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The Sunrise

Written by Victoria Hislop

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Famagusta was once a thriving city of forty thousand people. In 1974, its entire population fled when Cyprus was invaded by Turkey. Forty years on Varosha, as the modern city is known, remains empty, sealed off behind the barbed wire put up by the Turkish army. It is a ghost town.

Chapter One

Famagusta, 15 August 1972

Famagusta was golden. The beach, the bodies of sunbathers and the lives of those who lived there were gilded by warmth and good fortune.

Fine, pale sand and a turquoise sea had together created the most perfect bay in the Mediterranean, and pleasure-seekers came from all around the world to soak up its warmth and to enjoy the sensual pleasure of the calm waters that gently lapped around them. Here was a glimpse of paradise.

The old fortified city with its strong medieval walls stood to the north of the beach resort, and trippers went on guided tours to learn about its origins, and to admire the vaulted ceilings, detailed carvings and buttresses of the magnificent building that had once been the cathedral of St Nicholas but was now a mosque. They saw the remnants of its fourteenth-century history, heard tales of the Crusades, the wealthy Lusignan kings and the arrival of the Ottomans. All of this information, given by a well-meaning guide in the heat of the midday sun, was soon forgotten when they returned to their hotels, dived into the pool and felt the sweat and dust of history wash away.

It was the twentieth-century development that people truly appreciated, and after their excursion into history they happily came back to its straight-walled modern comforts and its characteristically huge windows that looked outwards on the glorious view.

The arrow slits in the old walled city had been enough to give a sighting of the enemy, but let in almost no light, and while the design of the medieval stronghold was aimed at keeping invaders out, the new city aimed to bring people in. Its architecture opened outwards and upwards to the brilliant blues of sky and sea, not inwards; 1970s Famagusta was inviting, light and designed to welcome the visitor. The image of an invader needing to be repelled seemed something from another age.

It was one of the world's finest resorts, purpose-built for pleasure, with little in its conception that did not have the comfort of the holidaymaker in mind. The tall buildings that hugged the coastline mostly comprised hotels with smart cafés and expensive shops beneath them. They were modern, sophisticated and reminiscent of Monaco and Cannes, and existed for leisure and pleasure, for a new international jet set ready to be seduced by the island's charm. In daylight hours, tourists were more than content with sea and sand. When the sun went down, there were hundreds of places to eat, drink and be entertained.

As well as its allure for the tourist, Famagusta also possessed the deepest and most important port in Cyprus. People in faraway destinations could enjoy a taste of the island thanks to the crates of citrus fruit that left in ships each year.

Most days from May to September were broadly the same, with a few dramatic leaps in temperature when the sun seemed almost savage. The sky was consistently cloudless, the days long, the heat dry and the sea cooling but always kind. On the long stretch of fine sand, tanned holidaymakers lay stretched out on sunbeds sipping iced drinks beneath colourful umbrellas, while the more active frolicked in the shallows or showed off on waterskis, slaloming expertly across their own wake.

Famagusta thrived. Residents, workers and visitors alike enjoyed almost immeasurable contentment.

The row of ultra-modern hotels stretched all along the seafront, mostly a dozen or so storeys high. Towards the southern end of the beach was a new one. At fifteen storeys it was taller than the

rest, twice as wide and so recently constructed it did not yet have a sign with its name.

From the beachfront it looked as minimalist as the others, blending into the necklace of hotels that lined the curve of the bay. The approach from the road, though, was grand, with imposing gates and high railings.

That hot summer's day, the hotel was full of people. They were not in casual holiday wear but in overalls and worker's dungarees. These were labourers, technicians and artisans, putting the finishing touches to a carefully conceived plan. Although the outside of the hotel seemed to conform to a standard scheme, the interior was very different from its rivals.

An impression of 'grandeur' was what the owners were aspiring to, and they considered the reception area one of the most important spaces in the hotel. It should be love at first sight for guests; unless it made an immediate impact, it had failed. There was no second chance.

The first thing that should impress was its size. A man would be reminded of a football pitch. A woman would think of a beautiful lake. Both would notice the impossible gleam of the marble floor and experience what it might be like to walk on water.

The person with this vision was Savvas Papacosta. He was thirty-three, though he looked older, with a few wisps of grey in his otherwise dark crinkly hair. He was clean-shaven and thickset, and today, as every day, he was wearing a grey suit (the best available air-conditioning system kept everyone cool) and an off-white shirt.

With one exception, everyone working in the reception area was male. The lone woman, dark-haired, immaculately dressed in a cream shift, was Papacosta's wife. Today she was there to supervise the hanging of the drapes in the foyer and ballroom, but in previous months she had been overseeing the selection of fabrics and soft furnishings for the five hundred bedrooms. Aphroditi loved this role and had a great gift for it. The process of creating a scheme for each room, using a slightly different style

for each floor, was similar to choosing clothes and finding accessories to match.

Aphroditi Papacosta's taste would make the finished hotel beautiful, but without her it would never have been built. The investment had come from her father. Trifonas Markides owned numerous apartment blocks in Famagusta as well as a shipping business that dealt with the vast quantities of fruit and other exports shipped out of its port.

The first time he met Savvas Papacosta was at a meeting of a local trade and commerce association. Markides had recognised his hunger and been reminded of his own younger self. It took him some time to convince his wife that a man who was running a small hotel at the less fashionable end of the beach had a promising future.

'She's twenty-one now,' he said. 'We need to start thinking about her marriage.'

Artemis considered Savvas to be socially beneath her beautiful and well-educated daughter, a little 'rough', even. It was not merely the fact that his parents worked on the land, but that their acreage was so small. Trifonas, however, saw this potential son-in-law as a financial investment. They had discussed his plans to build a second hotel several times.

'*Agapi mou*, his ambitions are immense,' Trifonas reassured Artemis. 'That's what matters. I can tell he is going to go far. There is fire in his eyes. I can talk business with him. Man to man.'

When Trifonas Markides invited Savvas Papacosta to dinner in Nicosia for the first time, Aphroditi knew what her father was hoping for. There was no *coup de foudre*, but she had not been out with many young men and did not really know what she was meant to feel. What was unsaid by any of them, though Savvas himself might have noticed it if he had studied the photograph given pride of place on the wall, was his resemblance to the Markides' late son, Aphroditi's only sibling. He was muscular, just as Dimitris had been, with wavy hair and a broad mouth. They would even have been the same age.

Dimitris Markides had been twenty-five when he was killed during the troubles that erupted between Greek and Turkish Cypriots in Nicosia in early 1964. He had died less than a mile from home, and his mother believed that he was just a bystander accidentally caught in crossfire.

Dimitris' 'innocence' made his death all the more tragic for Artemis Markides, but both his father and sister knew that it had not been a simple matter of bad luck. Aphroditi and Dimitris had shared everything. She had covered up for him when he sneaked out of the house, told lies to protect him, once even hidden a gun in her room, knowing that no one would come looking there.

The Markides children had enjoyed a privileged upbringing in Nicosia, with idyllic summers in Famagusta. Their father had a magic touch with investments and had already poured much of his wealth into the property boom that was taking place in the seaside resort.

When Dimitris died, everything changed. Artemis Markides could not and would not emerge from her grief. An emotional and physical darkness descended on all of their lives and did not lift. Trifonas Markides buried himself in his work, but Aphroditi spent much of her time trapped in the stifling atmosphere of a silent house where shutters were often kept closed throughout the day. She yearned to get away, but the only escape would be marriage, and when she met Savvas, she realised this could be her opportunity.

In spite of the lack of spark she felt with him, she was aware that life would be easier if she married someone of whom her father approved. She could also see that there might be a role for her in his hotel plans, and this appealed to her.

Within eighteen months of her first meeting with Savvas, her parents laid on the grandest wedding that had taken place in Cyprus in a decade. The service was conducted by the President, His Beatitude Archbishop Makarios, and there were over one thousand guests (who drank as many bottles of French champagne). The value of the bride's dowry in jewellery alone was estimated

at more than fifteen thousand pounds. On the day of her wedding, her father gave her a necklace of rare blue diamonds.

Within weeks, Artemis Markides began to make it clear that she wanted to move to England. Her husband was still benefiting from the burgeoning growth of Famagusta, and his business was thriving, but she could no longer bear to live in Cyprus. Five years had passed since Dimitris' death, but memories of that awful day remained vivid.

'We need a fresh start somewhere,' she nagged. 'Whatever we do here, wherever we live, this place can't be the same for us now.'

With huge reservations, Trifonas Markides agreed. Now that his daughter was married, he felt her future was secure and he would still have a part of his life on home soil.

Savvas had not been a disappointment. He had proved to his father-in-law that he could convert bare soil into profit. He had spent his childhood watching his mother and father alike toil on the land, producing just about enough to live on. When he was fourteen, he had helped his father build an extra room on to their house. He enjoyed the task itself, but more importantly, he realised that things could be done with the land other than scratching the top layer, and planting a few seeds. He despised the endless cycle of this process. It seemed utterly futile to him.

When he had seen the very first high-rise hotel going up in Famagusta, he had, in a quick mental calculation, worked out how much more profit could be made per acre of land by building upwards than by digging down to plant seeds or trees that needed tireless and repeated tending. His only problem had been how to buy the land so he could put his plan into action. Eventually, getting a few jobs, working round the clock and finding a bank loan (the manager recognised naked ambition when he saw it), he scraped together enough to purchase a small, undeveloped plot and built his first hotel, The Paradise Beach. Since then, he had watched the resort of Famagusta expand, and his own aspirations grew with it.

Trifonas Markides was a major investor in his new hotel project

and they had drawn up a business plan together. Savvas aimed to build up a chain that would one day be an international brand name, as recognisable as 'Hilton'.

Now the first stage was about to be realised. Construction of the largest and most luxurious hotel in Famagusta was complete. The Sunrise was almost ready to open.

Savvas Papacosta was kept busy by a constant flow of people asking him to inspect and approve their work. He knew that the final picture was made up of a thousand details and he took a close interest in them all.

Chandeliers were being hoisted into position, and their crystals created a kaleidoscope of colours and patterns that danced on the ceiling and were reflected in the floor. Not quite satisfied with the result, Savvas had each one lowered by just two links of the chain. It seemed to double the radius of the pattern.

At the centre of the vast space was a trio of gilded dolphins in a pool. Life-sized, they appeared to spring out of the water, their glassy eyes meeting those of the observer. Two men adjusted the flow that gushed from their snouts.

'A little more pressure, I think,' instructed Savvas.

Half a dozen artists were meticulously applying gold leaf to the neoclassical details on the ceiling. They were working as if they had all the time in the world. As if to remind them that they did not, five clocks were being lined up and fixed to the wall behind a mahogany reception desk that stretched for thirty yards down the side of the foyer. Within the next hour, plaques with the names of the world's major financial centres would identify them, and their hands would be accurately adjusted.

Decorative pillars, spaced to echo the layout of the ancient agora at nearby Salamis, were being delicately painted with veins to simulate marble. Clinging to scaffolding, a team of three worked on a *trompe l'oeil* mural that depicted various classical scenes. Aphroditi, the goddess of the island, was a central figure. In this image, she was rising from the sea.

In the floors and corridors above, working ceaselessly like bees

in a hive, pairs of chambermaids stretched cool new linen across king-sized beds and coaxed fat feather pillows into their cases.

'I could fit my whole family into this room,' observed one.

'Even the bathroom is bigger than my house,' responded her partner, with a note of disapproval.

They laughed together, bemused rather than jealous. The people who came to stay in such a hotel must be from another planet. In their view, anyone who demanded a marble bath and a bed wide enough for five must be rather peculiar. It did not occur to them that they were to be envied.

The plumbers putting the finishing touches to the bathrooms and the electricians scurrying to fit the final light bulbs had the same thoughts. Many of them lived cheek by jowl in homes with three or more generations. They could almost feel each other's breath when they slept; they waited patiently to use an outdoor toilet, and when the evening light faded and the low-wattage lighting began to flicker, they went to bed. Instinct told them that extravagance did not equate with happiness.

One floor below, close to where an indoor swimming pool was still being carefully tiled (there would be no use for it until November), two women, both dressed in white nylon housecoats, bustled about in a dazzlingly lit mirrored room. One of them was humming.

They were preparing the hotel's hairdressing salon for the big opening, and the inventory of everything that had been delivered over the last few days was now completed. The latest design of hooded hairdryer, rollers in every conceivable size, hair tints and processing chemicals for permanent waves: all was in order. Pins and grips, scissors and clippers, brushes and combs were put away in drawers or laid out on trolleys. The equipment needed for hairdressing was relatively uncomplicated. It was all down to the skill of the stylist, as Emine Özkan and Savina Skouros both knew.

Now that they were satisfied that everything was in working order, gleaming and pristine, they gave the counter a final polish, wiped around each of the six sinks and shone the mirrors and taps for the fifth time that day. One of them straightened the shampoos and cans of lacquer so that the brand name, of

which they were proud, was repeated in a perfect line: *WellaWellaWellaWellaWella*.

A great deal of business was expected from the female guests, who would be wanting their hair tamed after a day exposed to sun and sand. Within the next few months they confidently expected that every chair in the salon would be full.

'Can you believe this?'

'Not really . . .'

'We're so lucky . . .'

Emine Özkan had been cutting Aphroditi Papacosta's hair since she was a teenager. Until very recently, she and Savina had both worked in a small salon in the commercial part of Famagusta. Emine had come in on the bus every day from Maratha, a village ten miles away. When the modern resort had begun to expand and thrive, and her husband found work there too, they had uprooted their family and come to live on the edge of the new town, preferring it to the old walled city, which was predominantly inhabited by Turkish Cypriots.

It was the third time that Emine's family had moved in the space of a few years. Nearly a decade before, they had fled their village when it was attacked by Greek Cypriots and their house had been burned down. After that they lived for a time in an enclave where they had the protection of United Nations troops, before settling in Maratha.

Likewise, Famagusta was not Savina's birthplace. She had grown up in Nicosia, but the spate of violence between the two communities nine years before had left her with deep scars too. Such fear and suspicion had developed between Greek and Turkish Cypriots that United Nations troops were brought in to maintain the peace, and a boundary known as the Green Line was drawn across the city to divide the two communities. It had tainted her family's life.

'We hated being cut off like that,' she explained to Emine when they were sharing memories. 'There were good friends we just couldn't see any more. You can't imagine. It was terrible. But Greeks and Turks had been killing each other – so I suppose they had to do it.'

'Maratha wasn't like that. We all got on quite well there, us and the Greeks,' said Emine. 'Even so, we're all much happier here. And I'm *not* moving again!'

'Things are better for us too,' agreed Savina, 'but I miss my family a lot . . .'

The majority of Greek Cypriots were at ease with the Turkish Cypriots these days and no longer worried about paramilitary groups. Ironically, there was now rivalry and violence among the Greek Cypriots themselves. A minority of them wanted *enosis*, unification of Cyprus with Greece, and aimed to achieve it through violent means and intimidation. This was hidden from the tourists, and even most local people in Famagusta tried to forget that the threat was there.

Both women were standing in front of the mirror. They were identical in height, with a similar stocky shape, and wore the same fashionable short hairstyle and salon housecoats. They caught each other's eye and smiled. Emine was more than ten years older than Savina, but the similarity between them was striking.

That day, on the eve of the hotel opening, their conversation was flowing as usual like a river in springtime. They spent six days a week in each other's company, but their chatter was unceasing.

'My youngest sister's oldest is coming next week to stay for a few days,' said Emine. 'She just walks up and down, up and down, gazing into shop windows. I've seen her. Then she just stands and stares and stares and stares.'

Emine did an impression of her niece (one of a total of fifteen produced so far by her four sisters) transfixed by an invisible window display.

'The one who's getting married?'

'Yes. Mualla. She's actually got something to buy now.'

'Well, there's plenty for her to look at here.'

Famagusta had a plethora of bridalwear emporia whose windows were filled with frothy confections of satin and lace. Emine's niece would need several days to visit them all.

'She wants to get everything here. Shoes, dress, stockings. Everything.'

'I can tell her where I got my dress!' said Savina.

The two women continued tidying and polishing while they talked. Neither of them liked to be idle, even for a moment.

'And she wants things for the home, too. The young ones want more than we did in our day.' Emine Özkan did not entirely approve of her niece's ambitions.

'A few lace tablecloths. Embroidered pillowcases . . . It's not really enough now, Emine. Modern conveniences, that's what they want.'

Living in this fast-growing town, where light industry thrived along with tourism, Savina herself had developed a taste for plastic gadgets, which sat side-by-side with more traditional utensils in her kitchen.

'So how will Mrs Papacosta want her hair for the opening tomorrow? Like she had it for her wedding?'

Aphroditi would be the new salon's first customer.

'What time is she due?'

'She's coming at four.'

There were a few seconds of silence.

'She's been so good to us, hasn't she?'

'Yes,' said Savina, 'she's given us a big opportunity.'

'It won't be quite the same here, though . . .' said Emine.

Both women knew that they would miss the atmosphere of Euripides Street. Their old workplace had been a social meeting point as well as a haven for women to come and share intimate secrets, a female equivalent of the *kafenion*. Women in rollers lingered there for hours knowing that their confidences would stay within the confines of the salon. For many it was their only real outing of the week.

'We won't get our old regulars. But I have always longed for my own place.'

'And these ladies will be different. Maybe they'll be more . . .'

'. . . like those?' said Emine, indicating the framed black and white photographs that had been hung earlier that day. They showed a series of glamorous models with bridal hairdos.

'I expect we'll get quite a few weddings, anyway.'

The women had done all they could for now. The next day they would begin to take appointments. Savina squeezed her colleague's arm and smiled.

'Let's go now,' she said. 'Important day for us all tomorrow.'

They hung up their white coats and left the hotel by a back door.

Tourism provided an income for thousands in restaurants, bars and shops as well as in the hotels. Many families had been drawn to the city by the commercial opportunities it gave them, but also by its languid beauty, which they appreciated as much as the foreigners did.

Locals, boys especially, shared the sea and sand with hotel guests. Indeed, the mingling of the two frequently ended with promises of undying love and airport tears.

On this typical summer's afternoon, a small boy, maybe three years old, played on the beach just down from The Sunrise. He was alone, oblivious to anything around him, trickling sand from one hand to the other, digging down deeper and deeper to find the spot where the sand grew cool.

Again and again he passed the sand through his small fingers. He sieved and filtered until only the finest grains remained and ran like water as he lifted his hands and poured them back on to the beach. It was an action of which he never tired.

For an hour that afternoon he had been watching the group of long-limbed older boys playing polo in the water, and he yearned for the day when he would be big enough to join them. For now he had to sit and wait for his brother, who was one of the players.

Hüseyin had a casual summer job putting out loungers and collecting them again, but when he finished, he immediately waded out into the water to join a game. Since a coach had told him he showed great promise as an athlete, he was torn between two dreams: to be a professional volleyball or water polo player. Perhaps he could combine both.

'We need to get your feet back on the ground!' teased his mother.

'Why?' demanded his father. 'Look at him! With those strong legs he has as much chance as anyone.'

Mehmet stood up and waved when he spotted Hüseyin striding up the beach. Two or three times, with his head in the clouds, Hüseyin had forgotten that he was in charge of the little boy and set off home without him. Mehmet would not have been in any danger, apart from the fact that he had a three year old's inability to orient himself and would probably have wandered the wrong way. In the village where his parents had been born many years before, a small child alone would never get lost. Famagusta was a world away from such a place.

Mehmet was often told by his mother that he was a little miracle, but Hüseyin's pet name for him, 'little nuisance', seemed to have a truer ring. It was how the boy sometimes felt when his two big brothers were around.

'Come on, Mehmet, time to go home,' said the older boy, cuffing his brother round the ear.

With a ball in one hand and his little brother's hand in the other, Hüseyin made his way to the road. Once they were on the tarmacked surface, he repeatedly bounced the ball. They were both hypnotised by the repetition. Sometimes he could get all the way home, a fifteen-minute walk, without once breaking the rhythm.

They were so absorbed that they did not hear their names being called.

'Hüseyin! Mehmet! Hüseyin!'

Their mother, a hundred yards from the staff entrance to The Sunrise, was hurrying to catch up with them.

'Hello, my darlings,' she said, scooping Mehmet into her arms. He hated being picked up in the street and wriggled furiously. He was not a baby.

She kissed him on the cheek before putting him down.

'Mummy . . . ?'

A few yards away there was an advertising hoarding: an illustration of a smiling boy, his grin wide and cheeky, holding a glass that overflowed with effervescent lemonade. Mehmet gazed at this image every day and never gave up hope.

Emine Özkan knew what he was going to ask.

'Why do you want a drink that's been put in a bottle when you can have a fresh one? There is no sense in it.'

As soon as they reached home, Mehmet would be handed a glass of still, pale liquid, sweetened with plenty of sugar but nevertheless sharp enough to make him draw his cheeks in. It was as flat as milk. One day, after a game of water polo in which he had triumphed, he would go to a kiosk and buy a bottle for himself. It would make a loud *tsok* when the top came off, and bubbles would flow.

One day, thought Mehmet. One day.

Both Mehmet and Hüseyin cherished their dreams.