



## REBECCA FISHWICK

---

Rebecca was born in Kent and studied classics at university. She taught English in Thailand for a while, where she decided that she had better get on with the business of becoming a writer and so applied to the MA at Bath Spa. She's now back in Kent, working on her big book about the Trojan War, and working in the city.

### *About Short Fall*

Harry's life is over. His father has been arrested, and life as he knows it is spiralling to an end. Travelling back to school after days of police raids and interrogations, he runs into his best friend, Jasper, on the train. But Harry hasn't left home empty-handed. He has his father's handgun, along with a whole lot of stolen cash. Returning to school in the middle of the night, Harry and Jasper find themselves the cause of an accident that flings them out into the world, and off on the run.

Harry doesn't want to face up to his actions. He doesn't want to get caught. But that would make him just like his dad. Wouldn't it?

*rebeccafishwick13@gmail.com*

*@rebeccaofcourse*

# SHORT FALL

---

## *Chapter One*

### *The Gun*

I'd found the gun months before the police went through our house, so I knew where to look for it when they arrived.

I wasn't even meant to be home. No one had told me my dad had been arrested, but I guess they didn't have time. They arrested him at work, and Lydia was only just getting the call when I walked in the door. I'd come down to London with my school. We were putting on Part One of Henry IV at the Drury Lane theatre. I was meant to be playing Hal.

Lydia, my stepmum, barely even acknowledged me as I came in, but I heard what she was saying, and as soon as I caught the word 'arrested' I went upstairs to get the gun.

It was in my dad's desk. It wasn't even hidden, really, just slipped under a book. It had a clip in it, but I didn't know how many bullets. It was an old Beretta, with a silver muzzle. Beside it was a wad of cash. I took that, too.

I was on the stairs when the bell rang. It was immediately followed by hammering on the door. The police didn't even trust us to open it. I ran downstairs and out the back, almost colliding with Lydia. She had this look on her face I'll never forget. Jaw set, eyes hard and determined. I was glad I wasn't a police officer.

While Lydia was answering the door, I was vaulting over the fence to next door's garden (they were in Gibraltar, anyway) and hiding it among their hydrangeas. I hid the money with the gun, and climbed back over before they

had time to get into the house and see me through the windows. It's amazing how quickly you can move when you really need to.

The bust lasted hours. What I remember most about it was the police traipsing all through the house with their shoes on, even though it was raining outside and the garden was turned to slush. Lydia was in a frenzy. Pacing around, yammering down the phone and intermittently crying and tearing her hands through her hair.

Little Imogen, my sister, had no idea what was going on. I found her upstairs, just watching the police tear apart her bedroom and all her stuffed toys and dolls and things like they were sifting through trash.

And, all right, maybe I didn't really have any right to be angry about it, but I was. None of them said anything about getting Imogen out of the way so she wouldn't see. None of them even felt sorry for her. And it wasn't 'til I saw her just standing there that I went and scooped her up and took her downstairs and got her some ice-cream. The police were in the kitchen, too. One of them was actually swabbing the microwave, as if a murder had happened there.

I was meant to be at the theatre three hours before the performance, but I didn't go. The police were still there and I didn't want to leave the gun under the neighbours' hydrangeas, or risk getting it while they were still there. My phone was going like crazy. I put it on silent, and slipped it into my pocket.

When the police left, Lydia told me to put Imogen to bed. I found her upstairs, talking to her cat, Rameses. He was a sphynx cat, meaning bald. They were sitting in the lap of her giant Winnie the Pooh teddy, and she was murmuring confidentially to him. He was staring up at her like he understood every word.

He gave a soft mew when I came in, and Imogen looked round.

'Hey, Harry.'

'Hey, Immy.'

'What time is it?'

'Bedtime.' I sounded like a parent.

'When's Daddy coming home?'

I looked at her carefully, wondering how much she knew and how much she'd worked out from the police searching the house from ceiling to floorboards. She watched me with intelligent hazel eyes.

‘I don’t know,’ I said. ‘Soon, I hope.’

That wasn’t really a lie. There’s such a thing as bail.

‘OK,’ she said. She heaved a great sigh, and looked down regretfully at Rameses, like she was forty-seven years old and weary of the world. ‘I guess I’ll go to bed, then.’

I went outside afterwards, and got the gun. I counted the money in my room. It came to forty grand. I sent a text to my friend Jasper, who was playing Falstaff in the production I’d missed. It was the lamest excuse I’d ever sent.

*Sorry I wasn’t there tonight. Something came up. Family issues.*

I put the gun and the money under my pillow, and felt like James Bond gone rogue. I didn’t sleep.

\*

I went back to school a couple of days later, after the police had had enough of my company.

I’d thought I’d stick around a bit for moral support, at least. But Lydia had decided to go to her family in Dubai and she was taking Imogen with her. She told me she’d be back for the trial. At least, she’d told my shoes.

So, I was on the train to Glasgow, which was as full as I’d ever seen it. I hadn’t been able to book a seat and every hour or so I got turfed out of wherever I’d found to sit down.

I wanted to read or something, but I didn’t have a book. Instead, I wondered who was going to pay my school fees now and, if nobody was paying them, how long it would be before someone noticed and kicked me out. I didn’t want to have to go to Hong Kong to live with my mum. She’d probably just send me back, anyway.

So, I was just glaring out of the window as the lush green countryside went by. If you’d seen my face you might have thought I was thinking of pouring cement over the whole thing.

Actually, I was thinking about the gun. The gun that was sitting in my suitcase in the luggage rack, several feet away from me. I could see in my mind’s eye the exact place where it was, nestled between two pairs of jeans. Probably just bringing it on the train counted as terrorism. And that made

me think of the interrogation I'd already had, which had lasted eight hours and was probably against my human rights. They'd threatened to arrest *me* several times for 'perverting the course of justice' because I wouldn't tell them anything.

*'I don't think you're telling us the whole truth, Harry.'*

That's what they called me – Harry, not 'Mr Latimer'. Probably an attempt to make me feel like a little kid, even though they'd suggested – in a way they probably thought was suave and subtle – that I could be tried as an adult, despite being still only seventeen.

We were pulling out of Carlisle when a shadow fell over me. There was a free seat beside me, and if the guy was about to tell me he'd booked the window, then he'd better be ready to fight me for it.

'Harry Latimer, where the hell have you been?'

I knew that voice. I looked round and up. Jasper Knightley was standing in the aisle. The sun was setting behind him and he was bathed in a wash of red light. He was looking down at me in absolute astonishment, as if he'd found me under his kitchen sink.

'Oh,' I said, too surprised to even seem surprised. 'It's you.'

He swung his duffle bag up into the rack and ducked into the seat beside me, somehow managing to fill more space than he actually occupied, which was a little trick of his.

'You've not been arrested, have you?' he asked, pulling down the foldaway table that someone had tucked a newspaper into, glancing at the front page. I knew Jasper wasn't the least bit interested in the news – or anything more recent than the Romans – but he can't ignore something that's there.

I felt people turn to look at us and the silent prickle of them listening in.

At the question, I think something in my face twitched. 'Uh, no ... Why would you think that?'

'Because one time when I called your phone, a police officer answered.'

Oh, yeah. They had taken my phone at one point. They'd probably been through all my messages. I hoped they got a good laugh from it.

'Oh. Well, we're ...' I struggled for a lie. But what was I going to say? '*We're having a bit of policing done?*' I tried again. 'I ...'

'Yes?'

'I can't talk about it on the train.'

His eyes lit up with undisguised interest.

'*Really?*' he asked, with a relish I felt was rather insensitive. 'How fascinating. Well, you have to tell me now.'

'I can't.'

'You could say it quietly.'

'No.'

'You could write it down.'

'Shut up.'

'You could say it in Latin.'

'What? No, I couldn't!'

'Try.'

I sighed. 'Fine. Uh ... *Pater mea* ...'

'*Meus*,' Jasper corrected.

'You don't even know what I was going to say.'

'"Father" is masculine. Or at least mine is.'

'You know what? Forget it.'

'No, no,' he said, folding up the newspaper and tossing it on to an empty seat across the aisle. 'Tell me.'

I shook my head. 'I can't. I don't know how.'

'Is your dad dead?'

'No.'

'Is he dying?'

'Stop guessing.'

'Are *you* dying?'

'No, shut up.'

'But are –'

'Why don't you tell me how the play went?' I suggested, fixing him with the sternest look I could manage.

Jasper frowned. 'What play?'

I stared at him. '*The* play. Henry IV. The play we were both meant to be in.'

'Oh,' he said, laughing. '*That* play. It's weird how you forget these things. Yeah, it went all right.'

'Did it?' I asked. I didn't really believe him, and I sort of didn't want to believe him. I was meant to have played the main role, after all.

‘Yep. My greatest performance yet, I think. I might retire now, actually.’

‘Who played Hal?’ I asked.

‘I did,’ Jasper said, looking as satisfied with himself as if they’d actually crowned him prince.

‘What? Then who played Falstaff?’

‘Freddy Simpson.’

‘Oh. I guess that makes sense.’ Freddy Simpson was giant, loud and laughed more than he spoke. ‘Then who played ...?’

‘Oli Green.’

‘What? Really? I thought he was only meant to be doing the lights.’

Jasper shrugged. ‘I’ll admit, he could have been better,’ he said. ‘But he didn’t have a very big part, and Freddy was in his element.’

I looked around the carriage. ‘Why are you coming back alone? Where is everyone else?’

‘Oh, they got an earlier train,’ he said. ‘Don’t you remember we were meant to leave this morning?’

I racked my memory. I’d lost track of the days since my dad’s arrest. We were supposed to go to the Globe the day after the production and there was another day in London after that. It had been three days – no, four, since it was the evening – since I’d left them. I’d messaged my drama teacher only once, claiming my little sister had pneumonia. I don’t know where I’d got that idea.

‘Why didn’t you go with them?’ I asked.

‘I did. But I got off the train and came back.’

‘Why?’

‘To look for you.’

‘For me?’

‘Yes. Would it kill you to answer your phone once in a while?’

I started reaching into my pocket, but drew my hand back. ‘I haven’t really thought about it,’ I said. This was kind of true, in that I *had* thought about it occasionally, but only as a vague and not very urgent idea, and then I’d forget about it again. ‘And I haven’t really had time.’ This was a little less true.

Jasper was looking very closely at me. His brown eyes were very dark, so dark they were almost flat black at times, and the intensity of his look was a little unnerving.

I cleared my throat. 'So, if you came back for me, how come you got on at Carlisle?'

'Where? Oh. Right. The place where ... Well.' He cleared his throat in turn, looking uneasy. 'I'm not that great at this whole rail travel thing.'

'OK ...'

'So, I meant to go back, but I didn't know how.'

'Couldn't you have asked someone?'

'I wanted to appear competent.'

'It didn't work.'

'Perhaps not,' he said. He'd slid down his seat as we'd been talking, so that our faces were more or less on a level. Now he straightened up. 'But,' he added, regaining his old composure, 'don't think I won't get the whole story out of you. I've had quite a week because of you.'

I couldn't help scoffing a little. 'Huh. Tell me about it.'

The train pulled to a stop.

'Where are we?' Jasper asked, peering out of the window. The sun had set and the station platform was dark.

'Carstairs,' I said, without looking out of the window.

'Where the hell is Carstairs?'

'Where we are.'

'Are you sure we're on the right train?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'Are we in Scotland?'

'Yes.'

'Oh,' he said, sitting back. 'Can't be long now, then.'

He was wrong.