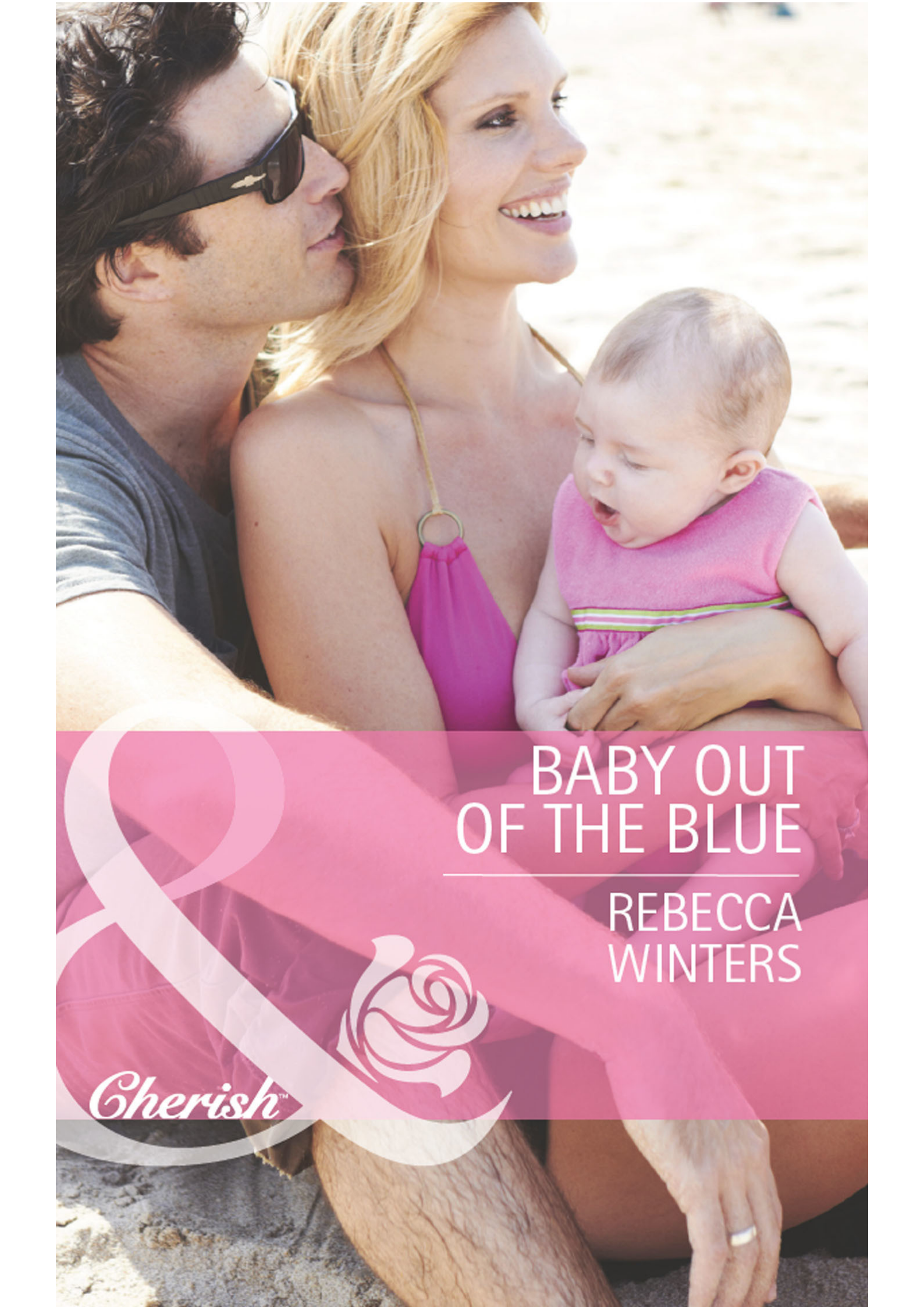


A photograph of a man, a woman, and a baby on a beach. The man is on the left, wearing sunglasses and a grey t-shirt, looking towards the woman. The woman is in the center, smiling, wearing a pink halter-neck top, and holding the baby. The baby is on the right, wearing a pink sleeveless top, looking down. The background is a sandy beach with some blurred figures in the distance.

BABY OUT OF THE BLUE

REBECCA
WINTERS

A stylized white rose logo is positioned above the word "Cherish".

*Cherish*TM

Rebecca Winters

Baby out of the Blue

«HarperCollins»

Winters R.

Baby out of the Blue / R. Winters — «HarperCollins»,

Holidaying in Greece, Fran is shocked to discover a tiny orphaned baby who has been swept away in a tornado! The baby's uncle and guardian, Nik, is relieved when he sees Demi is safe with Fran. But can Fran and Nik dare believe that their dreams of parenthood – and love – might come true at last?

Содержание

About the Author	6
CHAPTER ONE	7
CHAPTER TWO	15
Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.	24



TINY MIRACLES

Two best friends find love, happiness —and little bundles of joy!

Friends Fran and Kellie have been through thick and thin together since childhood, and now both are facing the fact that their dreams of motherhood might never happen.

Follow the two women's stories as they fall in love with two gorgeous Greeks, and find happiness beyond their wildest dreams, as well as the little longed-for miracles they never thought possible...

This month, read Fran's story:

BABY OUT OF THE BLUE

In May comes Kellie's story:

ALONG CAME TWINS...

Dear Reader,

Miracles come in so many assorted ways it would be impossible to name them all. When I thought about writing a set of stories about miracle babies, my mind ran through a list of possibilities.

While I was pondering the exact one I wanted, I remembered seeing a news headline: Miracle Baby. There was a picture of a baby, old enough to sit up, but you'll never guess where she *was*—*in the middle of a cornfield* in the midwest portion of the US! Her parents had been killed in a tornado ten miles away. Instantly an idea for my novel sprang to mind, and I knew I had to write *Baby Out of the Blue*.

Remember, life is stranger than fiction.

Enjoy!

Rebecca Winters

About the Author

REBECCA WINTERS, whose family of four children has now swelled to include five beautiful grandchildren, lives in Salt Lake City, Utah, in the land of the Rocky Mountains. With canyons and high alpine meadows full of wildflowers, she never runs out of places to explore. As well as her favorite vacation spots in Europe, they often end up as background for her romance novels, because writing is her passion, along with her family and church.

Rebecca loves to hear from readers. If you wish to email her, please visit her website, www.cleanromances.com.

Baby Out of
the Blue
Rebecca Winters



www.millsandboon.co.uk

CHAPTER ONE

FRAN MYERS' GAZE fastened on the scenery unfolding at every bend along the coastal road. Against the azure blue of the Aegean, the miles of white beaches with their background of deep green pines didn't seem real. Dark, fast-moving clouds swirled overhead, adding a dramatic aspect to the landscape. The panorama of colors was quite spectacular.

"I didn't know the Greek Riviera was this beautiful, Kellie. I'm in awe. It's so unspoiled here."

"That's why my husband had built the resort where we'll be staying for the next few days. The Persephone is the latest getaway for the very wealthy who can afford to have peace and quiet in total luxury."

It was such a fabulous area, the news didn't surprise Fran. "Is that why you've brought me all the way from Athens? Because you think I need peace and quiet?"

"Exactly the opposite. Many royals come here to vacation. I'm hoping you'll meet one who's unattached and gorgeous. You two will take one look at each other and it'll be love at first sight."

"That'll never happen, not after my bad marriage."

Fran's best friend since childhood flashed her a searching glance.

"Don't look so surprised, Kellie."

"I'm not surprised. What I see is that a vacation for you is long overdue. Every time I've called since your divorce, you've been at the hospital doing your patient advocacy work all hours of the day and night, and you couldn't talk more than a few minutes. You need a passionate romance to bring you back to life!"

"You're hilarious. It's true I've buried myself in work to keep me from thinking, but it's been a year. I'm doing a lot better now."

"Liar. I don't need your mom to tell me you don't have a life and need to take a break in completely different surroundings. I intend to see you're pampered for a change. We'll laze around, swim, sail, hike, do whatever while we scope out eligible men."

"You're incorrigible, but I love you for it. You know very well that when I told you I would come, I didn't expect you to go to this kind of trouble for me. I thought we'd be staying in Athens to see the rest of the sights I missed when I flew over for your wedding. That was too busy a time to get everything in. Besides, your adoring husband couldn't be thrilled with this arrangement."

Kellie waved her hand in the air in a dismissive gesture. "July is Leandros's busiest time. He's off doing business in the Peloponnese and looking for new resort sites in other places. This is the perfect time for me to spend with the person who's been the sister I never had. That's why I called you to come now and wouldn't take no for an answer. We have a lot of catching up to do."

"Agreed."

The two women had been friends since they'd attended the same elementary school in Philadelphia. They could read each other's moods. Having gone through the good and the bad of their lives together, they'd become closer than most sisters.

When they'd been planning this trip, they'd talked about September. But Kellie had changed her mind and was insistent on Fran coming as soon as possible. Something was going on; normally her friend traveled everywhere with her husband. It sounded as though she needed to talk to Fran in person.

Two years ago Kellie had married millionaire Greek business tycoon Leandros Petralia in Athens. Fran had been the matron of honor at her wedding. Though they'd talked on the phone and emailed since then, they'd only seen each other the half a dozen times Kellie had flown home to Pennsylvania to be with her family for a few days. On those short visits Fran could tell her friend was so crazy over her exciting husband, she couldn't bear to be gone from him longer than a few nights.

But clearly that wasn't the case today. Kellie seemed wired, and her show of gaiety was somehow artificial. Physically she was thinner than the last time Fran had seen her. On their five-hour drive to the resort south of Thessalonika, Kellie's glib responses throughout their conversation weren't at all like her.

Fran decided to hold off until tomorrow to have a heart-to-heart with her golden-blond friend. Right now she wanted Kellie to concentrate while she drove the fabulous slate-blue luxury saloon—too fast for Fran's liking. As they whizzed along, Fran's eyes darted to the stormy sky. "Have you noticed how black those clouds ahead are?"

"Yes. It's almost spooky and so windy, it's buffeting the car. That's very strange. This place is legendary for its sunshine. Wouldn't you know it would choose today to cloud up for your arrival?"

"Maybe it's a bad omen and your hubby came back to Athens early only to find you missing."

"Don't be absurd—" Kellie answered with uncharacteristic sharpness. "He's got his secretary with him. Maybe they're really somewhere in the Dodecanese Islands, a favorite place of his when he wants to relax."

With Mrs. Kostas? She was in her late forties.

Her friend's emotional outburst took Fran by surprise. "I was just having some fun with you." She'd never seen Kellie explode this way before.

"I'd rather talk about you. Has Rob called yet, wanting you two to get back together?"

"No. In fact, I've heard he's involved with someone at his work."

"He'll soon realize he's lost the best thing that could ever happen to him."

"Spoken like my best friend."

Kellie had been the maid of honor at Fran's wedding. Four years ago Fran had married Rob Myers after meeting him through mutual friends in Philadelphia. He was an upcoming estate-planning attorney working for a prestigious local law firm. On their third date she'd told Rob that she could never conceive, so if he didn't want to see her again, she'd understand.

He'd told her he didn't have a problem with adoption. It was a great option for childless couples. Besides, he was interested in *her*, and he had proven it by marrying her. After a year passed, she'd brought up the idea of putting in adoption papers, but he'd said it was too soon to think about and kept putting her off.

Eventually she realized he had issues and she suggested they go for counseling so they could talk about them in depth. But the counseling revealed that with the busy law practice thriving, he no longer had the time or the interest to enlarge their family, especially when the child couldn't be their own flesh and blood. Fran was enough for him.

But she wanted children badly. After three years of a married life no longer happy or fulfilling for either of them, they'd agreed to divorce. It was the only way to end the pain. Since then Fran had decided marriage wasn't for her. Kellie scoffed at such nonsense and told her she would find the right husband for her no matter what.

"Kellie? I don't know about you, but I'm thirsty. Let's stop at the village I can see up ahead and get ourselves a drink at one of those cute hotel bars."

"It's only twelve more miles to the Persephone," her friend responded in a clipped tone. "We'll order room service and have dinner in our suite where we can relax. But, of course, if you can't wait..."

"I hope you don't mind."

Kellie's hands tightened on the steering wheel, further proof her friend was barely holding herself in check. "Of course not."

There was no softening of her tone, or a reassuring smile. Right now, Fran was more concerned with Kellie, who'd been driving over the speed limit. She never used to drive this fast. After they stopped for a soda maybe Fran could prevail on her friend to let her drive the rest of the way. She'd use the pretext that she'd never been behind the wheel of a Mercedes before.

Fran wanted both of them to arrive at the resort in one piece. With this wind, the driving could be dangerous. To her alarm, the idea came into her head that Kellie wasn't even seeing the road. Intuition told her the once flourishing Petralia marriage was having problems.

Not Kellie, too.

By the time they reached the village proper the wind was so powerful there was actual debris in the air. "Stop in front of that hotel on the corner, Kellie. It's starting to hail. Let's make a run for it."

The small ice balls pounded down, emptying the street of people rushing to take cover. All the shops and cafés had taken their display items and tables inside. When Fran entered the hotel bar with Kellie, tourists and staff alike were huddled in groups talking and gesticulating while they brushed themselves off.

"Kellie? You understand Greek. What are they saying?"

"I don't know, but I'll find out."

Fran followed her friend over to the counter where Kellie got a waiter's attention. He rattled off an answer to her question. She turned to Fran. "Someone in the back was listening to the radio and heard that tornado-like winds have swept through the area. There's no television reception right now. The police have issued a warning that everyone should stay indoors until the danger has passed. It's a good thing you wanted to stop here."

Considering the violence of the elements, it was providential they'd been passing by this village. "Let's get a drink and find a place to sit down while we wait this out."

After being served, they carried their sodas to an unoccupied bistro table. By now the hail had stopped and a heavy downpour had descended.

Kellie frowned. "I can't believe this weather."

"Since it made the six o'clock news, maybe you ought to call and let Leandros know you're all right."

Her jaw hardened. "He knows. Whenever I leave our apartment, my bodyguard Yannis follows me. If my husband is interested, he'll phone me." She pulled out her cell and checked everything. "Nope. No calls yet. See?" She showed her the screen. "No messages."

"Kellie—" Fran put a hand on her friend's arm. "Tell me what's going on. I'd planned to wait until morning to ask you that question, but since we won't be leaving here any time soon, I'm asking it now. I want to know what's happened to the happiest wife I've ever known. Where did she go?" The reason Kellie had wanted Fran to come to Greece was no longer a mystery.

Kellie averted her soulful brown eyes. "Maybe you should be asking Leandros that question."

"He's not here. *You* are. What's wrong?"

Kellie's face was a study in pain. "I'm losing him, Fran. In fact, I've discovered I never really had him and I can't stand it."

Her friend's emotions were so brittle they'd crack if Fran pushed too hard. Instead of arguing with her that it couldn't possibly be true, she took a deep breath before saying, "Does this have anything to do with the fact that you haven't gotten pregnant yet? You're probably putting too much pressure on yourself to give Leandros a child. These things take time."

"Since I've been diagnosed with seminal plasma hypersensitivity, that's the understatement of the year. I've never wanted to talk about it, but you deserve an explanation."

"Our marriage took a crushing blow when I discovered that the painful itching and hives I experienced after intercourse was because my body is allergic to Leandros's sperm. When the doctor told me twenty thousand-plus women suffer from it in the U.S. alone, I couldn't believe it."

Fran shook her head. "I had no idea."

"I know. Growing up, I never knew such a problem existed. Leandros had to have been devastated, but he was wonderful about it. He's worn a condom every time, but I *know* deep down he must hate it."

“The doctor knew we wanted a baby and said we could try artificial insemination with a good hope of success. They have to wash his sperm of the proteins first before the procedure is done. We’ve been trying that method since last year, but unfortunately it hasn’t worked for us. He said he’s willing to adopt. How’s that for irony after what you’ve lived through? At this point I’m thinking it’s just as well,” came the bleak admission.

Fran couldn’t believe what she was hearing. “What do you mean?”

“I’m talking about Karmela Paulos. She came to work for Leandros a month ago as part of the typing pool.”

Ah. Karmela. The woman couldn’t get to him by other means, so she’d insinuated herself into the office. Now things were starting to make sense.

Karmela Paulos was the gorgeous, raven-haired younger sister of Leandros’s first wife, Petra. Petra had been pregnant when she’d died in a helicopter crash over the Ionian Sea.

Two years later Leandros had met Kellie by accident at the Cassandra in Athens, one of the famous Petralia five-star hotels. It hadn’t taken long before he’d married her, but it seemed that since his late wife’s funeral, Leandros had acquired a constant companion in Karmela who was always around.

Fran had met her at the wedding and hadn’t liked her proprietorial behavior with Leandros either. Though he was now a husband for the second time, it seemed Karmela had won herself a position that placed her closer to Leandros than before. This was foul play at its best. Being her brother-in-law, he could hardly turn her down.

“It was clear to me at the wedding that your marriage had thwarted her dreams to become the next Mrs. Leandros Petralia.” Whatever subterfuge was going on here, Fran was positive Karmela was behind it in order to break them apart. She clearly still wanted Leandros for herself.

Too bad. Fran intended to make sure this was resolved before she went back to Pennsylvania in two weeks.

“Tell you what, Kellie. You heard the warning from the police, so I have an idea. Since we’re not supposed to be out on the street, how about we get a room for tonight right here?”

“That sounds good.”

“I think so, too. It’ll be fun. How long has it been since we hung out in some cozy little hotel like this?”

“I don’t remember.”

“We’ll watch the news on TV when it comes back on, and we’ll get some food. Then we can talk all night if we want. I’ve got an idea about how to thwart Karmela without your husband realizing what’s happening.”

“I don’t know if that’s possible.”

Fran smiled. “You haven’t heard my plan yet.” She got up from the table. “I’ll talk to the proprietor and arrange a room for us. When the rain stops, we’ll go out to the car for our luggage.”

By now Fran figured Kellie’s bodyguard would have contacted Leandros wherever he was and told him his wife was safe and sound. She hoped Leandros would call her soon. The problems in their marriage were tearing her best friend apart. No one knew what that felt like better than Fran.

Nik Angelis had just entered his Athens penthouse when one of his brothers phoned him. He clicked on. “Sandro? What’s up?” They’d already spent part of the day in a board meeting at the Angelis Corporation. Nik had recently taken over for his father who’d retired.

“Turn on your television. The news about the tornado is on every station.”

“I was in it, remember?” It was the only talk at Angelis headquarters. After he’d seen his sister and her family off to Thessalonika early that morning on the company jet, Nik had headed over to the international air cargo station to check on some shipments. While he was talking business with one of the staff, a funnel had dropped down from clouds descending on Athens. It had swept through in a northwest direction and headed straight for the air cargo station.

After a few minutes it dissipated, but in that amount of time, it had caused damage to the constructions in its path and left a trail of destruction. Fortunately everyone involved had escaped injury, including Nik. Before he instructed his limo driver to take him to his office, he'd made contact with his pilot.

Relief had filled him to learn they'd been at cruising speed and out of range of the severe turbulence of the weather pattern before the tornado had formed. Knowing his sister's family were safely on their way north for a vacation, he'd been able to relax.

"No, no," Sandro cried anxiously. "Not that one. I'm talking about another one that touched down near Thessalonika a few minutes ago."

Another one?

"Let's pray Melina and Stavros are safe."

Nik's heart had already received one workout this morning, but now it almost failed him. "Hold on." He raced into his den and clicked on the TV with the remote. Every station was covering the news using split screens to show the funnel clouds of both tornadoes.

...and then another tornado struck a part of the Greek Riviera at 5:13 p.m. this evening. It was reported as a T-4, and has since dissipated, but we won't know the true extent of the damage for a while. Word has already reached the station that a dozen villas and some private suites at the world famous Persephone Resort owned by the Petralia Corporation, have been destroyed.

Nik felt as if a grenade had blown up his insides. The Persephone was where Melina, Stavros and their infant daughter were going to stay for the first two nights of their vacation. Nik's good friend, in business and socially, Leandros Petralia, was the owner of the resort.

"I called Melina on her cell, but there's no phone service." Sandro sounded frantic.

The knowledge sent ice through Nik's veins.

So far twenty people are unaccounted for. We repeat, it doesn't mean those are fatalities. Relief is pouring in from all over. We ask people to stay away from the area and let the police and search-and-rescue workers do their job. Cell phones are not working. We've posted a series of hotline numbers on the screen in case you have or need information about a loved one.

Pure terror seized his heart. "Do you think Cosimo is home from the office yet?"

"I don't know, but I'll try to reach him."

"Tell him to meet us at the airport, Sandro." He wanted both his brothers with him. "We'll fly to Thessalonika."

"I'm on my way!"

Nik clicked off, then phoned his driver and told him to bring the car around. On his way out the door he called his pilot and told him to ready the jet for another flight to Thessalonika. In a little over an hour Nik and his brothers could be there. They would need a car.

En route to the airport he phoned his parents at the family villa on Mykonos. They'd just heard the news and were in total anguish. "Our precious Melina, our Demitra," his mother half sobbed the words.

"Their suite may not have been among the ones affected, *Mana*. In any case, Stavros will have protected them. We have to have faith. Sandro and Cosimo are going to fly there with me now. You get on one of those hotlines and see what you can find out! Call me when you know anything. Let's pray phone service is restored there soon. I'll call you when I know anything."

A rap on the hotel-room door the next morning brought both girls awake. With the TV knocked out last night, they'd talked for hours about Karmela. Before falling asleep, Fran had made sure her friend was armed with a firm plan in mind for once their vacation was over.

Kellie lifted her head and checked her watch. "It's ten after ten!"

"Maybe it's one of the maids waiting to make up our room. I'm closest." Fran jumped out of bed in her plaid cotton pajamas. "Who is it?" she called through the door.

"Yannis."

“I’ll talk to him,” Kellie murmured. In an instant she slid out of her bed and rushed over to the door. The dark-haired bodyguard stood in the hall while they spoke in Greek. The conversation went on for a minute until Kellie groaned and closed the door again. Her face had turned ashen.

Fran thought her friend was going to faint and caught her around the shoulders. “What’s wrong? Come sit down on the chair and tell me.”

But Kellie just stood with tears gushing down her pale cheeks. “A tornado touched down twelve miles to the north of here last evening, killing nine people. Among them were five guests staying at the P-Perse-phone.”

They stared at each other in disbelief. “I can’t credit it,” Fran whispered in shock. “If we hadn’t pulled over when we did...” They could have been among the fatalities. She started to tremble.

“Yannis said Leandros heard about it on the television, but he was almost a thousand miles away in Rhodes. He flew here immediately, but even with his own jet and a police escort, he had trouble getting into the site until the middle of the night. Three of the twelve individual suites were demolished. There’s nothing left of them.”

Fran gasped. “On top of the human tragedy, your poor husband is having to deal with that, too.”

“Leandros told Yannis it’s a nightmare, and there’s still no phone, internet or television service to that area. He got hold of him through the help of the police to let me know what has happened. I’ve been asked to stay put here until he joins us. Yannis said it shouldn’t be long now.” Kellie’s teeth were chattering.

“Come on. We need to get ready and go downstairs. Knowing your husband, he must be absolutely devastated and is going to need you more than he’s ever needed anyone in his life.” Now would be the time for Kellie to draw close to Leandros and put the plan they’d talked about last night into action.

Both of them showered and dressed in a daze. Fran put on white linen pants with a spring-green-and-white-printed top. She tied her dark honey-blonde hair back at the nape with a white chiffon scarf. After slipping on white sandals, she announced she was ready. Nothing seemed real as they packed up and carried their bags downstairs to wait for Leandros.

To Fran’s surprise, the main doors of the hotel were open for patrons to walk out and enjoy coffee at the tables set up in front of the building. Warm air filtered inside and a golden sun shone out of a blue sky. Up and down the street, life appeared to be going on as usual. You would never have known there’d been a natural disaster twelve miles away from here last evening.

A waiter approached them. “The tables in front are full. If you’ll walk around to the patio in back, we’ll serve you out there.”

“Thank you,” Fran said before taking Kellie aside. “Yannis is sitting outside in his car by yours. Let’s stow our luggage and then tell him we’ll be in back of the hotel. We need breakfast with our coffee. He can show Leandros where to come. I feel like soaking up some sun until he arrives. Don’t you?”

“I guess so,” Kellie answered in a wooden voice.

They walked over to their car and put their cases in the back. “This hotel seems to be a popular place. Go ahead and talk to Yannis while I get us a table before they’re all taken.”

“Okay.”

Fran followed the stone pathway to the rear of the hotel where blue chairs and tables were set with bright blue-and-white-check cloths. There was an overhang of bougainvillea above the back door, and further on, a small garden. Too bad the wind had denuded most of the flowering plants. There were only a few red petals left.

She took a seat in the sun while she waited, thinking she was alone. But all of a sudden she heard a strange sound, like a whimper. Surprised, Fran looked around, then up. Maybe it was coming from one of the rooms on the next floor where a window was open.

Again she heard the faint cry. It didn't sound frantic and it seemed to be coming from the garden area. Maybe it was a kitten that had been injured in the storm. Poor thing. She jumped up and walked over to investigate.

When she looked in the corner, a gasp escaped her lips. There, on its back in the bushes, lay a dirty black-haired baby with cuts from head to toe—

Fran couldn't fathom it. The child was dressed in nothing more than a torn pink undershirt. The little olive-skinned girl couldn't be more than seven months old. Where in heaven's name had she come from? A groan came out of Fran. She wondered how long the child had been out here in this condition.

Trying to be as gentle as possible, Fran lifted the limp body in her arms, petrified because the baby had to be dying of hypothermia. Her pallor was pronounced and her little lids were closed.

"Fran?" Kellie called out and ran up to her. "What on earth?"

She turned to her friend with tear-filled eyes. "Look—I found this baby in the garden."

A gasp flew from Kellie's lips. "I can see that, but I can't believe what I'm seeing."

"I know. Quick—get me a blanket and drive us to the hospital. I'm afraid she's going to die."

Kellie's eyes rounded before she dashed through the back door, calling in Greek for help. Within seconds, the staff came running out. One of them brought a blanket. Fran wrapped the baby as carefully as she could and headed around the front of the hotel. Kellie ran ahead of her to talk to Yannis.

"He'll drive us to the hospital."

He helped Fran and the baby inside the backseat of his car. She thought he looked as white-faced as Kellie, who climbed in front. She looked back at Fran. "What do you think happened?"

"Who knows? Maybe the mother was on the street around the corner when a microburst toppled the stroller or something and this dear little thing landed in the garden."

"But she's only wearing a torn shirt."

Both of them were aghast. "I agree, nothing makes sense."

"Do you think she could have been out there all night?"

"I don't know," Fran's voice trembled. "But what other explanation could there possibly be, Kellie? The baby has superficial cuts all over."

"I'm still in shock. You don't suppose the mother is lying around the hotel grounds somewhere, too? Maybe concussed?"

"It's a possibility," Fran murmured. "We know what tornadoes can do. The one in Dallas tossed truck rigs in the air like matchsticks. Sometimes I feel that's all we see on the news back home. I just have never heard about a tornado in Greece."

"They get them from time to time. Leandros told me they usually happen near coastal waters."

The baby had gone so still, it was like holding a doll. "Tell Yannis to please hurry, Kellie. She's not making any more sounds. The police need to be notified and start looking for this baby's parents."

Once they reached the emergency entrance, everything became a blur as the baby was rushed away. Fran wanted to go with her, but the emergency-room staff told her they needed information and showed her to the registration desk.

The man in charge told them to be seated while he asked a lot of questions. He indicated that no one had contacted the hospital looking for a lost baby. Furthermore, no mother or father injured in the storm had been brought in. So far, only a young man whose car had skidded in the downpour and hit a building had come in for some stitches on his arm.

When the questioning was over he said, "One of our staff has already contacted the police. They've assured us they'll do a thorough investigation to unite the baby with her parents. An officer should be here within the hour to take your statements. Just go into the E.R. lounge to wait, or go to the cafeteria at the end of the hall."

When they walked out, Kellie touched Fran's arm. "I think we'd better eat something now."

“Agreed.”

After a quick breakfast, they returned to the E.R. lounge. “If the baby lives, it will be thanks to you and your quick thinking. Had you been even a couple of minutes later arriving at the patio the baby might not have had the strength to cry and no one would have discovered her in time.”

Hot tears trickled down Fran’s cheeks. “She has to live, Kellie, otherwise life really doesn’t make sense.”

“I know. I’ve been thinking the same thing.” They both had. Kellie had been praying to get pregnant and it had been Fran’s fate not to be able to conceive. What a pair they made! She found two seats and they sat down.

“I wish Leandros would get here. After seeing this baby, I’m worried sick for what he’s had to deal with. Lives were lost in that tornado. He’ll take their deaths seriously.”

“It’s too awful to think about. I’m still having trouble believing this has happened. When I saw her lying in those bushes, I thought I was hallucinating.”

Before long, two police officers came into the lounge to talk to them. There was still no word about the parents. After they went out again, Fran jumped up. “I can’t sit still. Let’s go into the E.R. Maybe someone at the desk can tell us if there’s been any news on the baby yet.”

Kellie got to her feet. “While you do that, I’m going outside to talk to Yannis. Maybe he’s heard from Leandros.”

Quickly, Fran hurried through the doors to the E.R. and approached one of the staff at the counter. “Could you tell me anything about the baby we brought in a little while ago?”

“You can ask Dr. Xanthis, the attending physician. He’s coming through those doors now.”

Fran needed no urging to rush toward the middle-aged doctor. “Excuse me—I’m Mrs. Myers. I understand you might be able to tell me something about the baby my friend and I brought to the hospital.” Her heart hammered in fear. “Is she going to live?”

“We won’t know for several hours,” he answered in a strong Greek accent.

“Can I see her?”

He shook his head. “Only family is allowed in the infant ICU.”

“But no one has located her family yet. She’s all alone. I found her in the bushes in the garden behind the hotel.”

“So I understand. It’s most extraordinary.”

“Couldn’t I just be in the same room with her until her parents are found?”

The man’s sharp eyes studied her for a moment. “Why would you want to do that?”

“Please?” she asked in a trembling voice.

“She’s a stranger to you.”

Fran bit her lip. “She’s a baby. I—I feel she needs someone,” her voice faltered.

All of a sudden a small smile lifted one corner of his mouth. “Come. I’ll take you to her.”

“Just a moment.” She turned to the staff person. “If my friend Mrs. Petralia comes in asking for me, please tell her I’m with the baby, but I’ll be back here in a little while.”

“Very good.”

The doctor led her through the far doors to an elevator that took them to the second floor. They walked through some other doors to the nursery area where he introduced her to a nurse. “I’ve given *Kyria* Myers permission to be with the baby until the police locate the mother and father. See that she is outfitted.”

“This way,” the other woman gestured as she spoke.

“Thank you so much, Dr. Xanthis.”

His brows lifted. “Thank you for being willing to help out.”

“It’s my pleasure, believe me.”

CHAPTER TWO

FRAN FOLLOWED THE NURSE to an anteroom to wash her hands. She was no stranger to a hospital, having worked in one since college to follow up on patients who needed care when they first went home.

When she'd put on a gown and mask, they left through another door that opened into the ICU. She counted three incubators with sick babies. The baby she'd found in the garden was over in one corner, hooked up to an IV. She'd been fitted with nasal prongs to deliver oxygen. A cardiopulmonary monitor on her chest tracked the heartbeat on the screen.

She was glad to see this hospital had up-to-date equipment to help the baby survive, yet the second she spied the little form lying on her back, so still and helpless, she had to stifle her cry of pain. The precious child had cuts everywhere, even into her black curls, but they'd been treated. Mercifully none of them were deep or required stitches. With the dirt washed away, they stood out clearly.

The nurse pulled a chair over so Fran could sit next to the incubator. "Everyone hopes she will wake up. You can reach in and touch her arm, talk to her. I'll be back."

Finally alone with the baby, Fran studied the beautiful features and profile. She was perfectly formed, and to all appearances had been healthy before this terrible thing had happened to her. All the cuts and hookups couldn't disguise her amazingly long black eyelashes or the sweetness of her sculpted lips.

With such exquisite coloring, she looked like a cherub from the famous painting done by the Italian artist Raphael, but this cherub's eyes were closed and there was no animation.

She put her hand through the hole and touched the baby's forearm. "Where did you come from? Did you fall out of heaven by accident? Please come back to life, little sweetheart. Open your eyes. I want to see their color."

There was no response and that broke her heart. Even if the baby could hear her, she couldn't understand English. "Of course you want your mommy and daddy. People are trying to find them, but until they do, will you mind if I stay with you?"

Fran caressed her skin with her fingers, careful not to touch any cuts. "I know you belong to someone else, but do you know how much I'd love to claim a baby like you for my own? You have no idea how wonderful you are."

Tears trickled down her cheeks. "You can't die. You just can't—" Fran's shoulders heaved, but it wouldn't do for the baby to hear her sobs. By sheer strength of will she pulled herself together and sang some lullabies to her.

After a time the nurse walked over. "I'm sure you're being a comfort to her, but you're wanted down in the E.R. Come back whenever you want."

Fran's head lifted. She'd been concentrating so hard on the baby, she hadn't realized she'd already been up here several hours. "Thank you."

"Leave everything in the restroom on your way out."

"I will." With reluctance she removed her hand and stood up. "I'll be back, sweetheart."

A few minutes later she reached the E.R. lounge and discovered Kellie talking quietly with Leandros. Her attractive husband had arrived at last, but he looked as though he'd aged since Easter. When he'd flown to Pennsylvania with Kellie in the Petralia company jet at that time, the three of them had gone out for dinner and all had been well.

The second her friend saw her, she jumped up from the chair and ran across the room to meet her. Leandros followed. "Is the baby going to make it?" Kellie cried anxiously.

"I don't know. She's just lying there limp in the incubator, but she's still breathing and has a steady heartbeat. Have the police found her parents yet?"

"There's been no news."

Leandros reached for her. “Fran—” he whispered with a throb in his voice. It revealed the depth of his grief. They gave each other a long, hard hug.

“It’s so good to see you again, Leandros, but I wish to heaven it were under different circumstances. I’m so sorry about everything,” she told him. “I’m sure you feel like you’ve been through a war.”

He nodded, eyeing his wife with pained eyes. Something told Fran the pain she saw wasn’t all because of the tragedy. She could feel the negative tension between Kellie and her husband. Her friend hadn’t been exaggerating. In fact, their relationship seemed to be in deeper trouble than even Fran had imagined.

“Five guests at the resort died,” he muttered morosely. “We can thank God the honeymoon couple weren’t in their suite when the tornado touched down or there would have been two more victims. Unfortunately the other two suites were occupied. Mr. Pappas, the retired president of the Hellenic Bank and his wife, were celebrating their sixtieth wedding anniversary.”

“How terrible for everything to end that way. What about the other couple?” Fran asked because she sensed his hesitation.

Leandros looked anguished. “The sister of my friend Nikolos Angelis and her husband had only checked in a few hours earlier with their baby.”

“A baby?” she blurted.

“Yes, but when the bodies were recovered, there was no sign of the child. The police have formed a net to search everywhere. You can imagine the anguish of the Angelis family. They’re in total shock. People are still combing the area.”

“Nik is the brilliant youngest of the Angelis brothers,” Kellie informed her. “He’s the new CEO of the multimillion-dollar mega corporation established by their family fifty years ago. He was out of the country when Leandros and I married, or he would have been at the wedding.”

“I remember seeing some pictures of him in a couple of magazines while I was on the plane flying over.” *Gorgeous* was the only word to come to mind.

Leandros nodded. “We’ve both put up money for volunteers to scour the region, but so far nothing. His parents are utterly devastated. They not only lost their daughter and son-in-law, but their little granddaughter.”

Granddaughter?

The mention of a baby girl jolted her as she thought of the baby upstairs fighting for her life.

“How old is the baby?”

“Seven months.”

“What color is her hair?”

“Black.”

A cry escaped her lips.

Maybe she hadn’t fallen out of heaven.

Was it possible she’d been carried in the whirlwind and dropped in the hotel garden? Stranger things had happened throughout the world during tornadoes.

“Kellie?”

“I know what you’re thinking, Fran—” Kellie cried. “So am I.” The two women stared at each other. “Remember the little girl in the midwest a few years ago who was found awake and sitting up ten miles away in a field after a tornado struck, killing her entire family? We both saw her picture on the news and couldn’t believe it.”

“Yes! She was the miracle baby who *lived!*”

“It would explain everything.”

Leandros’s dark brows furrowed. “What are you two talking about?”

“Quick, Kellie. While you tell him what we’re thinking, I’m going back upstairs to be with the baby. Maybe she has come to by now. After hearing from Leandros that their baby is missing, I think

she could be that lost child! She *has* to be! There's no other explanation. She *has* to live." Those words had become Fran's mantra.

The police had made a grid for the volunteers to follow. Nik and his brothers had been given an area to cover in the pine trees behind the resort. They'd searched for hours. Separated by several yards, they walked abreast while looking for any sign of Demi.

Debris had been scattered like confetti, but he saw nothing to identify their family's belongings. The tornado had destroyed everything in its path, including lives. Pain stabbed him over and over.

Where in the hell was the baby? How could they go home without her body and face their parents? The grief was beyond imagining.

Each of his brothers had two children, all boys. Their wives and families, along with Stavros's family had flown to Mykonos to join Nik's parents. He knew Sandro and Cosimo were thanking providence that their own children hadn't been anywhere near either tornado, but right now their hearts were so heavy with loss, none of them could talk.

Demi was the only little girl in the family, so beautiful—just like her mother. Not having married yet, Nik had a huge soft spot for his niece. She possessed a sweetness and a special appeal that had charmed him from the moment she was born.

Melina's baby was the kind of child he would love to have if he ever settled down. But that meant finding the kind of woman who could handle what he would have to tell her about himself before they could be married.

Up to now he hadn't met her yet and was forced to put up with the public's false assumption about him. Throughout the last year, various tabloids had put unauthorized pictures of him on their covers with the label Greece's New Corporate Dynamo—The Most Sought-After Playboy Bachelor of the Decade. He was sickened by the unwanted publicity. But this tragedy made the problems in his personal life fade in comparison.

Just two weeks ago he'd bought Demi a toy where you passed a ball through a tube and it came out the other end. She loved it and would wait for it to show up, then crawl on her belly after it. She could sit most of the time without help and she put everything possible in her mouth. Her smile delighted him. Never to see it—or her—again...he couldn't bear it. None of them could.

Hot tears stung his eyes at the thought that the seven-month-old was gone, along with her parents. It was a blow he didn't know whether he could ever get over. He and Melina had shared a special bond. She'd been there for him at the darkest point in his life. A grimace broke out on his face as he realized he couldn't even find her baby. He felt completely helpless.

Sandro caught his arm. "We've finished this section."

"Let's move to the next grid."

"Someone else has done it," Cosimo muttered.

"I don't care," he bit out. "Let's do it again, more thoroughly this time. Examine every tree."

They went along with him. Maybe five minutes had gone by when his cell phone rang. He checked the caller ID. "It's Petralia."

Their heads swiveled around, as they prayed for news that some volunteer had found her body.

"Leandros?" he said after clicking on. "Any word yet?"

"Maybe. If you believe in miracles."

Nik reeled. "What do you mean?"

"I'm with my wife at the hospital in Lemnos village. It's twelve miles south of you. Come quickly. This morning her best friend Mrs. Myers from the States, who's staying with us for a few weeks, found a baby girl, barely alive, in a hotel garden."

Nik's hand tightened on the cell phone. "Did I just hear you right?"

"Yes. If you can believe this, she was lying in some bushes at the rear of the hotel. On their drive to the Persephone yesterday, the storm got so bad, they ended up staying in Lemnos."

"You mean your wife and her friend—"

“Could have been among the casualties,” he finished for him. The emotion in Leandros’s voice needed no translation. “Fran went out to the back patio to get them a table for breakfast when she heard some faint cries and walked over to investigate.”

“What?”

“It’s an absolutely incredible story. The child is cut up and bruised. All she had on was a torn undershirt. They brought her to the hospital and Fran has been staying in the infant ICU with her in order to comfort her. So far no parents have shown up yet to claim her.”

“You’ve *seen* her?” Nik cried out.

“Yes. She’s about seven months old, with your family’s coloring. She’s alive, but not awake yet. So far that’s good news according to the doctor who thought at first they were going to lose her. Come as fast as you can to the E.R. entrance. We’ll show you to the ICU.”

He eyed his brothers. “We’re on our way, Leandros—My gratitude knows no bounds.”

“Don’t thank me yet. This child might not be your niece.”

“I have to believe she is!”

Nik clicked off and he and his brothers started running through the forest. On the way he told them the fantastic story. Before long they reached the rental car at the police check point. Nik broke every speed record getting to Lemnos while they all said silent prayers.

Once they reached the village, he followed the signs to the hospital. Leandros and his wife were waiting for them in the lounge of the E.R. His lovely wife, Kellie, was in tears over what had happened to Nik’s family. He was deeply moved by her compassion. She, in turn, introduced them to the doctor who was taking care of the baby.

“Come with me and we’ll see if she belongs to you.” On the way upstairs the doctor said, “I’m happy to report that a half hour ago, the baby opened her eyes for the first time and looked around. I think that had something to do with *Kyria* Myers who’s been singing to her and caressing her through the incubator. She’s the one who first heard the baby cry and found her before she lost consciousness.”

Nik couldn’t wait to see if the baby was Demi, but he understood they had to wash their hands and put on masks and gowns. It took all his self-control not to burst into the ICU. If it wasn’t their niece lying in there it would kill all three of them to have to return to Mykonos without her.

When they were ready, the nurse opened the door and beckoned them to follow her to the corner of the room. A woman gowned and masked like themselves sat next to the incubator with her hand inside the hole to touch the baby. With her back to them, he could only glimpse dark honey-blond hair tied back with a filmy scarf. She was singing to the child with the kind of love a mother might show for her own flesh and blood.

Touched by her devotion to a child she didn’t even know, Nik had a suffocating feeling in his chest as he drew closer and caught his first sight of the baby.

“Demi—”

His brothers crowded around, equally ecstatic at discovering their niece lying hooked up to machines, but squirming as if she didn’t like being trapped in there. She kept turning her head. Sounds of joy and tears escaped their lips as her name echoed through the ICU. But Demi took one look at them and started crying. With their masks on, she was frightened.

The woman caressing her limbs spoke in soothing tones and soon calmed her down. Nik could hardly believe it. Those words might be spoken in English, but Melina’s baby responded to the tender tone in which she’d said them.

After a minute, the woman pulled her hand through and stood up. Nik noticed she was of medium height. When she turned to them, he found himself staring into eyes a shade of violet-blue he’d only seen in the flowers that grew in certain pockets on Mykonos. They were glazed with tears.

“Mrs. Myers? I’m Nik Angelis,” he spoke through the mask. “These are my brothers Sandro and Cosimo. I understand you’re the person we have to thank for finding our niece before it was too late to revive her.”

“I just happened to be the first guest to walk out to the back patio of the hotel to be served,” came her muffled response. “When I heard her crying, I thought it was a kitten who’d been injured by the storm. I almost fainted when I saw her lying there face-up in the bushes.” Her eyes searched his. “What’s her name?”

“Demitra, but we call her Demi.”

“That’s a beautiful name.” He heard her take a deep breath. “There’s no way to express how sorry I am for the loss of your sister and her husband, Mr. Angelis. But I’m thankful you’ve been reunited with their daughter. She’s the most precious child I’ve ever seen,” she said with a quiver in her voice. Nik happened to agree with her. “If you could remove your masks, I’m sure it would make all the difference to her.”

“Demi doesn’t seem to have any problem with *you* wearing one.”

He saw a distinct flush creep above her mask. “That’s because I’ve been talking to her since we brought her here. I couldn’t stand it that she didn’t have anyone to give her love. Babies want their mothers. Her experience had to have terrified her.”

Not every woman had such a strong maternal instinct as Melina’s, but being a married woman, he had to assume Mrs. Myers had children of her own. “Leandros told me you’re here on vacation. For you to forget everything except taking care of Demi constitutes a generosity and unselfishness we appreciate more than you could ever know. She’ll be the reason our parents can go on living.”

“It’s true,” his brothers concurred before expressing their gratitude.

Nik moved closer. “I hope you realize our family owes you a debt we can never repay.”

She shook her head. “What payment could anyone want except to see that sweet little girl reunited with her family?” Her eyes still possessed a liquid sheen as they played over him. “Anyone can see she’s an Angelis from head to toe. Of course I don’t know about the noses and mouths yet.” Her husky voice disturbed his senses in ways that surprised him.

In spite of the horrendous grief of the past twenty-four hours, her comment made one side of his mouth lift. Until he’d entered the ICU and watched the loving way she was handling Melina’s daughter, he couldn’t imagine ever having a reason to smile again.

She took a step back. “Well—I’ll leave you gentlemen alone to be with your niece. When you speak to her, your voices will be blessedly familiar and will reassure her.”

Nik wasn’t so certain Demi wouldn’t start to cry the second Mrs. Myers left the room. “Where are you going?”

“Downstairs to join Kellie.”

“Don’t leave the hospital yet. We need to talk.”

“Since I’m their guest, I’m not sure what our plans are now.”

Making one of those decisions on sheer instinct in case she got away, he said, “In that case, I’ll go downstairs with you. I need to call our parents and give them the kind of news that will breathe new life into them. Above all, they’ll want to thank you.” He turned to his brothers and told them his plans before he left for the anteroom with her.

Once inside, he removed his mask and gown while she untied hers. Though she was married, he was a man who enjoyed looking at a beautiful woman and was curious to see what she looked like unwrapped.

Once she’d discarded everything, he discovered a slender figure clothed in a stunning green-and-white-print outfit. She had classic bone structure and a face that more than lived up to the beauty of her eyes. In a word, she stole his breath.

“What’s the verdict?” he asked after she’d studied him back.

Again, he saw warmth enter her cheeks, but she didn’t look away. “I happened to see your picture on the cover of a magazine while I was reading on the plane.” Nik’s teeth snapped together at the mention of it. “If you want honesty, then let me say I’m glad your niece received all the feminine features of her parentage.”

He'd been expecting her to say something about his reputation. Instead her thoughts were focused on Demi. Her surprising comment lightened his mood.

"Your sister must have been a real beauty to have produced a daughter like Demi."

Nik reached for his wallet and showed her a picture. "This was taken on Melina's thirtieth birthday two months ago. She and Stavros had been trying for four years for a baby before one came."

Kellie needed to hear that. Not every woman conceived as quickly as one hoped.

Fran studied it for a moment. "What a lovely family." Her voice shook. "I see a lot of your sister in her."

His throat swelled with raw emotion. "Yes. She'll live on through Demi." He opened the other door. "Shall we go downstairs?"

"I'll ride down with you," Dr. Xanthis said. "We'll need confirmation of your relationship to the baby with a DNA test."

"Of course. I'll ask the hospital in Athens to send my information so you can run a test."

"Excellent. I'll tell the lab to expedite the process."

Fran wondered what condition had been serious enough to put Nik in a hospital and to have provided a DNA match, but it was none of her business. She wished she weren't so aware of him.

Though she'd always thought Leandros was a true hunk, Nikolos Angelis was in a class by himself. Despite the grief lines etched in his striking Greek countenance, he was easily the most attractive male she'd ever met in her life. The photos of him didn't do him justice.

Besides his masculine appeal, he had the aura of a man in charge of his life—one who could accomplish anything. Kellie's hope that Fran would meet some gorgeous royal on this trip and fall instantly in love was still laughable, but she had to admit Nik Angelis was a fabulous-looking man.

Standing next to him, Fran thought he must be at least six feet three of solid lean muscle. She wasn't surprised he was still wearing soiled suit trousers and a creased blue shirt with the sleeves shoved up to the elbows. All three brothers had arrived in clothes they'd worn to work when they'd heard about the tornado. Naturally they'd dropped everything to fly to Thessalonika to search for their family. None of them had slept.

He needed a shave, but if anything, his male virility was even more potent. She noticed he wore his black wavy hair medium length. It had such a healthy gloss that it made you want to run your hands through it. Before the door opened, Fran gave him another covert glance.

Brows of the same blackness framed midnight-brown eyes with indecently long black lashes like Demi's. Between his hard-boned features and compelling mouth, she had to force herself to stop staring. Until now, no men she'd worked around for the last year had made any kind of an impact.

To be singling him out when he'd just been hit with the loss of his sister and brother-in-law made her ashamed. She rushed from the elevator ahead of him. But just as she was about to turn toward the lounge, he grasped her elbow. A warm current passed through her body without her volition.

"Come outside with me where my cell phone will work better. My parents will want to ask you some questions."

"All right."

They walked through the sliding doors into the late-afternoon sun. It was quarter to five already. She watched and listened as he communicated in unintelligible Greek with his parents. During the silences, she read between the lines. Her heart went out to all of them.

After a few minutes his penetrating gaze landed on her. He handed her the phone. "They speak English and are anxious to hear anything you can tell them."

Fran took the cell phone from him and said hello.

"We are overjoyed you found our Demitra," his mother spoke first in a heavy Greek accent. In a voice full of tears she said, "Our son tells us you've been at the hospital with her the whole time."

"Yes. She's the sweetest little thing I ever saw. A cherub. And now that she's awake, she seems fine."

“Ah...That’s the news we’ve been waiting to hear,” Nik’s father broke in. “We want to meet you. I told him to bring you and the Petralias to Mykonos when Demitra is released. After the funeral, you will stay on as our guests for as long as you wish. He tells me you’ve just started your vacation. We’d like you to spend it with us. Because of you, a miracle has happened.”

“Someone else would have found her if I hadn’t, Mr. Angelis, but thank you very much for your kind words. Here’s Nik.” She handed him the phone. “I’m going to the lounge,” she whispered.

“I’ll be right there.” His deep voice curled through her as she walked back inside the building.

Once again she found Kellie and Leandros seated on one of the couches. You didn’t have to be a mind reader to guess they were having an intense conversation that wasn’t going well. Judging by Kellie’s taut body and his grim countenance, they were both in agony. But when they saw Fran, they stopped talking and stood up.

Kellie rushed over to her, as if she were glad for the interruption. “Dr. Xanthis came to talk to us a minute ago and said he’ll release the baby tomorrow once the DNA testing is done. I was just telling Leandros that since she’s been reunited with her family, you and I can continue on with our vacation while he flies back to Rhodes.”

Obviously Kellie wanted Fran to fall in with her wishes despite anything Leandros had to say. But her comment caused his firm jaw to tighten, making Fran uncomfortable. “My project supervisor can finish up the work there. I have a helicopter waiting to fly the three of us back to Athens. One of my employees will drive the car home.”

Kellie tossed her blond head. “Don’t be silly, Leandros. I don’t want to interfere with your work. Besides, Fran and I want to sightsee in places where we’ve never been before.”

“Where exactly?” he demanded quietly. Fran had never heard him so terse.

“We’re going to do some hiking, but haven’t decided all the details yet. After dinner, we’ll get out the map to plan our next destination.”

Just when Fran didn’t think she could stand the tension any longer, Nik entered the lounge and walked up to them. He darted her a searching glance. “Did you tell them about my father’s invitation?”

The girls exchanged a private look before Fran said, “I haven’t had time yet.” Kellie’s troubles with Leandros had weighted them down.

In the next breath Nik extended them all a personal invitation to fly to Mykonos in the morning and spend a few days with his family. “My parents insist.”

“I was planning to pay them a personal visit anyway, Nik. We’d be honored to come,” Leandros spoke up before Kellie could say anything. “Under the circumstances, I’ll drive us back to Athens in Kellie’s car. Tomorrow we’ll fly to your villa.”

Uh-oh. That meant a lot of hours for them to talk, but Fran decided that was a good thing. Kellie could approach him with the plan they’d talked about last night.

“Excellent.” Nik shot Fran a level glance. “I realize you came here on vacation, but if it wouldn’t inconvenience you too much, would you mind staying with me at the hospital overnight?”

“Between the two of us taking turns, we ought to be able to comfort Demi while my brothers arrange for Melina’s and Stavros’s bodies to be flown home on our company plane. I’d very much like your help when we take Demi in the helicopter to Thessalonika airport in the morning. From there we’ll fly on the plane to Mykonos.”

Her heart thudded. Nik honestly wanted her help with his niece? He couldn’t know she wasn’t ready to say goodbye to the adorable child. Another night to hold her thrilled Fran to pieces.

Trying to sound in control she said, “If you feel it’s necessary, I’d be glad to help.” She looked at Kellie, knowing her friend didn’t want to be left alone with her husband right now. The situation was precarious. “What do you think, Kellie? Would it be all right with you?”

Fran knew Kellie was stuck in a hard spot. She couldn’t say no to Nik who’d already lost part of his family, but that meant she’d have to face Leandros sooner than she’d expected. It was providential they’d come up with an idea last night. *It had to work!*

“Of course. I’ll see you tomorrow and we’ll resume our vacation.”

If Kellie worked things out with Leandros, maybe she wouldn’t want to go on a trip after all. Fran was hoping for that outcome. “All right then.”

The news seemed to relax Leandros a little. No doubt he was thankful for this much of a reprieve so he could talk to his wife. “Fran? I’ll bring your bags in from the car.”

Nik shook his head. “Don’t bother, Leandros. I’ll come with you and put them in my rental car.” He turned to Fran. “I’ll be back in a minute.”

After the two men walked out of the lounge, Fran put an arm around Kellie’s shoulders. “I’m sorry about this. I had no idea Nik would ask me to stay on. Frankly, I didn’t know what to say.”

“Neither of us had a choice. It would have been churlish to refuse him.”

“If I stay overnight with the baby, are you going to be okay?”

Her friend took a shuddering breath. “I thought I’d have two weeks to be away from Leandros, but this situation has changed things for the moment and can’t be helped. Wish me luck broaching your suggestion to him,” she whispered in a pain-filled voice.

“Kellie, last night we talked a lot about Karmela, but I sense there’s still something you haven’t told me. What is it?”

Her head was bowed. “I was afraid to tell you. N-night before last, I told him this vacation was more than that. I wanted a separation.”

Fran groaned. “No wonder he looks shattered.” Fran was aghast that their marriage had already broken down to that extent.

Her friend’s lips tightened. “He said I wasn’t thinking clearly before he stormed out of the bedroom angrier than I’ve ever seen him. On our drive back to Athens, I’m going to do what you said. I’ll tell him that since I haven’t gotten pregnant, I need something substantial to do and want to work with him in his private office. I’ll remind him I was once a part of an advertising agency and am perfectly capable.

“But if he turns me down flat, and I’m afraid he will, then he needs to hear what I think about the sacred Karmela. Up until now I’ve been careful about saying anything negative, but no longer. I might as well get everything out in the open right now.”

Fran would have told her not to plunge in with Leandros where Karmela was concerned yet. Let the idea of his wife working with him take hold first. But both men came back in the lounge, preventing further conversation.

Leandros put his arm around his wife. “It’s going to be a long drive. We need to get going.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow.” Fran hugged her. “Tell him you love him so much, you want the opportunity to work with him,” she begged in a quiet whisper. “I don’t see how he can turn you down.”

When Kellie let her go without an answer, Leandros grasped his wife’s hand and they walked out of the lounge.

She felt Nik’s gaze on her. “We need a meal. Let’s drive to the hotel where you stayed last night and get a couple of rooms so we can shower and have dinner. By then we’ll feel much more prepared to spend the night with Demi.”

“That sounds good to me.” She would have said more, such as the fact that he hadn’t had any sleep last night, but she’d bring it up to him later.

He walked her out to the parking lot and helped her into the rental car. His dark eyes noticed every detail, and she was glad she was wearing her linen pants. Once he got in the driver’s side he said, “You’ll have to guide me to the hotel.”

“It’s on the southern end of the village near the main highway.” She gave him a few directions, not quite believing that he was taking her to the place where she’d found his niece. “There on the corner,” she said. He flipped a U-turn and pulled up close to the front entrance where people were dining. “Before we go in, I’ll show you the garden out in back.”

“Good. I want to take pictures while there’s still some light.”

She got out of the car before he could help her and they walked around the side to the rear of the hotel where more customers were enjoying their evening meal. Fran kept going until she came to the garden.

“I found her right there.” She pointed to the bushes in the corner. “There’s no indication she lay there all those hours. It’s still totally unbelievable to me. Finding her alive so far away from the Persephone is one of those inexplicable miracles.”

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

Текст предоставлен ООО «ЛитРес».

Прочитайте эту книгу целиком, [купив полную легальную версию](#) на ЛитРес.

Безопасно оплатить книгу можно банковской картой Visa, MasterCard, Maestro, со счета мобильного телефона, с платежного терминала, в салоне МТС или Связной, через PayPal, WebMoney, Яндекс.Деньги, QIWI Кошелек, бонусными картами или другим удобным Вам способом.