

PROLOGUE The Greek Civil War

During world war ii, Germany's occupation was strongly opposed by the Greek Guerilla forces intent upon doing whatever it took to drive out the foreign power. British and American forces aided in Stalin's effort, supplying arms and ammunition to the courageous communist rebel fighters. Unbeknownst to either party at the time, this support would soon falter as world war ii ended and events began to shift. Two main guerilla forces were operating in Greece. one, known as EAM-ELAS, participated in the majority of the fighting and was highly influenced by Stalinist communist rule, while the other, the eDeS, stepped in to occasionally take part in their own, less frequent, uprisings. The rebel fighters were well known as Andartes (rebels), tough and unbending, passionate, and always ready to spring to violence when it was called for. So passionate were they in their cause that in early 1944, the eAmelAS ventured off into the mountains, did away with the Greek

government, and set up their own provisional government in the process. The political and social unrest mounted, when, in an effort to bring the war-torn country together, British forces attempted to form a kind of coalition – which the communist guerillas adamantly resisted, refusing to give up their way of life, wanting communist rule. This marked the beginning of the bloody Greek Civil war, a war that mercilessly pitted brother against brother, neighbor against neighbor, and friend against friend. if you were fortunate enough not to have lost a loved one during world war ii, chances are you would feel the stinging pain of loss amid the fierce currents of the Civil War. The war was interrupted in 1945, when both parties cooled their heels and attempted to patch things. early that year, the communists agreed to disband their forces and opt for sudden peace. At last the people of Greece could go on rebuilding their lives. immediately following this refreshing turn of events, however, general elections were held in Greece, and the majority of elected officials were, predictably, royalists. Soon after, the Greek king found his way back to the throne. matters seemed to be headed down the same old track, and the nowdisbanded guerillas were beginning to fear a regression to the government's old ways. So, in 1946, a group of underground guerillas burst into action, fully capable and prepared to fight, stronger now than ever with the Stalin connection. These Greek resistance fighters fought hard, hoping to inspire the people around them to take action as well. They

had a vision that united all people, regardless of class level or religious affiliation, giving each individual a chance at the possibilities that a social utopia had to offer. The Andartes were unwavering patriots who clung to ideals of men such as Tito and Stalin. in their valiant struggle, they saw a brighter future, one that ensured the lowly villager a chance to rise above his status in life and achieve the kinds of things that he could only dream of. They lived and fought as brothers, and extended a siblinglike mentality toward women as well, even though females were poorly educated and horribly mistreated at the time.

An enemy of the communist guerillas was not handled with polite apathy or casual indifference. instead, enemies were robbed, raped, and even murdered. Young girls and boys were abducted, taken out to a mountain hideaway, and then forced to fight in the rebel armies as the reality of total communism became apparent. Both the royalists and the communists were suspicious of everybody and everything that crossed their paths. Both sides were intent upon coming out the other end shining and victorious. This fierceness of intent led to a mentality that encouraged torture for the procurement of information. homes were burned down and people were brutally killed, sometimes to attain information, other times to spread the disease of terror. in the end, more Greek people were killed during the Civil war by each other than at the hands of the Germans in world war ii. Things were so gruesome that Great Britain wanted nothing to do with the situation and, for financial reasons, washed their hands of it. with that, the United States took over, supplying the royal Greek government with all of the troops and economic aid needed to keep its fight strong. America feared that if the

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communists came out victorious, Greece would accompany its neighboring countries of Yugoslavia and Bulgaria by forging a communist agenda as the U.S. marshall Plan came in effect. America's aid proved highly beneficial in 1949 as the rebel guerillas were pushed away from the mountains and out of the country. The Greek Army had accomplished what it set out to do. Any remaining Andartes fled, most of them to the country of Albania. From that point on, they were forbidden from ever setting foot in the country of Greece. The war left roughly fifty thousand people dead, along with half a million Greeks displaced from their homes. in addition, this caused fellow neighbors to be untrusting and horribly suspicious of one another's actions. it was every man for himself. People were desperately trying to rebuild, and some stopped at nothing to ensure their survival. These wars tore families apart and destroyed lives and homes. it was because of the repercussion following the Civil war that i was sent away from my family, sent away from the only place i had ever known. Times were hard, so mercilessly dire, that the lack of options left a gaping hole in our day-to-day lives. There were many children and babies left on door steps of orphanages all throughout Greece, women having babies out of wedlock, parents who could not feed their children, or women whose fiancés were killed in the war and now found themselves unmarried with a child and unaccepted by the Greek culture. other families trapped by extreme poverty succumbed to programs that offered a better life in distant places for their children. Not understanding the finality of their actions, many bore the burden of guilt for the rest of their lives.

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iSS, international Social Services, was an organization that helped develop one of those programs initiated by Queen Fredericka and the American government to bring these children to the US from Greece and place them in families of Jewish origin. Queen Fredericka had guilty feelings that she didn't do enough to protect the Jews during world war ii and the German occupation of Greece. These children were not selected randomly but organized secretly either from couples traveling to Greece and visiting orphanages or careful selection via iSS. history also tells us children were bought and sold in black market trade. i was not from an orphanage and did not meet my pending adoptive parents before i left the island of Pergos for America.

CHAPTER ONE Never Forget

my attempts to locate my birthplace in Greece on various maps were made to no avail. I could find no way to comprehend it, no way to wrap my mind around it completely. when i left my village at the age of nine in 1956, my knowledge of America was naïve, and geographical distance related to nothing much larger than my surroundings. Now, at twenty-five and living in this vast country, i think back to when somber villagers pulled me aside and spoke in low, hushed voices, repeatedly reminding me, never forget where you're from. i read somewhere once that when a trauma happens, a chemical is released in the brain, causing one to vividly remember, even many years later, every detail about the experience. leaving my mother in Greece, boarding the plane en route to the states, adapting to a new culture— these events remain fresh in my mind as though they had happened yesterday. images of the childhood i left behind pulsed and burned within me. i could not get away from them, could not fully allow myself

to relax into the new life i had been given. All of my years in America had been spent clinging to that reminder, to the hope that one day i would return to the land i knew so well. Yet the village did not seem to exist anywhere. As my mind grew tangled with thoughts, i struggled to make some sense of the situation. Zoya, my adoptive mother, in her penchant for taunting me, often had told me that my village no longer existed. with a cruel smile, she described a horrible earthquake that sent the entire village into the sea, killing everybody i knew and loved. Upon saying these words, Zoya would step back, her eyes full of mocking laughter as she searched my face for the slightest change of expression. She knew exactly what she was doing. i believe she wanted me to feel pain and her words were meant to jab and cut at the deep wounds already engraved upon my soul. whenever she said these things, my ears heard the vicious words but my heart tightened in my chest – as though shielding itself, shutting out all traces of matters both dark and shattering. i refused to let Zoya inside. i could not bring myself to believe what she said. every aspect of her being rang false to me. Yet, i couldn't help but worry about my family: Where is my mother? Is she lying at the bottom of the sea, pushed there by the violent shudders of the earth? i remembered that, as a child, i did, in fact, experience earthquakes in my tiny village. Did Zoya know that we had them there? Though i tried to keep myself from falling prey to her horrible words, at times i worried that what she said was true. When I first entered the home, Peter, my adoptive brother, who was also from Greece, and i would speak in the only language

i knew; and when i was sick or fearful, Peter would be the one i would run to. he was my one link to the warm, familiar home i'd known before. Talking to him was my one comfort, but Zoya could not stand secrecy and forbade us our private language. As I grew older, I more firmly realized that nearly everything Zoya told me lacked reality. As a young girl in America, i looked out the window of my room and squinted at the other houses, wondering if all of the people inside them struggled with the same

stark realities. when i was fourteen years old, the tides shifted in another direction entirely, and the pattern of isolation and oppression was no more. Zoya's reign seemed to be reaching an end. I'm not certain exactly when Zoya's life began to unravel. it might have been from the day she met me at the airport or perhaps the day she retired from her work as a nurse. regardless, at times she seemed to take great pleasure in destroying herself, almost as if the alcohol she consumed endowed her with a malevolent power. Through her vicious actions and slurred speech, she freely tossed a variety of vulgarities and insults in every direction. her resentment was at its highest when she shouted things like "You are a dirty little peasant girl that your own mother didn't want." From the day i arrived, my existence seemed to pose a threat to her. Since Shully had always wanted a little girl, my entrance placated that desire; however, Zoya never felt the same. She resented Shully's adoration of me. She seemed to resent the fact that i had walked into their world. "You are a witch, a little devil, trying to take my husband away from me, with your big eyes and long eyelashes," she would say. with alcohol hazily jumbling the cells in her brain,

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she would point and yell at me, accusing me of being Shully's mistress. This occurred on several occasions. i simply stood there, listening to her words, knowing from experience that if i remained still enough, she would stop. i had no way to defend myself against such accusations. i didn't even know what the word mistress meant. however, even without that knowledge, i clearly knew her blaringly apparent jealousy. i did not know, though, what i had done to be deserving of such torment. A child, i had no choice except to bear it. The morning hours were the only ones in which her right-minded capabilities were present. There was a normalcy to her, a touch of togetherness screwed in tight by the steel of her cold, sharp mind. She went about the house, engaging herself in chores and the cooking of meals as though some semblance of sanity existed within her. As the day rolled forward, all that would change. with each drink she consumed, the layers of polish wore off and she became another person entirely. The cool, placidness of her gaze was replaced with a vibrant intensity, a crazed disorder and compulsion. her perfect hair became a disheveled mess. mad vibrations twisted their way around the house, casting a dark and listless shadow in every corner. By the time evening crept in, she was a raging alcoholic, consumed by the burning desire to taunt, enflame, and ravage. The more she drank, the more my brother and i feared her. Since we weren't allowed to watch television, Peter and i would each be in our separate rooms during the afternoons studying, and then reading into the evening. Although the confines of my four walls were, at times, quite suffocating, I was relieved to be shut away from the swirl of rage that was Zoya.

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She needed to be in control and meddle in all of the events of the house under the guise of performing her motherly duty. The more she involved herself, the more i felt how different she was from my mama i left behind. how did i get here? why am i not free to go home and play with my friends? why couldn't i immerse myself in my mother's love? with the events of why and how i came to America swimming in my memory, i relived the moments of my journey over and over. Despite these wealthy surroundings, i craved interaction, touch, being free to come and go as i had at home in Pergos. how did i come to be in

this place where i am told when to come out of my room and when to go in? i longed for a natural flow of activities, a normal life. I began to feel as though I had been locked in a dark chamber.