


"SUSPENSEFUL...IMAGINATIVE...
A SPLENDID READ." —*The Poisoned Pen*

THE SHADOWY HORSES

IN THE TRADITION OF BARBARA MICHAELS



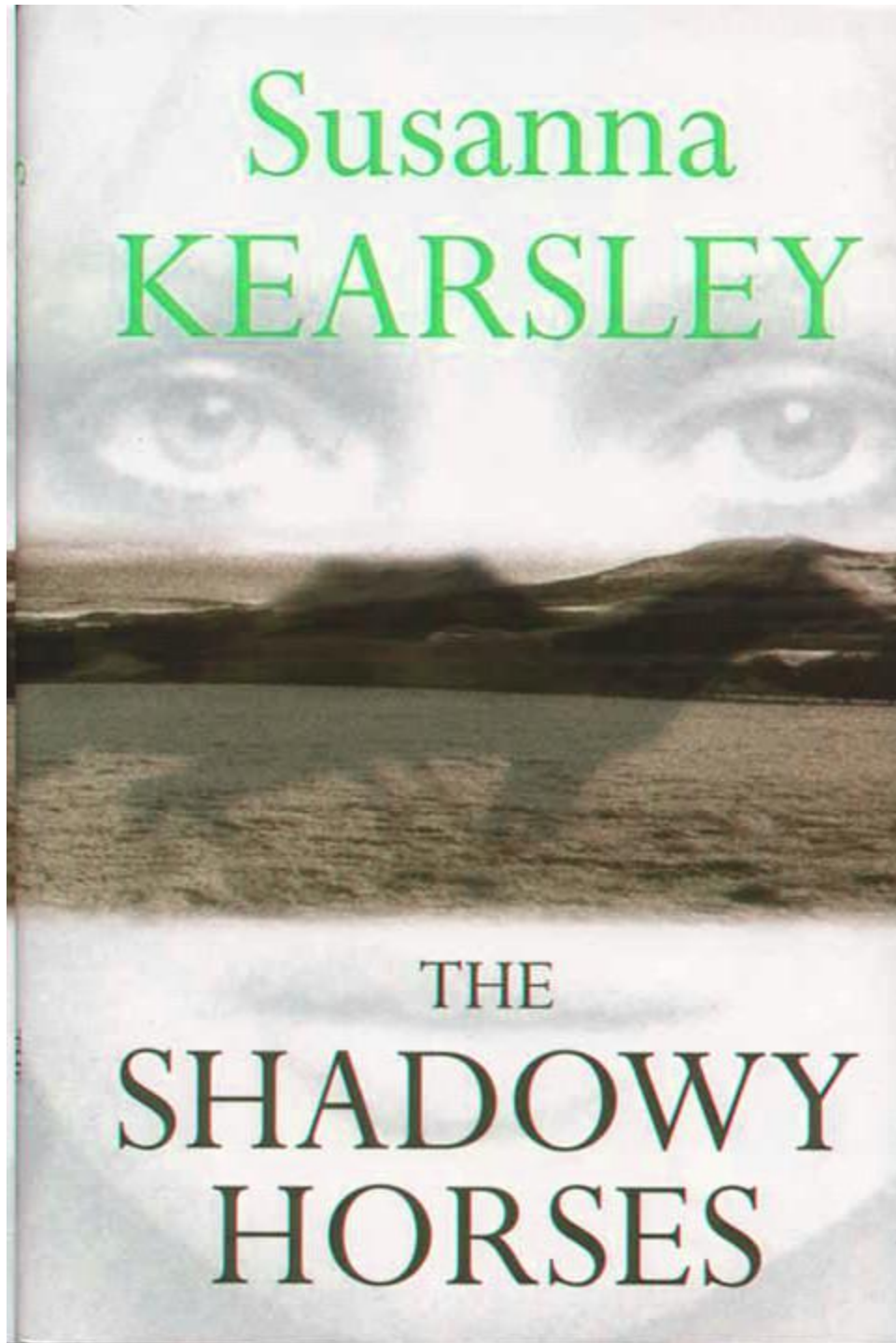
In the mists of time
lies a hidden danger...

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Susanna
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To the People of Eyemouth

So many of you have had a hand in the creation of this book, and I have spent so many hours in your company that now your streets, your homes, your harbor have a warm familiar feel, and I no longer feel a stranger to your town. But I do not belong to Eyemouth. Despite my best efforts I'm sure there will be places in this book where you will find I've got some detail wrong, or used a turn of phrase that's not your own. I can only hope that you'll forgive me any errors. And I hope that you will all accept this novel as a gift of thanks, from one to whom you've always shown great kindness.

I hear the Shadowy Horses, their long manes a-shake,
Their hoofs heavy with tumult, their eyes glimmering white;...

O vanity of Sleep, Hope, Dream, endless Desire,
The Horses of Disaster plunge in the heavy clay:
Beloved, let your eyes half close, and your heart beat
Over my heart, and your hair fall over my breast,
Drowning love's lonely hour in deep twilight of rest,
And hiding their tossing manes and their tumultuous feet.

W. B. Yeats, "He Bids His Beloved Be At Peace"

FIRST HORSE

... that delirious man

Whose fancy fuses old and new,

And flashes into false and true.

And mingles all...

Tennyson, "In Memoriam", XVI

I

The bus had no business stopping where it did. We should have gone straight on across the Coldingham Moor, with Dunbar to the back of us and the English border drawing ever nearer, but instead we stopped, and the shaggy-faced cattle that lifted their heads on the far side of the fence appeared to share my surprise when the driver cut the engine to an idle.

A fierce blast of wind rocked the little ten-seater bus on its tires and drove a splattering of cold spring rain against the driver's windscreen, but he took no notice. He shook out a well-thumbed newspaper and settled back, humming tunelessly to himself. Curious, I shifted in my seat to peer out my own fogging window.

There seemed, at first glance, nothing to stop for, only the cattle and a few uninterested sheep, picking their way across a ragged landscape that was turning green reluctantly, as if someone had told it only yesterday that spring had come. Beyond the moor, lost somewhere in the impenetrable mist, rose the wild, romantic Lammermuir Hills I'd read about as a child. And in the opposite direction, although I couldn't see it either, the cold North Sea bit deep into the coastal line of cliffs.

The wind struck again, broadside, and the little bus shuddered. I sighed, and watched my breath condense upon the chattering window glass.

Impulsiveness, my mother always said, was one of my worst flaws, second only to my habit of speaking to strangers. After twenty-nine years I'd grown accustomed to her heavy sighs and shaking head, and to her firm conviction I'd end up a sad statistic on the nightly news. But now, as I squinted out at the bleak, unwelcoming scenery, I grudgingly admitted that my mother had a point.

It had been impulse, after all, that had brought me from my London flat to Scotland in the first place. Impulse, and the slick, persuasive writing-style

of Adrian Sutton-Clarke. He knew me too well, did Adrian, and he had phrased his summons craftily—his promise of "the perfect job" set like a jewel at the center of a long letter that was so deliciously mysterious, so full of hints of grand adventure, that I couldn't possibly resist it. Adrian, for all his faults, had rarely steered me wrong. And if today was anything to go by, I decided, he hadn't been lying about the adventure.

Not that one could really blame British Rail for what had happened. My train had certainly set out from King's Cross cheerily enough, and even after we'd spent twenty minutes on a siding waiting for a points failure to be corrected, the engine had pushed ahead with vigor, determined to make up the time. It was only after our second delay north of Darlington, because of sheep on the line, that the train had begun to show signs of weariness, creaking and rolling from side to side in a rocking motion that lulled me instantly to sleep.

I had stayed sleeping right through Durham, then Newcastle, and finally Berwick upon Tweed, where I was meant to get off. When the train lurched to a stop at Dunbar, I'd scrambled down onto the platform with the familiar resigned feeling that told me I was lost. Well, not so much lost, really, as diverted. And the fact that my train had been an hour late coming into Dunbar proved something of a complication.

"You might have taken the 5:24," the stationmaster had informed me, in an effort to be helpful, "or the 5:51. But they've both gone. There'll not be another train to Berwick now till 7:23."

"I see." Nearly an hour and a half to wait. I hated waiting. "I don't suppose there's a bus?"

"To Berwick? Aye, there is, at..." he'd searched his clockwork memory for the time, "... 6:25. Just around the corner, there, and up the road a ways—that's where it stops."

And so I'd wrestled my suitcase around the corner and up the road to the small bus shelter, my spirits lifting somewhat as I read the posted timetable telling me the bus to Berwick travelled via Cockburnspath and Coldingham and Eyemouth.