

Dear Reader,

For so many, the South of France conjures up images of the Cannes Film Festival, 60s films starring Brigitte Bardot, or the expat excess of the Fitzgeralds. For me, the Riviera runs through my blood and my memory, thanks to every summer spent there as a child. The pairing of my French mother and English father ensured that I enjoy the two cultures, cherish each of them, but somehow remain a foreigner to both. It's a lonely place to be, but it's also the perfect vantage point from which to observe.

Beautiful summers in the Côte d'Azur scorch your memory when they go wrong. What seems idyllic and luxurious in *The Ruins*—wealthy Brits holidaying with their friends in a chateau on the Riviera—hides something I recognise: a sense of entitlement, one-upmanship concealed by camaraderie, and elaborate displays of wealth masking real money worries. In *The Ruins*, every one of these glitteringly grim moments is performed in front of the wide eyes of the children.

Children see things more simply and more clearly than adults. Children feel their feelings in sharper focus than adults. Children grow up and become remembering adults. And by God, do they remember.

In *The Ruins*, the three girls both speak and keep silent in ways that women everywhere will recognise in younger versions of themselves. Their thoughts and actions still shock and surprise me, though they are entirely of my own creation. But it seems I had to write this novel just to rewrite the story I knew as a child, that I know now as a woman. And so inevitably, *The Ruins* strays from real life in one crucial way: the adults are held accountable, and punished by the children, ensuring that those that did wrong get their just desserts.

Perhaps this is why, as an adult, I've been so drawn to the Classics: tragedy, blame, and retribution are inextricably linked. As in my debut novel, *Madam*, shades of the ancient histories and mythologies find their way into this contemporary story, reminding us that the past is never far, and that we mortals are doomed to repeat the same mistakes, again and again, as the balance of justice hangs over us.

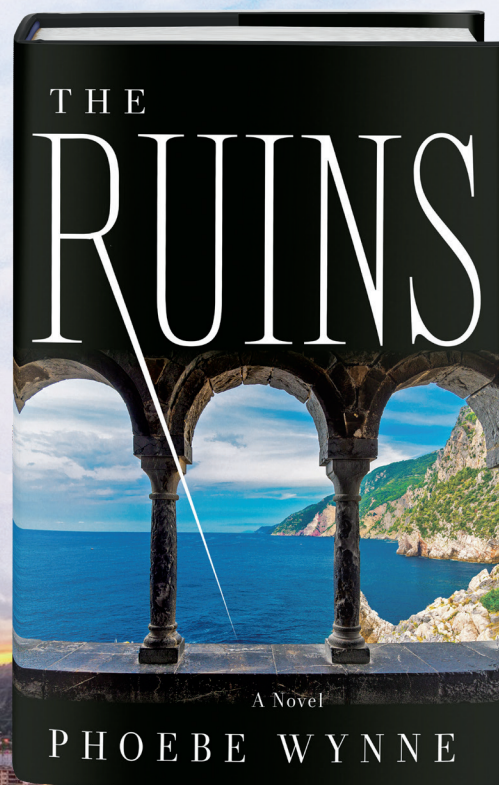
But what might happen if a few brave girls disrupted that cycle? I hope you'll discover the answer for yourself in *The Ruins*.



Phoebe Wynne



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