

## The Name I Choose

**Holly Brough**

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*In the historical romance novel *The Name I Choose*, a young woman escapes her bleak origins and pursues genuine love.*

In Holly Brough's historical romance novel *The Name I Choose*, an abused domestic worker in Spain finds refuge with an Englishman.

In 1839, fifteen-year-old Amalia is sent to work on the Tudós Estate under the pretense that she'll tend to the family's children. When the estate's foreboding patriarch, Manuel, takes a sexual interest in her, the members of the household accept this in silence. He alludes to the fact that he knew Amalia's mother too. There are hints of sadism in Manuel's tense, quiet pursuit of Amalia—and in her evasions of him. Their brushes with each other are suggestive; violence is implied by his menacing, powerful presence.

Manuel's plans are relegated to the novel's backdrop while its early chapters meander through accounts of Amalia's impetuous curiosity about her sumptuous surroundings. She is guileless and naïve; she establishes a sweet, supportive friendship with a fellow maid who encourages her to remember their low position and avoid trouble. She finds occasional reprieve from her worries in caring for the family's horses. Later, a traveling duke, Francis, seduces Amalia; the development is abrupt and leads to distracting shifts in the book's point of view.

The book's opening is harrowing, sharing information with the audience that Amalia herself is not privy to. Indeed, the book emphasizes outside forces on Amalia's life (she's penniless, for instance, due to a deal that Manuel had struck with her parents), giving its first half a deterministic sensibility. Further, the people who surround her are characterized in overly broad terms: many either function as obstacles in her life or show her just enough empathy to make her situation bearable. Later, Amalia becomes a more assertive, convincing heroine—after her circumstances prompt her to flee Manuel. She displays ingenuity when it comes to cooking and finds clever ways to avoid compromising herself further; her days are all about survival.

As the novel progresses, Amalia nurses suspicions that men cannot be good. These beliefs taint her experiences. She also has a serendipitous encounter with a grandmotherly figure who helps her and shares background information with her. The latter development is cut too short to be fully satisfying, though.

The book's true romance is approached in a gradual manner, marked by hesitance, wavering trust, and some hope. A captain enters Amalia's life; he is chivalrous and makes an effort to help her. But amending the wrongs that were done to Amalia is a complicated prospect, and the pursuit of information about her true parentage muddles these developments. The book's dramatic conclusion includes both predictable elements and encouraging ones.

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KAREN RIGBY (March 28, 2023)

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