

'Here!' Arie pointed to an open gateway and a concrete road leading upwards between hedges of oleanders in bloom.

'The house of Dimitri and Roula, there is an intersection in the road where you have to keep to the right.'

Annie, sitting beside him, nodded and felt the Land Rover reduce speed. A few potholes in the road surface marked the beginning of the road. Arie carefully steered around them and followed the road upwards at a snail's pace.

'Isn't this a dead end street?' Annie asked, when she saw that the strip of asphalt was quickly narrowing.

'I have no idea, Annie; I have never driven farther than Stamatis' restaurant. The road is in good condition for driving as far as the curve to the left, after that, the road goes down to the parking lot.'

The typically Greek restaurant was situated at the inside of the curve. A building made of natural stone covered with Greek, round, ochre roof tiles. A large terrace that was roughly paved was at the front of the building. On the terrace were small square tables with chequered covers and the inevitable oil and vinegar sets on top, and around the tables were wooden chairs with wicker seats.

Arie drove down onto the parking lot. He parked his car in such a way that he would be able to get on the steep road later without manoeuvring.

'Look at the ground before you get out, Annie,' Arie warned.

Annie looked at him questioningly. 'Why?'

‘Sometimes there are snakes, especially now in the spring. It’s not healthy to step on one of those critters.’

Annie pushed the door open, wondering if this was a joke. Arie had a peculiar sense of humour sometimes. There were no snakes to be seen. She got out and looked over the small parking lot. Only the steep entrance road was of concrete. The rest of the parking lot was no more than a paved patch of land, and at the edge, tufts of dry grass under some olive trees between pebbles and rocks. An Eldorado for snakes and lizards. She estimated the parking lot had space for about twenty cars. ‘The Greek will definitely park forty cars in a space like this,’ she thought.

During the few days they had been on the island, she had witnessed examples of the Greek art of parking. The real tourist season had not yet started and it seemed as if there were more cars than there were people on the island already. Double and triple parking seemed completely normal. No one looked surprised at a car blocking the road, because it was parked partly on the pavement under a tree and partly on the road. A free spot of asphalt, no matter how small, is enough for a Greek to park his car. No problem.

Waiting for Annie at the beginning of the steep road, Arie called out, ‘Are you coming?’

Annie hurried in his direction, while at the same time searching the ground for possible snakes or other vermin. Together they walked up the hill, stepped on the terrace, and noticed they were the first customers today. For Greek

standards, it was still early in the evening, just after half past eight.

A young woman appeared in the door opening of the small building at the end of the broad terrace. She was dressed in jeans, T-shirt and slippers, the normal dress code for Greek servants.

'Hello, Arie, we have been expecting you,' she greeted. 'How are you doing?'

'Good, very well, Alexia, thank you, and how are you?'

'Good, thanks. Kostas will be here soon. He is poking the fire under the charcoal. But do sit down.'

During the greeting and exchange of pleasantries, Alexia walked towards the couple and she pointed to the table in the corner of the terrace. Arie saw Annie looking towards the other side of the terrace where she could see the vegetable garden that started at the end of the parking lot.

'Lovely, my regular table. Thanks, Alexia,' Arie answered as he walked quickly to the designated table. Annie reluctantly followed him.

'I would have preferred to sit on the other side of the terrace, Arie. There on the elevated part of the terrace where we could have a view of the garden and the hills.' She stood still for a moment to see if Arie would change his mind and choose the other table as well.

A man appeared in the door opening of the restaurant, 'Hello, Arie, how are you, my good friend? And what have I heard, have you bought the villa on the hill? Well, well, and how long were you thinking of staying? And who is this, a new girlfriend?'

He walked towards Arie's table while checking out Annie from head to toe. The two men greeted each other with a firm handshake.

'Hello, Kostas, I am all right, and how are you, all right as well?'

In the many years Arie visited the island, he had learnt that the greeting ritual and reciprocal questions about health were very important.

'Come sit beside me, dear friend, so I can answer all of your questions. Annie, are you coming?'

Annie sat down on the chair beside Arie.

'Just a moment, Arie.' Kostas disappeared into the kitchen and re-appeared moments later with a bottle of ouzo and three small glasses.

'Let's first have a drink to your return and your new girlfriend.'

Kostas filled the glasses to the brim; he took one glass between his thumb and index finger and lifted it.

'Yamas! To your health.'

Arie and Annie followed his gesture, clicked their glasses against Kostas' and nodded, 'Yamas, to your health, Kostas.'

Kostas and Arie emptied their first glass of ice-cold ouzo in one swig.

Annie sipped at her drink that tasted of aniseed. 'Liquorice, which is what it tastes like. It is just liquorice water,' she thought, and drank the rest in one swig.

'Aren't you going to introduce me to your new girlfriend?'

Kostas asked while he looked at Annie.

'Kostas, this is Annie. She is not a new girlfriend; she is my personal assistant and lives in the guest rooms of the villa.'
Kostas stood up and shook Annie's hand.

'Pleased to meet you, Miss Annie, it is a pleasure to make your acquaintance. You must excuse me. Every year Arie drops by with a new conquest, so I thought...'

'I am also pleased to meet you, Mr. Kostas,' Annie interrupted him.

She liked Kostas. Despite his macho appearance, there was something soothing about him. She did not know if it was his blue eyes, his relaxed smile, his beard of three days or maybe his entire attitude. It was a good thing Arie had instructed her properly on the local customs. The reciprocal informing about health and the exchange of pleasantries upon meeting, are fixed rituals and not to be ignored. Everyone knew everything about everyone. They had also discussed the macho attitude, the Greek filotimo.

'Usually they are rough on the outside and smooth on the inside, pay no notice,' Arie had instructed her.

'I think Arie can explain to you exactly what the state of affairs is, Mr. Kostas.'

'I hope so, a beauty such as you, a personal secretary. Come on, Arie, what is with that.'

'In a moment, Kostas, but could we get something to eat in the meantime?'

'Alexia!...Lexia!...Where are you?' Kostas stood up and entered the restaurant.