse. You didn't get shot right?"

"No. Of course not."

"Good. No damage?"

"None."

"Cool. How hard is your mum? 'It's just a bullet' – pft!" Ronnie laughed as we descended the stairs.

"Yeah," I mumbled. She gave me a crooked look and sighed.

"Ok, your mum is out of ear shot. You can tell me," she pushed, giving me a friendly nudge. I sighed.

"I got mum shot."

"What? My mum said it was a gunman and the job went wrong."

"I was what went wrong Ronnie! Don't you see? If I hadn't been there to distract my mum and dad then they would never have been shot!"

"Pam, that's ridiculous."

"Is it? Mum and dad were angry with me because they caught me roping in a mark for a con and they were ignoring my aunt who was probably yelling warnings in their ear the whole time. I was distracting them. I broke their focus! Ron, what if it hadn't been my mum's arm. What if it had been her heart or her lungs or something...fatal?"

"Pam," We both jumped and looked up the stairs to see my father stood, arms folded across his chest. The two of us skidded to a stop.

"It's not your fault your mother got shot," He said seriously.

"Wh-nosey father alert! How is a girl supposed to have a private conversation with two spies for parents?" I grumbled, blushing furiously.

My parents didn't need to know about this. They already knew about what happened! I would never, in a million years have voiced my guilty feelings if I had known my father was listening. This was so embarrassing!

"Pam, don't brush this off with a sarcastic comment and push the conversation down a different route. I know when I'm being manipulated."

"You're not being manipulated dad. You're being brushed off by your teenager daughter, who wants to avoid and awkward conversation. A lot of girls do it," I sighed, "can we all act like you didn't hear what I tried to tell my best friend in confidence? You were interrupting girl talk dad, and that in itself is a massive faux pas."

"Sure, I could ignore it. If it was anything else, but it's this. It was not your fault that your mother got shot."

"Dad, just don't ok. I'm not in the mood," I tried to walk past him but he caught my arm and stopped me.

"No, Pam. I agree that your mother doesn't need to know we had this conversation. But clearly this conversation needs to be had if you're feeling like this is your fault. It's not!"

"Yeah, well we must have different definitions of the word fault because from where I stand it's all on me!" I snapped. Then I stopped, sighed while rubbing my eyes and

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took a large breath before continuing, "I'm sorry. I shouldn't snap."

"It's ok Pam. You're feeling stressed. But I mean it when I tell you that it's not your fault. Not even the slightest. Sure, we weren't expecting to see you there and that threw us. But you didn't wreck the job. We weren't counting on there being two mad men with guns. The people weren't where we were told they were going to be. That is not your fault."

"But you might have stood a better chance if I wasn't there."

"That's not true Pam. The truth of it is if you weren't there, then we probably would have done something more risky." He tried to catch my eye, to make me look at him as he spoke. But I kept my gaze firmly on the stairs below me.

"But I messed up your plan."

"The plan was based on wrong information anyway. The plan wouldn't have helped us. Sometimes things don't go to plan. Not that I have to tell you, you're incredible at thinking on your feet and changing your plans. Sure, we weren't banking on your being there, but you were. As it was, after your mother was shot you managed to find us a vehicle in record time and drove like no one I've ever seen to a hospital that you found in mere seconds."

"Leah found the hospital."

"Something, that because you were there, we were able to do. If you and your other family weren't there it could have been forever before we found somewhere. Your mother could have died if you *weren't* there Pam."

"Dad, you would have been fine if I wasn't there."

"Maybe. Maybe not. Pam, that's just the job. I know that you know that better than just about anyone." I finally looked up and met his eyes.

"You're not just telling me what I want to hear?" I demanded, "You're not just saying something to make me feel better?"

"No. I really mean it. Pam. I'm a really good liar, but you and I are the same. I never lie to family."

"Ok."

"Besides, we got the guy in the end – admittedly he did die but that's better than him being free. Everyone else came out alive and your mother's wound is more show than serious."

"I know..."

"Yeah, but knowing something and being okay about something is completely different," said my father. I shrugged.

"I guess..."

"Listen, if you tell your mother this I'm in serious trouble. But I'm kind of glad that you were there you know. I mean, even if you were in Minsk about to break the law and pull some crazy heist. I am so glad we could stop you. Your mother was right, you're more important than our work Pam. Always will be."

"Yeah, thanks for reminding me about that," I muttered pulling a face. Ronnie's mouth made a huge 'O' in surprise.

"You were actually pulling a heist? Like a proper one like you used to? Diamonds and art and things?" I laughed and shrugged.

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"A con actually," I corrected as my father hugged me reassuringly, "not a proper steal."

"They didn't get anything. Her annoying parents got in the way and messed everything up," said my father good naturedly. I winked at Ronnie and she broke out into a grin.

"Such a shame," she laughed.

"Right, I'm going to go and find your mother before she tries to do something stupid with that arm of hers. No more feeling bad, ok Pam?"

"Sure thing Dad. Although I think if mum tried to do something stupid Miss Price would sit on her."

"Ah yes, that's probably true. In which case I better go and save Sally. Bye girls!"

"Bye Dad."

"Bye Mr Torres!" added Ronnie with a wave.

"You're coming with me!" Ronnie grabbed my hand and yanked me up the stairs.

"Ronnie!" I protested as she almost dragged me up the stairs.

"You're stealing again," she demanded as she pulled me into one of the servant's passages and pulled me towards HQ.

"Not seriously. What part of the passages are we in now anyway?"

"No deflecting Pam! No tricks!" warned Ronnie as we made our way through the maze, "what did you get and please tell me the guy was a scum bag!"

"Total scum bag. Definition of the word," I agreed wholeheartedly, "I wanted to slap him the entire time I spoke to him."

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"What was the scam?"

"Well, I was posing as Lady Barrington looking to invest in an up and coming market and he was supposed to help me. We were going to make investments through Jerry, splitting it fifty/fifty in cash."

"You still got the money?"

"Yeah. In the end Leah and Jerry managed to get there and sort everything out, with a few phone calls from me...it worked OK in the end. Not as smooth as I like most of my work to be but it worked."

"Are you going back to a life of crime?"

"Not if I can help it Ronnie, you know that," I felt a little bit hurt by the accusation as we reached headquarters.

"I do but...you also promised you weren't ever going to steal like that again."

"It's complicated Ronnie. I didn't...I just.... what was I supposed to do? Refuse to help them?"

"Well, the way I see things, it's an option."

"You can't be serious!"

"As a heart attack!"

"I can't do that."

"Why not? It sounds to me like it was a three-person job and there was Micah there I'm assuming."

"Micah couldn't have done it."

"Why?"

Because he's eight years old and blind, I thought to myself, knowing full well Ronnie didn't know this.

"He doesn't really get on with people," I mumbled.

That wasn't a complete lie. The three of us had sheltered Micah rather a lot. So unintentionally, he didn't

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know a lot about people and how they acted, and he definitely behaved very young for his age. It was something that Jerry and I felt guilty about, so we were slowly introducing him to more people, one at a time. They were hoping to be able to send him to a school for the blind in London next year.

"Right," Ronnie sighed sitting on the sofa. She glared at the wall.

"You're mad at me," I stated.

"No, I'm not."

"Liar," I said after a pause. She took a deep breath as if trying to calm herself and looked at me.

"I just...what do I have to do to show you that you can trust me?"

"I do trust you Ronnie!"

"Then what was that? 'He doesn't really get on with people.' What's that all about? You are clearly trying to avoid something. Something your either embarrassed to tell me or you think I'll hate or for some other weird and twisted reason! Plus, your explanation as to why you're doing crime again is 'it's complicated'! What the hell is so complicated? I've not broken the law in my life! What else and I supposed to think except what's obvious?"

"Ronnie, I do trust you. But with this topic...you need to trust me. Please can we just leave it?"

"I thought I was your best friend. Best friend's trust each other! You're always so cagey and defensive when you talk about your family Pam, and when I try to learn more about the criminal world that you grew up in! I'm trying to learn more about you and the people that are important to

you! You're one of my best friends! What do I have to do to show you that no matter what you tell me, I won't think any differently?"

"Hey, I tried to tell you my feelings about Mum but that got hijacked by my father."

"Yeah, I know you'll tell me about them. I mean the other family, the criminal one!"

"That's not fair! You know I want to keep the two separate!"

"You can't keep them separate forever. You can't go leading a double life forever Pammie!"

"Why not?"

"It's madness. You can't keep running down two paths at the same time!" Ronnie sighed and rubbed her eyes, "as your friend, I am trying to be understanding. I really, really am."

"I get that you used to steal because it was for food, and that you still occasionally do illegal things...even if I don't agree with it and don't understand why. I can see for you that it's almost like an addiction you don't know you have – and I'm trying to help. The bigger things like cons, I don't know why you're doing that, I'll assume your family back home needs it, but that is a huge assumption for me to make Pam."

"I honestly don't care about the stealing and the illegal stuff because I know you, because I trust you have a good reason. Can't you see it? Trust! Everywhere! I'm giving you so much of my trust! So I'm trying to figure out what I have done or haven't done to earn this lack of trust in return."

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"Ronnie! How can you say that to me?" I gasped, feeling tears come to my eyes, "You know I trust you with my life! Why on earth would you think that?"

"You trust me with your life but you refuse to open up about your family? That's seriously messed up Pam!"

"I trust you with my life Ronnie, mine! But my families? That's their choice to make. Why don't you get it Ronnie? It's not that hard to understand! I've told you, I want to keep my two families separate!"

Why couldn't she understand that this was protecting her too? The more she knew about the Underground, the more dangerous it was for her. If the Underground realised that I had told her anything, it wasn't just me they would ruin but her too.

"Pam!" she said standing up and putting her hands on her hips, glaring at me, "one day you are going to have to choose which side of the law you want to live on. Unless both of your families are united somewhere in the middle ground, you are going to have to say goodbye to one of them. How many times has Jerry asked to meet your mother and father?"

"He's suggested it a couple of times," I admitted.

"And wouldn't it be better if they started with me?"

"They have met you!"

"Micah hasn't!" she shot back.

"Because Micah...Micah is complicated Ronnie!" I snapped, "There is a lot going on there that you can't understand!"

"I can't understand it if you won't tell me!"

"So what, I'm not allowed to have privacy now?"

"No! I never said that!"

"That's what you're saying though, that I'm not allowed to have some parts of my life private. That you don't agree with my decisions fundamentally because you don't know every single one of my secrets!"

"That's twisting my words! Don't you dare do that to me! Not to me! People that you love don't count as private Pam! Your family doesn't count as private or secret!"

"Yes it does!" I shouted at her, "you have no idea what family means to me. You have one member in your family, and you see her all the time! There is nothing complicated or messed up about it! You have no idea what family means to me! Do you even realise just how hard I have had to fight for what I have! What I have to show for it is a whole heap of chaos. For me a family doesn't end with blood relations. It's all about loyalty and trust. And despite what messed up notions are going on in your head, despite how little you think of me, I do trust you Ronnie!"

I turned on my heel and walked away.

"What! You're going to run away? I thought you were brave Pam! I thought you didn't care what other people thought of you!"

"Yeah? Well congratulations you're the exception to the rule you jerk!"

Ronnie didn't follow me, and that was good. I didn't want to see her. I was just so angry! I went straight into our room, throwing my bag on the bed and letting out a frustrated growl.

How dare she start judging me like that! I was perfectly within my right to hold back some information that

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I found to personal to share! Why? Why had she suddenly started this open, hostile attack? It wasn't fair!

I threw my bag then myself onto the bed, kicking off my shoes. I was too mad to do a lot of things right now. Normally when I was this mad I would get Ronnie to spar with me, doodle in one of my sketch books or call Jerry to rant about how unfair everything was. But I couldn't call Jerry and explain this one, because he'd take Ronnie side. I couldn't talk to Ronnie for obvious reasons, and my pencils were still in a trunk in the car. Annoyed I grabbed my manipulation book from the side, hauling it in front of me.

I forced myself to read the words on the page. I slowly began to calm down. I didn't look at the clock, I just kept reading. I felt the anger trickle away and I got more and more wrapped up in the work. It was good to be back and doing something that I liked.

The door opened and I looked up to see Ronnie. She sighed.

"Pam...I'm sorry."

"I'm sorry too," I said sitting up.

"I just...I worry that you're hiding something because you think that I'll react badly. Or that you're hiding it in some twisted way of protecting me. That you might be hiding something really bad that's hurting you and I can't fix it unless I know." Ronnie sat on her bed, crossing her legs and bringing one of her numerous pillows into her lap to punch and push into shapes as she spoke.

"I promise, it's nothing bad Ron."

"You promise?"

"With all my imperfect heart," I nodded.

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"Alright then. I believe you."

I smiled, thankful that our argument was over.

For the rest of the book please visit www.htking.co.uk

Authors Note

I would just like to thank you for reading Thief Underground. I had so a good time working on it. Please, if you enjoyed reading this, leave a review at your favourite online retailer (such as Amazon) and please recommend Thief Underground to your friends.

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Parties interested in my work in a business sense, please visit my website in order to send an e-mail to me directly. I am more than happy to receive your contact and answer any and all questions you may have.

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~ H. T. King