

THE TIME GATHERER by Rachel Dacus

EXCERPT

Giorgio not only behaved differently from the men of her city, he looked different. He had his honey-colored skin and thick, dark hair. His voice, even when not singing, ranged from deep to high. Everything about Giorgio fascinated her.

“What are you painting besides Prospero’s portrait?” he asked.

“I’m thinking of a new painting.” She hoped he wouldn’t insist on looking at the painting of him on her easel.

She refilled his glass. “I want to paint the story of Portia, wife of the noble Marcus Brutus, as she stabs her own thigh to prove she can keep secret the plot to kill Julius Caesar.”

“I know the story. A courageous woman.”

“And like all women, she must do as her husband bids. That is why I will never marry. Unless to a man who bids me to do exactly what I am doing.”

She was pleased when Giorgio picked up her hand and kissed it.

“Would you like to see it?”

“Naturally!”

Betta got up and put the canvas of Portia on the easel, hiding the portrait of Giorgio. She beckoned him over to see, hoping he’d appreciate the way she had portrayed Portia’s sad anguish. Portia was costumed in red and gold, wearing the jewels of a noble Roman wife, with pearls twined through her hair. A tiny blade was half-concealed in her hand. Her quiet desperation was in her stare, a woman whose life is nothing to the great men of her time.

“She is beautiful ... and sad,” Giorgio said.

Betta was glad he understood.

“She’s led to a desperate act,” he continued. “Despite the fact that as a woman she must obey the men around her, she is very brave. You’ve given her magnificent clothing and jewels, and they only make her predicament sadder.”

Betta suppressed the tears welling up. Giorgio understood her painting so well.