

# Chapter Two

Florence, November 1943

It was almost 9 pm when the train rattled through the outskirts of Florence. Marina had been so nervous she kept a book in front of her the whole ninety-minute journey. She kept expecting a German officer to appear and order her off the train. But no one disturbed her. Now she closed the book and forced herself to relax.

At the train station in Rome, she'd called Bernard to tell him she was coming. A housekeeper answered the phone. Bernard was out, but the woman had promised to give him the message.

Bernard and her father had known each other for years; he was a frequent client of the gallery. Bernard was one of the world's leading authorities on Renaissance art. His collection included paintings that her father wasn't ashamed to drool over: early Titians, a da Vinci, a Caravaggio.

A few years ago, her father had saved Bernard's life. Marina heard the story a dozen times, usually over dinner with a client or a new artist.

Bernard and her father had attended an auction at a palazzo in Rome's Parioli district. Bernard had his purchase - a valuable book of

early Renaissance sketches – under his arm when a thief approached them, brandishing a gun.

‘Bernard was about to hand the book over when I stopped him,’ her father would say, his eyes dancing after a few glasses of wine. ‘Instead, I reached into my pocket and pulled out a knife. I brought the knife so close to the thief’s face so quickly, he was practically blinded by the blade. The man ran.

‘Afterwards, Bernard couldn’t decide whether to be furious with me or grateful,’ he continued. This was the part of the story he most enjoyed telling. ‘First, he yelled at me. “Who brandishes a knife at a man holding a gun?” But I told him no thief would expect you to stop him with a knife. By the time he figured out I was essentially unarmed, he’d scurried away in surprise.’

Bernard had vowed to her father that he would someday repay him. And if he couldn’t repay Vittorio himself, perhaps he could help Marina.

She let the anger and pain wash over her again. Her father had tried to protect her, keeping her in the dark about Enrico. Just as she had been trying to protect him when she didn’t tell him about Nicolo. But she couldn’t think about Nicolo now. All she wanted was to keep the memories of her father fresh in her mind, to keep going over them as if they were a painting that the artist never wanted to finish.

The train pulled into Santa Maria Novella station in Florence and Marina felt like she could finally breathe. She caught sight of the city – the red dome of the Duomo, the Pitti Palace large and imposing under a full moon – and almost wept with relief and exhaustion.

## THE ITALIAN GIRL

She and her father had visited Florence many times. He considered it second only to Rome as a centre of art. Marina had stood in awe of Botticelli's *Venus* and gazed for hours at Michelangelo's *David* and Donatello's sculpture of Saint George. She wondered how she would ever enjoy walking through the Uffizi Gallery and Galleria dell'Accademia again without him beside her.

The air in the train station was freezing and she was glad she had grabbed her coat from the downstairs closet. Her teeth chattered – whether from the cold weather or the terrible day, she wasn't sure. She still couldn't take in everything that had happened. The grief washed over her in waves, and she could barely catch her breath. But she remembered what her father had said to Paolo: he had gone on living after her mother's death, and she had to do the same.

Now that she was in Florence, she realised she didn't know how to get to the villa. There were no taxis and she doubted any buses operated at night. She still didn't know if Bernard had received her message.

Outside, a fair-haired man with patrician features stood next to a small car. He looked only a decade or so older than she was, and he wore an expensive-looking dark overcoat. He watched her with clear blue eyes.

'Are you Marina?' he asked, approaching her.

Marina stiffened. He had a slight accent that almost sounded German.

'It's all right,' he said, as if reading her thoughts. He held out his hand. 'My name is Ludwig Heydenreich. I'm a friend of Bernard's. He called and asked me to collect you. He's terribly sorry that he

wasn't able to pick you up himself. He was visiting a client a few hours away and worried that he'd be late.'

Marina didn't move. He was German. She couldn't shake his hand, and she certainly couldn't get in his car.

'I'm sorry, you must have mistaken me for someone else,' she said, turning away.

It didn't matter that she had no other way to reach the villa. It could be a trap. Bernard had been out when she called. He might not even know she was here.

Ludwig followed her across the pavement. He reached forward and touched her arm.

'I promise you, I'm a friend,' he tried again. 'He gave me a description of you. We can find a phone booth and call the villa if you like. Anna, the housekeeper, will vouch for me.'

Marina stopped and grudgingly turned around. Ludwig looked nothing like the German officers who prowled the streets of Rome. His expression was kind and his eyes crinkled at the corners when he smiled.

'How were you sure it was me?' she asked cautiously. 'Surely there are other women with light brown hair on the platform.'

Ludwig dropped his hand and smiled warmly.

'None of them are alone and none of them are so young and pretty.' He pointed to her suitcase. 'Please come with me. It's much too chilly to be standing out here. Bernard will be furious if I let you catch a cold.'

Marina's stomach lurched. Only a few hours ago, Germans had killed her father and Enrico. Their blood was all over the basement floor. The wind blew up from the Arno and she wrapped her coat around her. If she didn't accept his offer, she might freeze to death before she ever reached the villa.