

## Chapter 1

Eve was hanging washing in the small courtyard when she heard the knock. She dropped the clothes pegs and ran across the searing cobbles to the black door in the high stone wall. She wanted it to be her brother David, because he was missing and she was afraid.

Her heart raced as she opened the door and the scent of fresh bread, herbs and coffee wafted in from the street. Disappointment seared through her as she realised at once that it wasn't David. Outside, in the narrow alleyway, squinting in the fierce sunlight, stood two men. Eve recognized the shorter, fatter one as Luigi Grassi, one of the fascist henchmen of the Italian governor of Rhodes Island. His early morning appearance at her parents' house in the Old City of Rhodes Town, filled her with horror. Her mouth went dry, her heartbeat stampeding afresh. Had these men come to tell them that David had been found injured or dead?

'*Si, signori?*' she asked, unable to prevent the wobble in her voice. She had reported David's disappearance four days ago and Grassi had dealt with her then, all smiles as he rudely appraised her blonde, slender figure. He was a blackshirt bully, and she was wary of him. These closing years of the 1930s were anxious times, especially on Rhodes.

'May we come in, little English signorina?' Grassi answered his smile widening. He removed his fedora hat and stepped through into the yard without waiting for Eve's permission. 'There's no need to be alarmed. We've had no news of your brother. This visit is merely a courtesy.' He nodded to the shirt which had dropped from Eve's suddenly nerveless fingers. 'You've lost your washing.'

Eve reluctantly stepped towards the thick-set Grassi, but the man with him was ahead of her, plucking David's best shirt from the cobbles in a single, smooth movement. He held it out, his deep-set eyes full of sympathy.

'Thank you.' Eve blushed as the stranger looked at her. In her entire nineteen years, she could not remember being scrutinized with such care.

Boldly she stared back at the tall, long-legged man, who looked as if he belonged in uniform instead of his light summer suit and boater. Unlike the balding Grassi, he had thick dark-brown hair, with black brows and lashes. His handsome face seemed full of a contained energy that might be ardent, Eve thought, but might also be cruel. She frowned and took the damp clothing from him, bundling it into her wicker basket. 'Follow me.'

She hurried across the yard, disconcerted when the stranger fell into step beside her. 'There's been no news?'

'None from our end,' said Luigi Grassi. Catching up, the fascist official put an arm through hers, smiling as she flinched. He patted her hand. 'But David is a man, and English. You should not worry so much, signorina. We know that he is not involved in any trouble—yet. So far, you English have understood laws, and empire.'

Walking on her right side, the stranger cleared his throat. 'I am very sorry,' he said, with a sincerity Eve instantly believed. 'I hope that you will soon have news of your brother's safe return.' He ducked under the washing line as they marched, three abreast, past Eve's pots of basil and flowering marjoram, towards the arched stone doorway of the ancient town house. 'I wish to help. Signor Grassi has asked me—'

The young man broke off as Eve pushed open the house door and entered first,

stepping into the shuttered calm of a small tiled foyer.

'Please,' she gestured them in.

He cleared his throat. 'You are the housekeeper here, no?' he asked, speaking for the first time in careful English.

Grassi gave a bark of laughter, muttering something in an Italian dialect which Eve was glad she did not understand. 'Yes, in a way,' she replied to Grassi's more sensitive partner.

It was true. She washed and cleaned and shopped and cooked and had done so from an early age, bringing a little order into her parents' cheerfully chaotic household. Her mother had no taste for 'domestic drudgery' as she called it and was unable to do more than dusting because of the onset of rheumatoid arthritis. Once active, now, during bad flare-ups of the disease, Philippa Burnett became bedridden. Eve was grateful that her clever mother remained free in her mind, continuing her studies despite her pain.

Eve's father, George Burnett, was also a scholar. In the twenties, he and Eve's mother had taken part in archaeological digs in Turkey. Now, in 1937, semi-retired to the congenial climate of Rhodes, George pursued an interest in the former knights of the island. Although English, Eve and her older brother David had been brought up amidst the classical ruins of Troy and Greece. David, a schoolmaster, shared his parents' passion for antiquity and chuckled at Eve's dream to go to England to study nursing. 'Face it, Evie,' he'd said, 'You're a bright little thing but scarcely university material.'

Remembering, Eve's face burned at his unfair comment as she opened the double doors to the lighter, airy sitting room where her parents spent much of their time and where they were now.

'Forgive the interruption,' she told them in English, 'But these gentlemen have asked to speak to you.' Seeing their instant alarm, knowing they were concerned for her brother, as she was, she added softly, 'There's no news yet of David.' She tried to smile a reassurance, feeling her lips tight in her taut face.

Philippa Burnett recovered first. Covered by a light paisley shawl despite the early summer heat, sitting in her armchair close to the half-opened courtyard window, she looked as calm as an empress. Regally, she waved the two men to a couple of straight-backed chairs opposite the circular table where she and her husband were reading. 'Of course. Would you bring us some lemonade, please?' she asked Eve.

'Yes, Mum.' Eve withdrew, but not before she heard her father remark dryly in English 'Naturally, we're always extremely keen to hear from our Italian overlords.'

Eve chewed her lower lip in alarm, rushing to the kitchen to complete her task as rapidly as possible. Her father and David were idealists, outspoken in their criticism of Mussolini, the Italian dictator.

Her father's wry comment about overlords was true: for several years the Greek island of Rhodes had been controlled by the Italians. Under the fascist rule of Mussolini, that control had become harsher, with corrupt officials like Luigi Grassi harassing Eve's Greek friends and neighbors. As resident alien English, she and her family had so far escaped persecution, but Eve was worried as she prepared a tray of her home-made lemonade.

Was David involved with one of the Greek anti-fascist movements? Was that why he was missing? What had he done?

Hoping that none of these fears showed in her face, Eve checked her appearance in the

antique mirror in the foyer as she left the kitchen. Her golden hair, pinned in its simple pleat, was reassuringly neat, but her mouth was pale, her gray eyes haunted against her peach tan. Conscious that the tall, considerate stranger—who knew English—would miss nothing, Eve rubbed her lips with a work-roughened hand and willed herself to walk slowly.

In the high-ceilinged sitting room, she found Grassi strutting to and fro on the rag rug. In Italian, lately the official language of Rhodes, he was hectoring her parents about David's 'undesirable' friends.

'Your son has fallen into wild company: vandals, petty criminals, the kind who daub political slogans on this island's public buildings...'

'Sounds rather as if you're speaking from personal experience,' George Burnett remarked in English, polishing his gold-framed spectacles.

Eve laid her tray on the book-strewn table, wishing her father would be quiet for once. Locked into their study of the distant past, her mother and father seemed perilously unaware of the present. A protective rush of feeling overwhelmed her. Longing to stay, but aware that neither of her parents considered her grown-up enough to take part in a discussion with two fascist officials, she turned to go.

'Please—stay.' The tall stranger rose from his straight chair and offered it to Eve. He glanced at her parents. 'With your permission?' he asked them in English. 'This concerns your daughter also.'

George Burnett nodded and Eve sat down, detesting her own fear. Grassi was pugnacious but stupid: she knew he was interested in her and she felt reasonably sure that she might be able to use that interest to distract him. The man standing before her was different, sharper. There was a honed, muscular quality about him that his cream suit failed to hide. She wouldn't stand a chance against him physically, and Eve had the uncomfortable foreboding that he was more than her mental match.

Perhaps sensing her as the easiest target, the stranger seemed to address his remarks almost exclusively to her. His voice was low, calm, his English clear, but Eve remained on her guard. If David was involved with the Greek resistance, this man was her enemy.