Some Sunny Day

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Extract

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ONE

''Ere, Rosie, you live down in Little Italy with the Eyeties, don't you? Only it's just bin on the wireless that that Mussolini of theirs has only gone and sided with ruddy 'Itler, just like it's bin saying in the papers 'e would. I heard about it when I took Mrs V.'s parcels to the post office for 'er.' Nancy, rushing into the small sewing room at the back of Elegant Modes, announced the news with malicious relish. 'Fascists, that's what they all are, living over here, spying on us. If you ask me, the whole lot of them want locking up.'

'That's not fair, Nancy,' Rosie Price objected, her brown eyes brilliant with emotion, and her cheeks flushing as she put down the dress she was holding and determinedly faced the other girl. 'Most of the Italians in Liverpool have been here for years, and I know for a fact that a lot of the boys from the families near us were amongst the first to join up when war was announced.'

Nancy tossed her head and eyed Rosie resentfully.

Until Rosie had started working at the dress shop on Bold Street just after Christmas, *she* had been the prettiest girl there and had grown used to the other girls both admiring and envying her. Mrs Verey, who owned Elegant Modes, had even asked Nancy to model the dresses now and then if a customer couldn't quite make up her mind.

Mrs Verey bought her stock with her regular customers in mind. For daytime there were smart tweed suits for the winter with neat little fur collars, to be worn with pretty knitted twinsets, and blouses trimmed with lace; for the summer, short-sleeved cotton and silk dresses and good navy-blue lightweight coats. She also carried a range of truly beautiful evening frocks, in silks and satins, with full panelled skirts flaring out from tightly fitted bodices. Most of the frocks came with matching wraps and pretty little evening bags. These dresses, like the wedding dresses she also sold, were kept in special glass-fronted wardrobes in their own special 'salon'. And since Rosie, with her tiny waist and her curves, her thick, naturally curly dark hair, and the dimples that softened her cheeks when her mouth curved into a smile, had come to work at the salon, it was she who Mrs Verey chose and whose inherent style the other girls were now trying to copy.

Rosie loved the expensive fabrics of the clothes Mrs Verey sold and searched the stalls in St John's market for offcuts and bargains – pretty pieces of lace and unusual buttons with which to dress up her own clothes. She favoured neat, simple styles

rather than frills and ruffles, preferring to buy plain things she could put her own stamp on with some pretty trimmings: a lace collar, or a contrasting belt. Mrs Verey had said approvingly, 'You've got a proper sense of style, Rosie, and no mistake. That's something that can never be bought.'

'Well, *you* might be all pally with them, Rosie, but there's a lot of folk in Liverpool who are a bit more patriotic,' Nancy announced sharply. 'My dad was saying only the other night as 'ow we don't need the likes of Eyeties and Fascists over here eating our rations and that.'

Rosie had no idea why Nancy kept picking on her the way she did. From her very first day at the shop, Nancy had gone out of her way to be unkind to her and get her into trouble. Rosie could still remember how, on her first morning, Nancy had told Rosie to iron a fragile satin dress satin side up, which would have ruined the garment completely if one of the other girls hadn't stopped her just in time. When Rosie had said innocently that she was following Nancy's instructions Nancy had claimed that Rosie must have misunderstood her. But it hadn't been until later in the week when Ruth, one of the girls, had overheard Nancy telling Rosie that Mrs Verey wanted her and that she was to go down to the showroom right away, that Rosie realised that it wasn't kindness that was motivating Nancy to take an interest in her but quite the opposite.

'Rosie, you just tek no notice of anything Nancy tells yer to do, wi'out checking wi' one of us first,'

Ruth had warned her. 'We all know that Mrs Verey doesn't allow us girls to go down into the showroom in our workroom clothes, and looking untidy. I reckon Nancy has a mind to get you into trouble so that Mrs Verey decides to get rid of you. She's allus bin a bit like that, has Nancy. She's got a real nasty streak to her, if you ask me.'

Now Rosie tried to avoid Nancy and not get drawn into arguments with her. She didn't want to risk losing her job, not whilst she was still only a trainee assistant, to give her job its proper name. Rosie's working day was filled with a variety of jobs that included making sure the floors were kept free of dust, especially in the workroom, learning how to press the delicate fabrics, making sure that clothes that had been tried on by customers were put back properly in the correct place, and just occasionally, under the stern eye of one of the more senior girls, being allowed into the shop to serve those customers who had come in for some small item such as a pair of stockings or some handkerchiefs. But now she couldn't just stand there and let Nancy get away with saying what she had.

'That's not fair,' Rosie repeated. 'Some of the families, like the Volantes, the D'Annunzios, the Santangellis and the Chiappes, have been in Liverpool for fifty years and more.' Although she wasn't Italian, Rosie had grown up amongst the immigrant Italian families who inhabited that part of the city known as 'Little Italy', the heart of the

Italian community in Liverpool. Rosie knew how proud Liverpool's Italians were, both of their roots in the Picinisco area of Italy, poor farming country between Naples and Rome, and of their English home from home. The first immigrants, men in the main, driven out of their home country by poverty, to look for work to support their families wherever they could find it, had worked hard, saving what they could to send home, and returning there in the summer to help tend the family farms. As soon as they were able to do so, they had brought to Liverpool their wives and children, and a tradition had built up of the Italians marrying within their own community and adhering as much as they could to the ways of the old country.

The Italian immigrants had always been made welcome and were able to find work because they possessed wonderful artistic talents. Rosie had been told how in the early days of their arrival, in Lionel Street, a number of Italian families had converted their cellars into little workshops where they made beautiful and intricate figurines and statues, sometimes working in marble. These skills were passed down from one generation to the next. Those unskilled men amongst the earlier immigrants had been prepared to undertake almost any type of work to support their families. One of their occupations was knife sharpening, and Rosie had often heard how proud the Gianelli and the Sartorri families were of the fact that from humble beginnings they had developed commercial businesses

within the city, offering their knife-sharpening services to hotels and restaurants.

As new immigrants arrived from Italy, those who were already established welcomed them, taking them in as lodgers and helping them to establish themselves in turn, so that a closely knit community began to develop. Ever watchful for an opportunity to earn a living, one man, Vincenzo Volante, set up in business hiring out handcarts and larger carts for transporting barrel organs. Vincenzo could speak several languages and so he took on the responsibility of helping the newcomers who could not speak English.

As la Nonna, the grandmother of Rosie's best friend, Bella, had told Rosie with great pride, the Italians coming from the homeland were extremely gifted artistically and musically, and soon the streets of Little Italy were warmed by the songs of the old country and the laughter of its people.

Those who pushed their barrel organs around the city entertaining the public, quickly realised that there was a market for the ice cream they had enjoyed at home in Italy, and so certain families set up small businesses in their homes making ice cream. Raphael Santangelli in particular was famous for his ice-cream business, starting from humble beginnings in Gerard Street, and selling his ice cream first from handcarts pushed around the streets, and then, as the business became more successful and he could afford them, via three-wheeler ice-cream carts. Now the Santangellis were well known and respected,

and their motorised ice-cream vans were seen everywhere in the city. La Nonna was very proud of her own family's distant connection to the Santangellis, to whom she was a cousin several times removed. She had boasted to Rosie, though, that her own recipe for ice cream was just that little bit better than that of the Santangellis, owing to a 'secret' extra special ingredient she had learned at her own grandmother's knee and which she only intended to pass on to her daughters on her deathbed.

The Chiappe family was also famous for its ice-cream business. They had a well-known ice-cream shop near the Gaiety Cinema in Scotland Road, and another branch at 8 Feather Road, owned by Angelo Chiappe, who was a great friend of Bella's father. In the winter, when no one wanted to buy ice cream, the sellers sold roasted chestnuts instead.

Many Italian men found work in the catering trade in Liverpool's hotels, and in 1939, when Romeo Imundi had retired from Romeo's, the grocery store owned and run by the Imundi family on Springfield Street, the whole community had turned out to wave him off back to Picinisco.

Knowing what she did about the length of time the Italian families had been established in Liverpool, and just how much they had contributed to the city in different ways, and how much they cared about it and about one another, it shocked and disgusted Rosie to hear Nancy speaking so nastily about them, and she was fully prepared to say so. Nancy, though, wasn't prepared to listen.

'They're still Eyeties, though, aren't they?' she insisted.

'Don't pay no mind to Nancy, Rosie,' Ruth said quietly as Rosie carefully hung up the dress, ready to start work on it in the morning. 'I dare say Nancy's had her fair share of Gonnelli's ice cream and Podestra's chips in her time.'

Rosie managed a small smile, more out of politeness than anything else. It made her so angry when she knew how hard the Italians worked to hear them being run down so unfairly.

'Nancy's being so unkind, Ruth,' she replied fiercely. 'You should have seen how proud the Italian folk in our street were when their boys joined up. St Joseph's Boxing Club was practically empty, so many of the boys who go there had enlisted. The Fuscos a few doors down from us lost their only son at Dunkirk,' she added quietly. Her eyes clouded at the thought.

The whole country was still in shock over the dreadful news they had all heard about the British Expeditionary Force, the very best of the country's experienced soldiers. Trapped when Hitler had swept into Belgium and then France, the British soldiers had been forced to retreat to the French beaches of Dunkirk. Thousands of them had died there and thousands upon thousands more would also have perished or been taken prisoner had it not been for the brave men who had risked their own lives over and over again to sail across the Channel to bring their fellow countrymen safely home.

Rosie had seen the newsreels, showing that valiant rescue operation. She had seen too the heart-wrenching celluloid images of the haggard, grey-faced men in their uniforms, heads bent in shame and defeat. Mr Churchill's stirring words, though, had raised everyone's spirits and given the fighting men of Great Britain back their pride, as he had turned defeat into pride that so many brave men had been saved. But the terrible events of Dunkirk had left a shadow over the whole country, along with the fear of Hitler's threatened invasion.

Just thinking about the war made Rosie feel so afraid. And not just for herself. Her father was a merchant seaman, sailing under the 'Red Duster', as the Red Ensign was nicknamed. All through the winter, merchant ships had made their way across the Atlantic in convoys, bringing much-needed supplies to the country, but the loss of life and shipping had been severe, and Rosie could never relax when her father was at sea.

Although the dress shop closed at five o'clock, the girls in the sewing room were expected to work on until six. Normally Rosie, who as a trainee was mainly working on alterations to start with, loved her work, adjusting pretty clothes in beautiful material, coming up with interesting trimmings and using her skill as a seamstress to excellent effect, but tonight she was anxious to leave so that she could hurry home and find out more about the news Nancy had referred to. Their Italian neighbours had been reluctant to talk about

the likelihood of Mussolini joining Hitler. All of them still had family back in Italy, and Rosie, knowing how close-knit Italian families were, could only imagine how anxious they must be feeling.

The shock of being at war, and most especially the Dunkirk evacuation, was at the forefront of everyone's mind and had brought a sombreness to people, but it had also brought a resoluteness, Rosie recognised, as she stepped out into the early evening sunshine and headed for home. Rosie's parents rented a small house in Gerard Street. Like the children of their Italian neighbours, Rosie had attended Holy Cross school and worshipped at Holy Cross itself.

It wouldn't take her very long to walk home, and although her stomach growled hungrily as she drew level with her favourite chippy, she refused to give in to the temptation to go in, telling herself as she turned into Springfield Street that she'd come back later after she'd seen Bella and get herself a tuppenny dinner. It wasn't likely there'd be dinner on the table, after all. Her mother, Christine, wasn't the domesticated sort, and Rosie had learned from a young age that when her father was at sea she had to look after herself. Rosie expected that right now Christine would be round at the Grenellis', smoking and laughing with the men, whilst Maria bustled around her kitchen making dinner for everyone. Sometimes Rosie found it hard to understand what her undomesticated, often hard to please mother had in common with gentle, homely Maria, and why Maria

put up with a friend who was as difficult and selfish as Rosie knew her mother to be. As a little girl she had often wished secretly that Maria was her mother, loving the way she would sweep her up onto her lap and cuddle her, something Christine never did.

Her mother practically lived at the Grenellis' when Rosie's father was away at sea. Rosie imagined that Christine, who had left her large family of brothers, sisters and cousins behind when she had left Preston to come and live in Liverpool as a young wife, missed them so much that she naturally preferred the hustle and bustle of her neighbours' house to the solitude of her own home. Rosie knew how her father had fallen in love with her mother at first sight when he had been visiting a fellow sailor who lived in that town, and how he had refused to take no for an answer and had finally persuaded her mother to marry him. She had often complained to Rosie, though, about how lonely she had felt when she had first arrived in Liverpool, knowing no one there but her new husband, who had promptly returned to sea, leaving her on her own. It had been the Grenellis – especially sweet-natured, gentle Maria – who had taken pity on her and taken her under their wing, inviting her into their home and offering her their friendship.

Rosie suspected that it was because of that friendship, and her reluctance to be parted from such long-standing and kind friends, that her mother had refused all her father's attempts to persuade her to move out of the Gerard Street area, with its small

shabby houses, and up to a bigger and smarter house on Chestnut Close between Edge Hill and Wavertree where his widowed sister already lived. Her father was a hard worker and, unlike many other seamen, neither drank nor gambled away his wages, so they had the money to go, but her mother wouldn't even entertain the idea of moving.

Rosie had grown up hearing her parents arguing about it, and then pulling the bed covers over her ears to block out the sound. She often felt guilty for loving her father so much more than she did her mother. But her mother treated her sometimes as though she resented her rather than loved her. It wasn't that she was ever actively unkind to her, Rosie admitted; her mother simply wasn't like that. But neither was she the kind of mother who openly showed tenderness and love for her child, and Rosie had learned very young not to go to her mother for cuddles. If she did, Christine was more than likely to refuse to pick her up, telling her instead to go away.

Things were better between them now that Rosie was almost grown up, and these days Rosie found herself behaving towards her mother as though *she* were the child, and in need of looking after, as well as taking over most of the domestic responsibilities.

The love she hadn't got from her mother, though, she certainly had received from her adoptive Italian family. Maria had no children of her own but her comfortable knee and warm arms had always been there for Rosie throughout her childhood. And

whilst her mother had often spoken critically and sometimes even unkindly to her friend about her plumpness and her homely ways, Rosie loved Maria deeply. She had sensed too, in that way that children can, that Maria loved her. It had been Maria she could remember singing lullabies to her and telling her stories, Maria to whom she had wanted to hurry after school so that she could tell her about her day.

Giovanni and Lucia, Bella's grandparents, had first come to Liverpool as a very young couple, with the encouragement of other family members already living in the city. Both Maria and Sofia had been born in Liverpool, although Giovanni had insisted on them marrying young men from his and Lucia's old village. Maria and Sofia had both been new brides at the same time as Christine, and Rosie's first memories were of being in the Grenellis' busy, aromatic kitchen, playing with Bella whilst the grown-ups worked and gossiped around the kitchen table. Rosie soaked up the Italian language like la Nonna's famous ciabatta soaked up the pungent olive oil that was lovingly sent from Italy four times a year. La Nonna, as the whole family called Lucia, could speak English but she preferred her native tongue and, especially whilst cooking or eating, the rest of the family followed suit. Over the years, sitting on the floor, listening attentively, wide-eyed and enthralled, Rosie learned the history of the Grenelli family from la Nonna.

Rosie had been so entranced by la Nonna's

stories that she had asked her school teacher, Miss Fletcher, to show her where Naples and Rome were in the dusty, slightly worn pages of a school atlas, and had then lovingly traced the whole country of Italy from that map, marking out first the cities la Nonna had named, and then the Picinisco area itself. When she had seen what Rosie was doing, Miss Fletcher had helped her to chart a dotted line all the way from Picinisco across the sea to Liverpool. Then when this had been done, under Miss Fletcher's guidance, Rosie had transferred the tracing onto a clean piece of white paper, carefully marking out the cities of Rome and Naples in different coloured pencils before drawing in Picinisco itself. When she had proudly given her map to la Nonna she had been rewarded with tearful delight and a good many hugs and kisses.

La Nonna had so many stories to tell about the old country and the old ways of life, and about the hardship her people had endured in their journey to Liverpool. Rosie had listened to them with delight, drinking in everything she was told, and imagining for herself how it must have felt to go through such a frightening upheaval. With the acceptance of the young, Rosie had seen no difference between herself and Bella, feeling as at home sitting on the floor listening to la Nonna as though she were her own grandmother, and the stories she was hearing were stories of her own family.

Indeed, from a young age Rosie had been more familiar with the names and family relationships of

Bella's extended family, in Liverpool and in Italy, than she was with her mother's extensive but seldom seen siblings. As an only child, she relished the close network of the Grenellis, the support and love they showed for one another. It would have been a lonely life otherwise, especially when her father was at sea.

Perhaps it would have been different if they had lived nearer to them or if her father had been part of a large family, but he only had his elder sister, Rosie's Aunt Maude and her husband, Henry, whom they had seen so rarely that, after his death when she was twelve, Rosie could barely remember what he looked like.

That her mother and her father's sister did not get on had always been obvious to Rosie, even when she was little. Whenever her mother spoke about 'your Maude' to Rosie's father, she did so in a scathing, slightly high-pitched and angry tone of voice that always made Rosie's tummy hurt, especially when she saw her father looking so sad and sometimes cross.

As she got older Rosie was told by her mother that her Aunt Maude was a snob who had never wanted Christine to marry her brother. And in fact on more than one occasion her mother had told Rosie that part of the reason she had married Rosie's father had been 'to show that snotty bitch what's what'.

The trouble had started, apparently, when Rosie's father had taken his new fiancée to Liverpool to introduce her to his sister.

'Acted like I was a piece of muck wot had got stuck to her shoe, she did, trying to show off wi' her la-di-da way. If you ask me she never wanted yer dad to marry anyone. Mothered him she had, you see, Rosie, him being the younger and then him going spoilin' her by giving her half his wages and allus bringin' her stuff back when he came ashore. Of course she didn't want him getting married and her gettin' her nose shoved out of joint. Stands to reason. But your dad's that soft he couldn't see that. He thinks she's perfect and she bloody well isn't. I'll bet that husband of hers were right glad to die and escape from her.'

Her mother had always been fond of making outrageous statements of this nature but Rosie had always dreaded her making them when her father was at home in case it sparked off one of their increasingly bitter rows.

'Then you coming along didn't help,' her mother had informed Rosie bluntly, 'especially when she saw how your dad took to you. She and that husband of hers never had no kiddies of their own and you'd have thought she'd have bin glad to have a little 'un in the family, but not her. Hates you almost as much as she does me.'

Her aunt certainly didn't like her very much, Rosie was forced to admit. Whenever her father took her to visit, her Aunt Maude's manner towards her was always cold and disapproving. There was none of the warmth in her aunt's house that there was in the Grenellis', even if there was

more money. Not that the Grenellis were poor. Giovanni had worked hard for his family, and both his sons-in-law worked in his ice-cream business: small, plump Carlo, who was Sofia's husband and Bella's father, with his twinkling eyes and lovely tenor voice, and tall, good-looking Aldo, who spent his spare time like many of the Italian men at St Joseph's Boxing Club, or in the room at the back of Bonvini's shop with his fellow *paesani*, playing cards, and who was married to kind Maria. In the winter the men of the family, all skilled musicians, earned a living entertaining cinema queues and playing at Italian weddings and christenings.

The first thing Rosie noticed as she turned the corner into Springfield Street was the strange silence. The street was empty of the children who would normally have been playing under the watchful eye of their grandmothers. The caged singing birds, trained by some of the Italian families who had brought them from their homeland, were absent from open doorways and the doors themselves were firmly closed where normally they were always left open for friends and family. There were no voluble discussions on the merits of rival products from the women, no occasional mutters of deeper male voices belonging to the card players in the smoke-filled, wine-scented room at the back of the shop. And, most extraordinary of all, the shops themselves were closed – even Jimmy Romeo's, as the grocery shop owned by the Imundi family was fondly known. Rosie stared at it in bewilderment. Jimmy Romeo's

never closed. On halfdays when other shops locked their doors and hung their signs in the window, and proud fathers walked with their sons to meet up with friends, Jimmy Romeo's remained open for the men to play their favourite card games of *scopa* and *briscola* in the back room, and exchange banter. The street seemed almost alien without the familiar sharp smells of cheese, sausage, olives, coffee and garlic wafting through the open doorways. Something, not fear exactly, but something cold and worrying trickled down Rosie's spine like the ice cream Dino Cavelli had deliberately dropped down the back of the taffeta dress Maria had smocked so carefully and lovingly for her to wear for her eleventh birthday party. Dino's parents were close friends of Bella's, *comparaggio* in fact, the name Italians gave to those very close friends they had honoured by inviting them into their family. As was the tradition, Dino's parents had been *compare* and *comare* at Bella's parents' wedding, and were also Bella's godparents, just as Bella's parents were Dino's. Rosie often envied Bella the security of the traditional Italian network of friends and family that surrounded her, although Bella complained that she found it restrictive and would love the freedom to go out with girlfriends that Rosie enjoyed.

Dino was a tall handsome young man now, and Rosie didn't mind admitting that she rather enjoyed his flirtatious teasing whenever they happened to meet. Like her own father, he was in the merchant navy, and it always gave her a small *frisson* of

excitement to see him walking down the street towards her when he was back on leave. So far she had resisted his invitations to go to the pictures with him, knowing all too well that he would not have dared to put such an invitation to an Italian girl. It was well known that young Italian men might enjoy a bit of dalliance with English girls but when it came to marriage they were too worried about their mamma's feelings to do anything other than marry the girl of her choice – and she would always be a good Italian girl.

Not that she wanted to marry Dino – or indeed anyone right now. It was impossible for her to think of falling in love and being happy when the country was at war and so many dreadful things were happening. Her father was the kind of man who believed in protecting his family from the realities of what it meant to sail across the Atlantic, knowing that Hitler's U-boats were waiting to hunt down and sink the merchant vessels that were bringing the much-needed supplies of food, oil and other necessities back to Liverpool. He might not say to them that each time he sailed he knew that every day he was at sea could be his last, but Rosie knew the truth. In February his ship had been late getting back into Liverpool, because one of the other vessels sailing with it had been torpedoed and sunk with the loss of most of its crew. Rosie had inadvertently overheard her father talking about it with some of the other sailing men from the area.

No, her father might not talk much to her about

the dangers he and the other merchant seamen faced, but that did not mean that Rosie was not aware of them. She had felt indignant on her father's behalf when she had learned that if a merchant ship was lost then the seamen were paid only for the number of days they had been on board it. If a ship was torpedoed and the men had to abandon it, they were paid nothing at all for the days, sometimes even weeks, it might take them to get back to port and find another berth.

Rosie had heard her Aunt Maude berating her father for not getting a shore job where he would be safe and better paid, but as easy-going as her father was, when it came to his work he could not be shifted. He had salt water in his blood, he was fond of saying, and the life of a landlubber was not for him.

Rosie crossed Christian Street into Gerard Street, a small smile curling her mouth as she thought of her father. The smile instantly disappeared the moment she heard angry raised voices, followed by the sound of breaking glass. Half a dozen or more men had suddenly appeared at the far end of the street, some wielding heavy pieces of wood, and yelling out insults and threats as they smashed in the window of an ice-cream shop. As Rosie watched, paralysed with fear, more men joined those attacking the shop, and then several started to march up the street, one of them stopping to throw a brick through a house window, whilst others banged on doors and called out

insults. Above the yells of the attacking mob and the sound of glass being trodden underfoot, Rosie could hear a woman screaming and a baby crying. Rose Street police station was only five minutes away. If she ran she could be there in less, Rosie decided, her heart bumping against her chest as she hurried off.

Fortunately she didn't need to go all the way to the police station, because she met several policemen coming towards her. One of them was their local bobby, Tom Byers, whose son had been at school with Rosie and Bella.

'There's a gang battering down Gonnelli's ice-cream shop,' Rosie told him breathlessly. 'I could hear a baby crying . . .'

'You get yourself off home, and make sure you stay there, young Rosie,' Tom told her grimly, straightening the chinstrap of his helmet, his usually friendly face looking very stern. 'It isn't safe for you to be out with these young hotheads on the loose, creating trouble for decent honest folk.'

'What's happening to . . . ?' Rosie began, but the noise from the mob was growing in volume and the policemen had already started to hurry towards it.

But instead of going home, Rosie scurried down to the Grenellis', going round to the back door as she always did and calling out as she knocked on it.

'It's me – Rosie.' She couldn't bring herself just to walk in unannounced. even after all these years

and countless admonishings from the Grenellis to do so.

The door was opened immediately, and Rosie was almost pulled inside by Bella's grandfather.

'Did you see what's happening, Rosie?' Bella asked her anxiously from the back of the kitchen. 'We heard shouts and breaking glass.'

'It'll be them crazy mad *Inglesi* who was down here earlier full of drink, yelling that we're all Fascists,' Sofia, Bella's mother, always sharper-tongued than her gentler sister, Maria, answered tersely.

'Well, you can't blame 'em for what they're thinking, not with bloody Mussolini doing what he's done,' Rosie's mother announced, putting out her cigarette and almost immediately lighting another one as she leaned against the wall, constantly stealing quick furtive glances towards the door.

Despite the fact that it was June, the room seemed unfamiliarly shadowed in some way, and shrouded in an atmosphere that was a mixture of confused helpless anger and growing apprehension.

Rosie's father was always saying what a beautiful girl her mother had been, and she was still good-looking now, Rosie admitted, although privately she couldn't help wishing that her mother wouldn't dye her brown hair such a brash blonde, nor wear such a bright red lipstick. She had seen the way other people looked at Christine and it made her feel both angry and protective. Her mother made no secret of the fact that she liked

a good time: she loved dancing, and Rosie had often heard her asking Maria if she minded if she borrowed her Aldo so that she could go down to the Grafton for a dance.

No one was thinking about dancing now though, as the sounds from outside grew louder and ever closer.

'We'll be all right,' Carlo tried to reassure them. 'It will be those with shops they'll be going for.'

'How could anyone do something like this?' Rosie protested.

'They're doing it because we're Italian,' Sofia told her. 'If I was you, Christine, I'd take meself home. It'd be much safer for you and your Rosie there, that's for sure. After all, you aren't Italian, are you?'

Inexplicably there was a mounting tension between her mother and Sofia that Rosie didn't understand and for the first time she felt uncomfortably like an outsider to their close-knit family group.

'I saw Tom Byers on the way here and he said it was just a few hotheads, and that they'd soon have it sorted out,' she offered, in an attempt to give some reassurance and dissolve the tension, but as she spoke the noise from outside became so loud that she couldn't even hear Bella's response.

Giovanni and Carlo exchanged anxious looks and, as always in times of great emotion, Giovanni reverted to Italian, gesticulating wildly as he spoke.

'I don't understand what's going on,' Rosie repeated, trying not to wince as she heard the threatening sound of shouted abuse mingling with

that of breaking glass. It was so loud now, as though a full-blown riot were taking place: angry voices, the sound of blows, breaking glass and police whistles.

'It's because Mussolini is joining Hitler, Rosie,' Bella explained to her, raising her voice so that she could be heard above the din.

'I know about Mussolini but why should that mean—'

'Some people look for any excuse to make trouble,' Sofia told Rosie. 'They think that because we are Italian we are now their enemy. They forget that our children play with their children, that we have sons who are wearing the same uniforms as theirs. It's all right, Mamma.' She tried to comfort Lucia, who was looking anxiously at the door and crossing herself, whilst saying that she wished she had never left Italy.

'You'd better go next door, Carlo, and make sure that Giovanna is all right,' Sofia instructed her husband. 'She'll be on her own with the babies because Arno's gone over to Manchester to see his brother. Tell her she's welcome to come here if she wants. And if you see any police about, ask them what they're doing, letting this happen.'

Despite the gravity of the situation, Rosie couldn't help smiling slightly as she listened to Sofia bossing her husband around.

Carlo had almost reached the back door when the sound of someone banging loudly on it made them all gasp.

They each let out a breath when they heard Aldo's voice calling out, 'Maria, it's me, Aldo. Let me in.'

Maria opened the door, but it was Christine who was first at Aldo's side, leaning weakly against his broad shoulder and saying weepily how afraid she was. Almost comically opposite in looks to his brother-in-law, Aldo was tall, and broad-shouldered, lithe, with a dark, smouldering gaze and a dismissive way of treating Maria that made Rosie feel for her.

'Aldo, Carlo's just going round to bring Giovanna back here. You'd better go with him, in case she needs some help with the *bambini*,' Sofia instructed her brother-in-law.

Although no one ever said anything – like all Italian families, they were intensely loyal to one another – Rosie suspected that Sofia was not overfond of her sister's husband.

'There's no point,' he answered her dismissively, causing Maria to pale and Sofia to suck in her breath.

'It's too late? They've been hurt?' Maria exclaimed in distress. 'Oh, Aldo . . .'

'Did I say that?' he answered irritably. 'They're fine. Giovanna's brother was at the club. He walked up the street with me.' The women exhaled a collective sigh of relief. Rosie, as ever, automatically fell into the familiar pattern of echoing the huge sigh and expressive gestures of the others.

'Here, Mamma, drink this,' Maria was instructing la Nonna whilst she hurried to get a small glass

and pour her some of the special restorative 'cordial' that came all the way from 'home' and which was normally only served on very special occasions or when someone was in need of a tonic. 'Rosie *cara*, help Bella to make us all some coffee, will you?' Maria called back over her shoulder.

Rosie needed no second instruction. It felt so comforting to go through the routine she and Bella had learned together as little girls. Rosie could still remember how proud she had been when she had been allowed to serve la Nonna and Grandfather Grenelli the first cups of the coffee she had made all by herself.

These days there was no need for her to concentrate or worry as she ground the beans, releasing their wonderful rich dark aroma into the kitchen, and then waited for the kettle to boil. The Grenellis preferred to use an old-fashioned range rather than a modern stove, and Rosie admitted that there was something comforting about the warmth it gave out.

The giving of a medicinal cordial followed by the family gathering round the cordial drinker to offer comments on his or her condition, whilst they drank coffee was a part of Rosie's growing up and she took comfort from it now.

When her father was at home Rosie always drank tea because she knew it was what he preferred, but secretly she preferred coffee. Here in the Grenelli household she was more Italian than English, whilst at home she was very much her father's daughter. She had, she knew, inherited his calm temperament,

and his abhorrence of any kind of flashy showiness. They shared the same sense of humour, laughing over silly jokes on the wireless on programmes such as *ITMA*, which had her mother complaining that they were both daft. The delicacy of Rosie's bone structure came, her father had always claimed, from his side of the family, along with her warm smile. Rosie cherished the closeness between them, and even though she envied Bella the closeness of her loving family, Rosie wouldn't have changed her dad for anyone.

As Maria handed her husband the coffee Rosie had just poured, he told them, 'And Giovanna's brother is taking them back home with him. I saw the police helping them out the back way.' As always, Aldo barely acknowledged Maria, taking the coffee from her without bothering to thank her and then turning back to Rosie's mother, who was still clinging fiercely to his arm, to say, 'Don't worry, Chrissie, there's nothing to be afraid of now. The police have moved the rioters on.'

La Nonna muttered something to Sofia that Rosie couldn't catch, but which caused Maria to shake her head gently.

'Trust you not to be here when Maria needed you, Aldo,' Sofia told her brother-in-law scornfully.

'I couldn't get back. We had to stay where we were for our own safety, until the police had rounded up the troublemakers. It weren't just winders they were battering, you know,' Aldo answered her defensively. 'When I came up the street there was a man

lying in the gutter who the mob had left for dead. Police were waiting on an ambulance to tek him to the hospital.'

'And with you, of course, your own safety always comes before that of anyone else, especially poor Maria,' Sofia snapped.

'Sofia, please,' Maria protested. 'It is not fair to blame Aldo. He is not responsible for those who are rioting.'

'Isn't it time you went home, Christine?' Sofia said to Rosie's mother sharply. 'You aren't Italian, after all,' she repeated, 'and you'll be safer behind your own front door.'

Again a charged look passed between her mother and Sofia, which Rosie couldn't interpret.

Christine gave a small shrug. 'Walk us 'ome, will you, Aldo?' she demanded. 'I don't fancy walking back on me own, not with all them fellas running riot.'

A strange, almost prickly silence filled the small room, broken only when Maria bowed her head and said softly, 'Yes, Aldo, you must go with Christine and Rosie, and make sure they get home safely. May the Blessed Virgin keep you safe, Rosie,' she added, her words muffled against Rosie's hair as she hugged her tightly and kissed her.

Tears burned the backs of Rosie's eyes as she returned the hug and then followed her mother and Aldo, who was already opening the back door.

The street was now quiet, its silence making the devastation that lay before them all the more

shocking. The road was scattered with broken glass and doors that had been ripped off their hinges. Rosie's stomach lurched when she saw the bright red streaks of blood on the glass. She hoped fiercely they belonged to the men who had done the attacking and not to those who had been attacked.

'Jesus, it looks as though bloody Hitler's bin bombing the place,' Rosie heard her mother whisper to Aldo, as she clung tightly to his arm. Rosie, though, hung back, reluctant to take hold of his other arm. For some reason she was unable to understand, Rosie had never felt entirely comfortable in Aldo's company. In fact, when she witnessed the way he treated poor Maria, she couldn't understand how her mother could make such a fuss of him and, even worse, openly flirt with him in front of Maria herself. But she knew better than to take her mother to task for her behaviour. Christine made her own rules and didn't take kindly to being criticised, plus she had a keen temper on her when she was angered. Rosie had heard the arguments between her parents when her father had attempted to reason with her. On more than one occasion Rosie had witnessed Christine throwing whatever came to hand at her husband, including the crockery, before storming out, slamming the back door behind her and leaving Rosie and her father to pick up the broken shards.

They had almost reached their own front door, which was several doors down from the Grenellis'. Their

house, unlike those of the street's Italian families, looked uncared for, the step dusty and undonkey-stoned, and the paintwork dull instead of the bright blues, reds and yellows favoured by the Italians, which, like the window boxes of summer bedding plants in their equally rich colours they loved so much, were reminders of the warm, vibrant Mediterranean they had left behind. Stepping into the streets of Little Italy was like turning a corner into a brilliantly vivid special place where all the colours seemed brighter, the song birds sang more sweetly, the laughter echoed more happily, and even the air itself, scented with the rich smells of Italy, seemed warmer. But, best of all, the whole area, or so it seemed to Rosie, was imbued with a special atmosphere of love.

Set against this backdrop, her own home seemed unwelcomingly drab. No carefully tended window boxes of flowers adorned her mother's windowsills, the sound of singing and laughter never wafted out onto the air from open windows, no appetising smells of delicious pasta and soups wafted from her mother's kitchen, unless Rosie herself was making them, which wasn't very often because her father didn't like 'all that foreign muck', so when she cooked for him Rosie stuck to the traditional English dishes.

Christine modelled herself on her favourite screen actresses, like Rita Hayworth, who were known for their glamour rather than their domestic virtues, rather than on a respected Italian mamma like la Nonna.