

## Chapter 1 *Crash!*



‘Crash!’

‘Aaah!’

I looked up from my coffee. ‘Crash!’ – that was the café window. And ‘Aaah!’ – that was Kate.

People in the café shouted. Kate and I ran to the window. There was no one there. Then I turned to Kate and put my arm around her.

‘Are you all right?’ I asked.

‘Yes,’ she said. ‘I think so.’

‘What is it?’ someone shouted and a short red-faced man ran into the room. The man took my arm. ‘Matt! What are you doing to Kate?’ he asked.

‘Nothing, Papa,’ Kate replied. ‘It wasn’t him. It was from out in the street.’

The red-faced man looked at the window and then at me. He turned to his daughter.

‘Are you OK, Kate?’ he asked.

Kate gave him a little smile. ‘Yes, I think I am, Papa,’ she said.

Then her father spoke to me. ‘Sorry, Matt. I heard Kate and I thought . . .’

‘That’s OK, Paolo,’ I answered.

It was OK. You see, this is Soho, in the centre of London. In the day it’s famous for music and films. At night people come and eat in the restaurants. Expensive restaurants and cheap restaurants; Italian restaurants and Chinese restaurants. And day and night there are internet cafés like the Web Café.

In Soho you can buy anything and anyone. There are lots of nice people in Soho. But there are also lots of people who are – what can I say? – not very nice. I know because I live and work here. I take drinks to the shops and cafés. I do judo most evenings and I’m good at it. I’m not rich and famous. And I don’t know a lot. But I do know Soho.

I also know Paolo and the Web Café well. I often have

my morning coffee there. Paolo comes from Valletta in Malta, and he does everything in the café. He makes the coffee and other drinks at the bar, and cooks the food in the kitchen. It isn't bad food. He makes very good pizza. Maltese pizza? I know – don't ask me why. I don't eat a lot of pizza. But people do. They telephone, Paolo makes the pizzas and a boy takes the pizzas to their house. Takeaway Maltese pizza. Why not?

And why is it the Web Café and not the Pizza Café or Café Malta? Because in the café there are computers. People come to the café to use email and the internet. Lots of foreign tourists, not only Europeans, but also Americans and Japanese, come to the café to use the computers.

Kate is Paolo's daughter. She's a student, but she helps him in the café. She's why I go there a lot. Not for the coffee. Not for the pizza. Not for the computers. But for Kate. I love her brown eyes and her smile.

But Kate wasn't smiling now. She walked over to her father and took his hand.

'Was it those men?' she asked.

Paolo answered slowly, 'Yes, I think it was.'

I looked at the father and daughter. I didn't understand. Who were 'those men'?