

Chapter One

October 1947

“The Emerald City” or “The Land of Milk and Honey” — nicknames that the city of Sydney, Australia, had collected over the years evoked images of tranquility and of opportunity. However, tranquility was nowhere to be found as the traffic slowly made its way across the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The sun beat down upon the city, casting a golden shimmer over the waves. Beneath the large grey bridge, sailboats scudded back and forth or bobbed in the calm waters.

Sydney’s nickname “The Emerald City” originated from the deep green shimmering waters that surrounded it. To many people, the city was their haven from war-torn Europe and all other places in between. The label “The Land of Milk and Honey” was given to the great southern land by the refugees and immigrants because Australia offered her new citizens a chance for a new life and hope for the future. It was a place to forget and to rebuild.

Eva Muller rested her head against the window and shut her eyes, already feeling claustrophobic on the crowded bus. The sounds of chattering voices, the blaring horns of nearby cars, and the whining of a child who had obviously also had enough of the noise, were fraying her patience. She was tired, hot, and annoyed. Australia might have been the Land of Milk and Honey, but it was not her land of opportunity at that particular moment.

Eva, a tall, dark-haired woman with sapphire-colored eyes, captivated almost anyone who met her, including prospective employers. Quiet, unassuming, and polite with a reasonable grasp of English despite it not being her native tongue, Eva had a gift for languages; she spoke several languages fluently. But she also had a problem. As soon as she spoke, her accent caused many interviewers to decide instantly that they had no positions available.

Eva was German. Her accent was German and her heart was German, although her parentage was Greek. The odd combination was one that was very difficult to explain without going into a complicated story. She found she was either a “wog” or a “dago” — derogatory terms used for Greek and Italian immigrants by the Australian natives — because of her appearance, or a “kraut” because of her accent.

My life has taken a very different turn from the direction I thought it was going, Eva thought, grateful for the coolness of the window glass against her forehead. She thought back to her youth in Germany. The war was the start of my nightmare. First, my mother’s murder on Kristallnacht. I was told at the time that she had been mistaken for a Jewess. Then, my adopted father’s cruelties after he discovered I was a homosexual. It was a miracle I survived. Then Larissa, Greece, where I was reborn and began to live again. That’s where I met Zoe. The thought of Zoe put a soft smile on her face until her memories continued. But it was also during that time that I was told that my adopted father had ordered the death of my mother. I don’t know what to believe. One thing I do know — if it hadn’t been for Zoe, I wouldn’t be here today.

The Greeks were a proud people. Their land had been overrun by the might of the German army, but their will had never been subjugated. It was in Larissa, a small Greek town, that Eva had met the woman who finally brought light into her darkened world.

Zoe Lambros.

Eva smiled as the image of her lover, the woman who was her best friend and her knight-in-shining-armor all rolled into one petite package, came back to her mind and stayed.

Zoe was a red-haired young woman with emerald-colored eyes. As the bus slowly made its way across the Harbour Bridge, an unobstructed panorama of the harbor came into view. The shimmering waters made Eva smile. The emerald-colored waters reminded her of her lover’s eyes. Every time Zoe smiled, her smile lit up her eyes and made Eva’s heart melt. Despite being only fifteen at the time they had met, Zoe had been a courageous member of the Greek Resistance.

The diminutive young girl had tragically lost her entire family. First, her brothers were killed defending Greece from the invading Italians. Then upon hearing the news of their deaths, her father suffered a heart attack and died, leaving Zoe and her mother the only two family members remaining. After the Germans advanced into Greece, Zoe’s mother was murdered by the German military leader in charge of Larissa, Eva’s stepfather, leaving Zoe alone. While Zoe held her dead mother in her arms, she made a promise that her death would be avenged. Zoe had set her sights on Eva, determined that Eva was going to pay for the sins of her father even knowing that killing Eva would have condemned a hundred Greeks to their deaths.

Zoe never made good on that promise, even though she had the opportunity. Instead of killing Eva as she had planned, she fell in love with her. Now there’s something I didn’t count on. She got under my defenses. I still don’t know how she did that. It had been as much of a shock to Zoe as it had been to Eva. Despite Eva’s vow that she would not allow herself to fall in love with a woman again, she had found herself totally lost when it came to Zoe. She felt awkward, shy, and unsure of herself, and, as Eva soon learned, once Zoe’s mind was made up, there was nothing on earth that would or could change it. And Zoe made up her mind to have Eva. So after knowing Eva for over a year, Eva and Zoe shared their first kiss.

Zoe made her feel alive again, gave her hope, and made her laugh. She opened up a part of Eva that lay dormant, a part Eva had thought long dead. Eva began to dream again; the world held new possibilities and maybe, just maybe, there would be a little bit of happiness for her.

Eva took out a photograph she carried in her purse and looked at it. Zoe was sprawled on the grass, laughing. It was Eva's favorite photo of her lover. Eva traced Zoe's smiling face with her fingertip and sighed pensively. They could not declare their love for each other to the world. That would be unthinkable. They had to pass themselves off as sisters. *Even a blind man can tell that Zoe and I look nothing alike, but that's the story we have to maintain. Lies, lies, and more lies.* Eva shook her head and sighed.

Zoe wanted to tell the world of her love for her partner, but Eva knew all too well the cost of such declarations. She was certain Zoe did not fully understand the consequences, did not know the price they would both pay for that admission. Still, Eva often thought that angels would not dare tread where Zoe wanted to go.

Eva smiled. An indomitable spirit was one of the things she loved about Zoe. She looked at the photo again before putting it back in her purse. Signaling to the driver to stop at the next turn, she untangled her long frame from the tiny space it had been crammed into for the trip into the central business district.

Her mind went from her loving partner to her upcoming interview. This would be her last interview of the day. Eva had stopped into The Immigrants' Job Network after her previously unsuccessful interview for a job as a filing clerk, one employment opportunity Eva was glad she did not get. The Job Network had given her the address of a factory where a secretary was needed.

Eva had never been a secretary, but she could type. She did not know shorthand but was assured that the job did not require it. Clutching the address in her hand, Eva found herself outside the Johnson Brothers' Biscuit Factory. A smile creased her lips as the aroma of freshly baked cookies seeped into the air. Taking a deep breath, she opened the door and entered the building.

The cacophony of sounds inside the factory was as deafening as the noise she had endured riding the bus. Machines whirred and a giant fan tried valiantly to cool the place down. Women in white uniforms with little white hats, similar to nursing uniforms, stood at a conveyer belt, placing packets of biscuits into boxes. Eva stood and watched them for a long moment. Men in white pants and shirts or overalls picked the boxes up and carried them away. Eva was used to factory floors. She never worked in one before, but she would often visit her grandfather, Karl Muller, at his factory. He owned one of the largest steel and iron factories in Germany. This factory made some of her memories bubble to the surface.

"Can I help you?"

Startled, Eva turned to find a scowling woman standing next to her. The woman wore a white uniform like the others, but her hat had a pink band across the top.

"I'm looking for Mr. Peabody," Eva explained, and quickly looked at her note to make sure she had remembered the right name.

"Why?" the woman asked. She took out a cigarette and lit it while waiting for Eva's reply.

"I am here for the secretary position."

"That way," the woman said, jabbing her cigarette to the left, and walked away, leaving a very bemused Eva in her wake.

Eva shook her head and went to the door marked "Office". She passed through the doorway and was grateful to find that the noise subsided dramatically when she closed the door behind her. A young woman sat at a desk.

"Yes?"

"My name is Eva Muller, and I have an appointment to see Mr. Peabody."

"For the secretary position?" the young woman asked.

"Yes."

The woman sighed. "I'm so sorry, but Mr. Peabody has already hired someone."

"Oh," Eva sighed. She stood there for a moment not knowing what to do. "All right, thank you," she said and began to walk out of the office.

She had gotten as far as the door when a voice behind her asked, "Do you want a job?"

Eva turned and saw a short, balding man wearing large round spectacles that seemed to take over his entire face. He wore a three-piece suit that looked a size too small.

"Yes, but the young woman said that the position was filled," Eva replied.

The man nodded, took out a white handkerchief, and brushed it over his bald head. "I'm Mr. Peabody, the factory manager," he said. "It's not the office job; I'm looking for process workers."

"Oh," Eva said, nonplussed.

"You look like a strong girl. What's your name?"

"Eva," she told him.

"Eva, do you have a surname?"

"Muller," Eva said, holding her breath as she awaited his reaction.

"That's German, isn't it?"

"Yes sir, it is."

"So you are a kraut?" Peabody took off his glasses and cleaned them with his handkerchief.

"Yes, sir, I am German," Eva replied. She knew how the rest of the script would play out and was resigned to the inevitable response. Eva swallowed her disappointment as she realized that yet another job had been lost to her. She slowly raised her eyes to meet those of the bespectacled manager.

"Well," Peabody said quietly after a moment, "even krauts need jobs." A fleeting glimpse of softness invaded the man's steady stare.

Eva simply nodded.

Peabody dropped his gaze, then loudly cleared his throat. Eva had the impression the man was embarrassed at showing any understanding of anyone.

"So, Eva Muller, what was your last job?"

"I have not been working since coming to this country."

Peabody grunted. "What did you do before coming here?"

Eva licked her lips and sighed. "I was in Egypt for a year after the war ended." Eva deliberately omitted to say she had also been recovering from her own wounds which she had received from her stepfather's second-in-command, Jurgen Reinhardt, during the dying days of the German occupation of Greece.

"Hmm, all that nasty business with the Jews..."

"I'm not Jewish, sir."

"You're not?" Peabody asked with a slight look of surprise on his face.

"No, sir, I'm a Christian," Eva replied and wanted to shake her head. Peabody was quite shortsighted if he didn't notice the gold cross that hung around her neck.

"Ah," Peabody said, as he took off his glasses again. Taking the tip of his necktie, he rubbed his glasses. "Well, many people are displaced. You're not a Nazi, are you?"

"No, sir, I'm not."

"My oldest boy was in Egypt when the war ended."

"I met quite a few Australian soldiers. Very brave men." Eva was fond of the Australian soldiers that she had met. They had not cared that she sounded like a German. She had helped in the hospital where she put her little-practiced English to use. Although she had been taught the language at university, Eva had rarely had an opportunity to use it. In Egypt, Zoe had befriended an Australian nun and quickly learned the language. Eva had joined her and found that the formal English she had been taught was different from Australian English, a lesson that was driven home to her every day.

"Good." Peabody nodded and his double chin wobbled. "So, can you start on Monday?"

Eva stood there for a long moment before she found her voice. "Doing what?"

"You'll take the biscuits off the conveyor and stack them," Peabody replied. "It's good, honest, hard work. You're not afraid of hard work, are you?"

"No, sir," Eva said, shaking her head slowly. This was not what she'd had in mind. A job in a factory was not something she would have chosen, but they needed the money. Eva knew that if she wanted to give Zoe a chance to fulfill her own dreams, then the job was necessary. She had not had much luck elsewhere. "All right," she said.

"Good, good." Peabody nodded, walked over to the door, and yanked it open. He stuck his head out in search of the nearest supervisor. "Where is that woman when you need her?" he muttered to himself. After failing to find who he wanted, he spotted someone else and called out. "Wiggins! Get yourself over here!"