



REVENANT

OLIVIA LORENZ

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Dedication

Thanks are due to several people, without whom this book would never have been written. First, to Dr. Karen Hartnup, whose research into Leo Allatius spun off into the world of the *vrykolakades* and the *tympanioi* as well as other island and mainland *exotika*. Secondly, to Professor Robert Arnott, who introduced me to Aegean prehistory; Professor Michael Vickers at the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford; and Iain Patterson and Dr. Eleanor Loughlin, both at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland.

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Revenant is dedicated to Val K, with love and hugs.

Chapter One

Santorini, 1904

The distant grumbling of the volcano was split by the sound of a pickaxe striking stone. A group of locals gathered to watch, standing a safe distance from the excavation site on one side of the crumbling wall that marked the boundary of Agios Eleutherios. The tiny church squatted behind them, dazzling white but for the solitary bronze bell tinted green by the elements. Against the brightness of the church, the villagers were like a flock of birds. Black-plumed widows and pied old men leaned forward, heads bobbing as conversation passed between them.

The workman redoubled his efforts, using the side of the axe to scrape away the loosened soil before striking down again. This time, the pick chipped out flakes of limestone that ricocheted from the trench and struck the workman. He muffled a yelp of annoyance and turned to call out, “Mr. Hunter!”

Jack was already halfway across the site, still clutching a box of pencils and with a large sketchpad tucked under one arm. His foreman Koubelos trailed after him, dragging a tripod and a camera case, his face lined with anxiety at every jolt that made the plates clash within the bag.

“Come on,” Jack said, taking one stride to every three that Koubelos made. The foreman hefted the camera equipment higher onto his shoulder and tried not to stumble over the mass of twisted strata running through the centre of the dig site.

They had been recording the morning’s find, a Late Hellenistic bothros, when Jack had suddenly sat up, his drawing forgotten. “Did you hear that?” he’d asked, and Koubelos had listened, hearing nothing but the muttering of the volcano, the lazy knocking and banging from the workmen, and the whiffle of wind through the pumice boulders. But Jack was not listening to such mundane things. Koubelos had watched his

expression sharpen until he jumped up and began to collect together the equipment in a tearing hurry.

“What is it?” Koubelos had asked.

Jack had not looked back. “They’ve found something. The note changed. It’s not just soil and tephra. That was rock they just hit.”

“You can hear that?” Koubelos had paused and rubbed a finger in one ear, and then listened carefully. He could hear nothing more than before, and so, not for the first time, he wondered at the nature of the Englishman.

On an island where most of the inhabitants were small and dark in their looks, it had hardly been a surprise that, when Jack had first come ashore, the old lady who kept the mules on the jetty had run into town screaming of the tall *exotiko* come to terrorise them. It took a month before people stopped crossing themselves if they saw him on the street, but still he looked like an otherworldly being, pale and blond with a long mournful face like the icons in the Church of the Virgin. The March sun had done no more than brush light through his hair and had brought colour only reluctantly to touch his cheekbones.

Unlike the other English archaeologists who wore tweed to their digs, or the French, who wore all manner of colours, Jack only ever wore black. Apparently he had told his landlady that it saved him from wasting his time in laundry work. The villagers whispered instead that it was indicative of some terrible tragedy that demanded a prolonged period of mourning, but nobody had yet been able to decide what sort of tragedy it had been.

Jack did not help matters by spending most of his time alone rather than with the other Westerners on the island. More speculation arose when he wandered the streets of Fira at dusk, taking the track towards Oia. That particular stretch of road, everybody knew, was rife with vampires as soon as the sun went down.

Father Gregory of Agios Eleutherios had warned Jack of the danger, but the Englishman would not listen, thus proving to half of Fira that he was an *exotiko* and to the other half that he was merely foolhardy.

Koubelos had worked on the site for two months now and was mostly convinced that Jack was no more peculiar than any other Western archaeologist who passed through the islands. It was times like these, though, when Mr. Jack announced he had heard things that no normal human being could hear, that Koubelos's conviction wavered.

As they neared the place where a knot of workmen had formed to scoop out the pale earth from the trench, Jack noticed the villagers lined up behind the church wall. He nodded towards them. "What are they waiting for?"

Koubelos shrugged. "There is always interest when a grave is found."

"It might not be a burial."

"Rumour has it that there are graves here. The little stone idols you bought from the demarch came from this area," said Koubelos. "You said yourself many times, the little idols are grave-goods. It was only a matter of time before the men found a tomb here."

"I suppose they want to see if I can raise the dead, as Kera Eutimia is fond of saying," Jack said lightly. "Or if I embrace the corpse as my long-dead brother. It is supposed to be my brother that I'm mourning, isn't it?"

"I would not know," Koubelos said, his gaze fixed on the ground.

Jack sounded amused. "Of course not."

The workmen stood back as Jack and Koubelos approached. They began to point into the trench, talking loudly and making exaggerated claims as to their role in the discovery. The man with the pickaxe leaned upon it and shook his head when Koubelos questioned him, instead gesturing from the damaged capstone to the blunted end of his pick.

It was obvious to Koubelos that Jack was only half-listening to the chatter of the workmen, nodding politely whenever there was a pause for breath. He put down the sketchpad and pencils, his full concentration reserved for what had been revealed in the trench. Lapped by the pale earth was a capstone roughly six inches thick, set flush against the sides of a stone-walled coffin that measured some five feet by three.

"This is a cist burial," Jack said with authority, silencing the workmen. "It must be prehistoric."

Koubelos watched, marvelling at the Englishman's control over his excitement as Jack walked all the way around the grave. He made a show of checking his pocket-compass, even though the church, a perfectly good indicator of direction, was right beside him. He turned his back to the church and held the compass over the grave.

"Perfect north-south alignment," Jack said. "Open it."

There was a mutter of protest from the workmen, quickly hushed when Jack glared at them.

Koubelos chewed the ends of his moustache. "Perhaps we should wait for Father Gregory."

Jack looked genuinely astonished. "Whatever for?"

The foreman lifted his shoulders in a slow shrug and spread his hands wide as if the answer was obvious.

"Oh, come on," Jack said. "That's ridiculous."

Koubelos gave up and gestured to two of the workers to remove the capstone. As the men pushed and heaved at the block, Jack crouched at the foot of the grave, his hands clasped together beneath his chin as he waited. The villagers ventured forward, leaving the safety of the church to join the rest of the workmen. They shoved at each other to get closer until, with a sharp crack, the handle of one of the pickaxes broke. Nervous laughter flittered around the group, and then one of the women gave a shriek, pointing into the grave.

"Bones! I can see them!"

Jack rubbed his forehead and waved at the men to continue with the removal. Koubelos hesitated, glancing at Jack with more words of warning on the tip of his tongue, but then he forgot, distracted, as the capstone was finally levered aside.

"May the saints deliver us," Koubelos said instead, snatching off his cloth cap and kneading it between both hands. "What in God's Name happened to it?"

The villagers and workers crossed themselves hastily and backed away. Jack crawled along the side of the trench, seemingly oblivious to Koubelos's muttered prayer. He appeared to be transfixed by what lay within the coffin. Koubelos ventured closer.

A skeleton, wholly perfect, curled up on its right side, its knees tucked up so tight beneath its chin that it had surely been bound into that position. Its arms were crossed over its thighs as if grasping its ankles, and the skull was turned to face downwards, its jaw gaping into the cold stone beneath it.

"A contracted burial," Jack said, gesturing to Koubelos to start taking notes. "Just as at Pherendaki. But the skeleton... It's so well preserved! On Naxos there's hardly anything—a cluster of grave-goods, a few long bones and ribs. But not a complete skeleton. This is wonderful."

Koubelos grunted, noncommittal, and then made an involuntary sound of revulsion as Jack reached into the grave and touched the skull.

"Male," Jack continued, stroking his fingers across the back of the cranium. "Let me just check..." He paused as the skull rolled into his hand as he tried to turn it. With a soft curse, he picked up the detached skull and held it carefully against his chest, lying almost flat on the ground, half in, half out of the grave as he examined the spine.

"Mr. Jack, please," Koubelos said. "Take care that you do not fall in."

Jack rolled over, still cradling the skull, and looked up at the foreman. "I want him raised. Fetch the sheets."

Koubelos made a helpless gesture. "But Father Gregory..."

"Father Gregory is a superstitious old fool!" Jack snapped, startling Koubelos. "And so are the others, who clearly would much rather gossip like old women than do any honest work." He glared at the workmen who had taken refuge in the churchyard.

Koubelos bowed his head at the first sign of anger he'd ever seen from the Englishman, but his voice was level as he said, "Raising the dead without the say-so of a priest is not honest work."

"Well, then. I'll do it myself." Jack gently settled the skull back in the grave and got to his feet, dusting off the clinging red dust as he did so.

He gave the foreman a blistering look. “Do you think you could bring yourself to photograph the skeleton?”

“Yes, Mr. Jack.”

Koubelos busied himself with setting up the tripod and fitting the camera onto the pedestal, and then he inserted the plate and prepared to take the first photograph. Just in time he remembered that Jack insisted on having some sort of object placed by a find to indicate its relative size, and so he opened the box of pencils and selected one still unsharpened. Koubelos put it as close to the side of the grave as he dared and returned to the camera.

He peered through the viewfinder and took the photograph. By the time he was ready for the next, the pencil had disappeared. Koubelos muttered, going over to where it had lain. He could see the slight depression it had made in the soil. He looked towards the grave. The ground surrounding the trench sloped down from the coffin, so the pencil could not have rolled away by itself. Perhaps the breeze had moved it, although Koubelos could not recall feeling anything beyond a slight whisper in the past few minutes.

He took a few steps forward and peered into the grave. With a start he jumped back, making the sign against the evil eye. The skull laughed up at him, its jawbone yawning at a rakish angle. Koubelos was certain that Jack had put it back as he had found it. He was sure that when he had taken the photograph, the skull was lying facedown. Now here it was looking at him and grinning.

Refusing to be spooked by a pile of bones, Koubelos looked for the missing pencil. He spotted it protruding from the ribs on the underside, and so he knelt to work out a way of retrieving it without having to touch the skeleton. Using a second pencil, he began to tap the first out from beneath the curving ribs, but soon it was stuck against something. Irritated, Koubelos put a hand in to seize the pencil, only to drop it again immediately as his fingers came out stained a deep blood red.

“What are you doing?” Jack asked as he came back carrying a long stretch of linen. “Koubelos! You’re as white as... hmm.” He dropped the

sheet onto a rock and walked over to the foreman, who held out his hand in mute appeal.

“Rust,” Jack said. “Where did you find that?”

“I thought it was blood,” Koubelos said, embarrassed now that the initial fright had faded. He wiped his hand against his trousers and then inspected the faint red-orange tinge smeared into his fingertips.

“Why is there rust inside the grave? The stone has no oxides in it.” Jack crouched and looked inside.

Koubelos waited for him to exclaim at the way the skull was laying, or at the presence of the pencil between the ribs. Instead, he continued to talk about the rust until Koubelos risked a glance towards the head of the grave. The skull was facedown, exactly as Jack had left it. And the pencil... Koubelos looked at the ground, expecting to see it there. It was not.

With an inward sigh of relief for his sanity, he put his hands into his pockets, only to withdraw his right hand when he felt a painful jab. He unfurled his fingers and stared at the missing pencil, which had managed to sharpen itself between the grave and his pocket.

Koubelos forced his attention back to Jack, who had leant into the coffin and removed a small, misshapen lump of rust from beneath the bones. He approached the graveside unwillingly, wishing he could ignore Jack’s excited chatter about the new find. He would rather be at the other end of Santorini, or better yet, on another island, than continue with this dig.

“Iron,” Jack said, holding up the fused mass. “How fascinating! A pity that this is the only surviving piece. It looks like a link from a chain.”

Koubelos shivered involuntarily. “A chain, Mr. Jack?”

“So it would seem. Look here.” Jack indicated the faint trail of reddish dust scrolling across the bottom of the coffin and smudging over the upper ribs and arm of the skeleton.

“The corpse was chained,” said Koubelos, his nervousness increasing. “That is not a good thing.”

“It certainly is not,” Jack agreed. “I was hoping for a Bronze Age burial, but this would suggest a much later interment.”

“It suggests much more than that!” Koubelos stepped back from the grave. “Evildoers were chained after death to stop them from walking again. The capstone, also—too heavy for a man to lift alone. This was a wicked man, Mr. Jack. We should cover him again.”

“We shall do nothing of the sort.” Jack stood up and fetched the sheet, unravelling it and handing one end to Koubelos. “Hold it steady. Don’t drop it,” he said, taking the other end and preparing to step into the coffin.

“Please!” Koubelos said, panicked. “It is most unwise to cross a corpse.”

“This is a skeleton,” Jack said. “Not a corpse. There’s a difference.”

Koubelos continued to complain, the end of the cloth shivering as he gesticulated. Jack told him sharply to shut up and stop moving about, and then began to slide his end of the sheet beneath the bones.

The operation was easier than Koubelos expected, and within a few minutes the skeleton lay on the ground beside its coffin, its bones yellow against the cloth. The move had dislocated many of the smaller bones, but Jack was more concerned with a thorough examination of the top of the spine.

Koubelos kept his distance, casting glances towards the now deserted churchyard as if he wished he could seek refuge there. He tried to concentrate on taking the notes that Jack was dictating at high speed, but faltered when he realised the pencil he was using was the one that had fallen into the grave. As he surreptitiously swapped it for a new pencil, he was certain the skull winked at him. But how could a skull wink?

Just as Koubelos was about to fling down the notebook and run from the site, Jack picked up the skull and looked at it sombrely. “Somebody really didn’t like you, my friend. What did you do that so angered them?”

Koubelos fought the urge to laugh hysterically. “Do not talk to it!”

Jack ignored the outburst. “As well as being chained, he was decapitated.”

“But only the worst kind of sinner was decapitated!”

“And the best kind of saint,” Jack reminded him. “There’s a lot of ground between the two. Let us not jump to conclusions.”

“I am jumping nowhere,” Koubelos said with feeling.

Jack knelt beside the skeleton and touched each of the long bones with reverence, arranging them neatly on the sheet. Unable to watch, Koubelos turned away and stared morosely into the coffin. At first he thought he was seeing things. Then, when he looked closer, he realised he could see a coin glinting amongst the accumulated dust.

“Mr. Jack. Look here.” Koubelos pointed to the coin and Jack moved over, still on hands and knees, to see inside the grave.

“How did I miss that?” Jack wondered aloud, and Koubelos had not the heart to tell him that probably it had not been there before.

Jack reached in and picked up the coin, set it on his palm, and then flipped it into the air. Although tarnished in places, the gold glittered as it spun. When he caught it again, Jack held it out to Koubelos, who took it with some trepidation, as if it were contaminated.

“Mid-seventeenth century. Possibly tribute for the Turks.”

“Turkish money.” Koubelos spat on the dust.

Jack raised an eyebrow. “Not quite. It’s Venetian—they had the stronger currency. Gold beats silver any day and by the time that coin was minted, the Ottoman *akçe* was almost debased out of existence.”

“Still,” Koubelos muttered, “it was meant for the Turks.”

“Yes. And now it gives us a *terminus post quem* to work with. Fascinating. He’s not Iron Age at all, but later. Much later.”

“Why bury a coin with a corpse?” Koubelos asked. “A Turkish coin, at that. What use can it have? A dead man cannot buy goods.”

“Really, Koubelos, I am surprised—and yes, saddened—that you should so quickly disregard your own heritage,” Jack said lightly as he

took back the coin. “While it could, of course, mean many things, placing a coin in a grave usually indicates payment.”

“So he was a thief. A mercenary.”

Jack sighed. “Not necessarily payment for him. For Charon. To take the soul across to Hades.”

“A pagan superstition,” Koubelos said, crossing himself. “This I do not like.”

“It’s strange,” Jack said thoughtfully. “Whoever buried him really wanted him gone. Four types of burial ritual, just to make certain he didn’t come back.”

“Excommunicated, too,” Koubelos added. Seeing Jack’s fleeting look of incomprehension, he nodded towards the church. “If he were a decent Christian, he would be buried on holy ground, yes? So he is not decent. Either that, or he is Moslem. It makes little difference. One state is as bad as the other.”

“Fascinating,” Jack said, his gaze returning to the skeleton.

“We should put it back and close the grave. Father Gregory will do it. He knows how to deal with such things.”

Jack shook his head. “This is an archaeological excavation, not some kind of satanic ritual. And I am quite willing to take my chances with superstition.”

Koubelos made the sign against the evil eye again and said softly, “I pray that you do not come to regret that remark, Mr. Jack.”

Chapter Two

Jack slapped his hand down onto his notebook as the evening breeze riffled through the pages. One of his pencils skittered across the table and landed with a tiny plinking sound on the paved limestone slabs of the terrace, where Skitos, his landlady's cat, went to investigate it.

"Fetch!" he said, but the cat simply put up its tail and padded away to sit beside the big clay pithos brimming with narcissi and irises. It was the only patch of colour against the whitewashed wall and Kera Maria was proud of what she optimistically called her "garden". Jack had watched the anemones die off earlier in the year, drowned under a torrent of water. It was fortunate, he thought, that the current crop of flowers thrived in damp, boggy conditions.

A stream of muddy water wriggled from the base of the pithos across the terrace, following the uneven surface of the slabs to disappear beneath the retaining wall. Skitos seemed to know exactly how to avoid dipping his paws in it, a trick that Jack had not yet learned. Every evening he would kick off his shoes to enjoy the feel of the sun-warmed stone beneath his feet, yet he would invariably retire to bed with cold, muddy toes.

This evening, although both feet were resting in the stream, he did not notice. Holding the pages of his notebook flat with one hand, Jack automatically scooped up the remainder of his meal with the other. Kera Maria always made spiced pumpkin balls on a Tuesday, and they were best eaten warm, slathered in the delicious yoghurt and cucumber dip known as *tzatziki*. Jack had forgotten them as he read back through his notes, only remembering to eat when Kera Maria pointedly dropped a

saucepan on the floor of the kitchen. She glared at him through the window until, guiltily, he lowered his head and began to eat.

He was careful not to drop tzatziki onto the notebook, although it was difficult to eat and draw at the same time. Jack took another pencil from the box and trailed the point across the site map to join the clusters of findspots, hoping that some sort of logical shape would emerge.

“You have finished, yes?”

Kera Maria stood watching him from the steps into the kitchen. Jack realised he’d eaten all of the food on his plate, so he set the bowl of *tzatziki* on top of it and smiled.

“Delicious, as always.”

“I thought you would not eat tonight,” she said, the hint of a scold in her voice as she waddled down the steps onto the terrace. She was a small, round woman with eyes as crinkled and black as currants and a complexion like over-cooked pastry. Jack could not even begin to guess at her age and knew only that she was a widow still fiercely loyal to her husband’s memory. His daguerreotype portrait hung in the hallway outside Jack’s room and showed a wild-looking man wielding a brace of pistols, staring at the camera with contempt. Every time he walked past the image, Jack had to look away, unnerved by the old man’s fanatical expression.

Despite the presence of the photograph, Jack liked staying at Kera Maria’s. The other archaeologists tended to bunch together at the modest hotel kept by Kera Eutimia on the more affluent side of Fira. Eutimia bragged of the best views in all of Santorini, and certainly Jack could not fault the claim when he’d attended a few of the dinners laid on by the French School. The sunset was always spectacular when viewed from the rim of the caldera, but Jack preferred to watch from Kera Maria’s terrace as Anafi, Santorini’s eastern neighbour, disappeared into the haze of evening.

“I have things on my mind,” he said, looking down at the map.

“So I have heard.” Kera Maria crouched and retrieved the fallen pencil with a grace that belied her shape. She handed it to him solemnly. “I heard that you are a marked man, thrice-cursed.”

Jack sighed and dropped the pencil back into its box. “Four times cursed, actually. Or five, according to Koubelos... Who told you that? Eutimia, I suppose.”

Kera Maria cackled. “For one who doesn’t listen to gossip, you are remarkably well-informed.”

“Oh, I listen to gossip,” Jack said airily. “The difference is, I don’t repeat it.”

“That Eutimia is trouble,” she said. “You know she never forgave you for coming here rather than staying at her hotel. As if there was a choice to be made! That woman cannot cook to save her life. Only this morning I saw her in the market, buying peppers so wizened not even a maggot would touch them. And that she calls food! You are better off here, Yiannakki, or you would now be suffering dreadful belly-aches as I hear the other English archaeologists do.”

Jack winced at her familiar use of his given name. She had refused to call him Jack on account of it not being a good Greek name. His Christian name, John, she found much more pleasant, and so now he responded to anything from Yiannos to Yiannakki, just to keep the peace.

“Eutimia only wanted me to stay at her hotel because she thought it would gain her kudos in town by ensnaring the *exotiko*,” he said.

Kera Maria sniffed. “*Exotiko* indeed! You are just a man, like any other. A trifle thin, perhaps, and it would do you good to sit out in the sun more. By summer you will be as brown as a berry and there will be no more of this *exotiko* nonsense.”

“I am out in the sun all day,” he pointed out mildly.

“Yes, indeed,” she said, “digging up corpses. That is not healthy.”

“For me or the corpse?”

Kera Maria drew herself up to her full height and glared at him. “You are cheeky. Be glad I am fond of you, Yiannakki, or you would surely starve.”

With that, she gathered the crockery together and carried it away, steadfastly ignoring him when he called out, "I would not starve! Eutimia would feed me."

Jack thought he heard her muffled laughter as she went indoors, and then he turned back to his notes.

The site bothered him, but he did not want to admit defeat and ask for help from any of the other archaeologists in Fira. He was afraid that, should he find anything significant, one of the Schools would swoop down and carry it away from him. Jack did not have the resources of Schliemann or Evans. He could not sway entire governments with promises of buried treasure. All he had was a vague remit from the University of Edinburgh to investigate the antiquities of Santorini within an equally unspecified amount of time.

The French School planned their digs as if they were going to war. Jack had wrangled an invitation from one of the archaeologists on Delos and wandered around their site, becoming more and more alarmed at how amateur his own dig was in comparison. Hoping to emulate their success, he had spent two days marking out trenches, only for the workmen to dig somewhere else entirely, thinking that the marked-off areas were to be left untouched.

But for his fear of numbers, Jack sometimes wondered if he should not have been an accountant instead. It was surely easier than running an excavation. As he gloomily surveyed the map, he felt the cat brush against his legs. Idly he let drop one hand to pet its head, and Skitos responded by rubbing his chin against Jack's fingers. After a moment, the cat jumped up onto the table and wandered across the map, purring loudly.

"Skitos, no." Jack tried to shoo the cat away, but instead it sat down on the notebook and looked at him with luminous green eyes. The purrs continued, but the tip of its tail flicked to and fro.

Jack sat back, amused. He and Skitos had never been the best of friends, ever since the first day of his arrival, when the cat seemed to continually emerge from nowhere to trip him up. Kera Maria called the

animal *Gata*, “cat”. Jack had named him *Skitos*, after the same way he took his morning tea—simple, without sugar.

“Eh, that creature!” Kera Maria said as she came back outside. “He’s not allowed on the table. You shouldn’t encourage him.”

Jack shrugged and gave the furry black rump in front of him a shove. *Skitos* looked affronted and stalked over to the wall where he sat again and began to wash slowly.

“I thought you might like a drink to take your mind from your troubles,” Kera Maria said. She set down a tray holding two glasses, a jug of water, and a bottle of ouzo.

“And I think I will join you,” she added, seating herself in the chair opposite him and relaxing back into its wickerwork embrace. “So, tell me of this corpse.”

“It’s a skeleton,” Jack corrected, pouring out a generous measure of ouzo for Kera Maria before taking a glass of water for himself. “You probably know more about it than I do, but—in case your sources of gossip are incorrect—then I can tell you that it’s male, aged between thirty and forty, with certain diagnostic lesions on the bones that indicate anaemia.”

She nodded impatiently, reaching for the water jug and adding its contents, drop by drop, to the ouzo until the liquid in the glass clouded, thick and milky-looking. “Yes, yes. But where did you find it?”

Jack opened his notebook again and turned it around to show her the site map. “Right here.”

“Outside the church boundary,” she said. “And *Agios Eleutherios*’ has been there since 1485, yet this corpse was put there by the Turks!”

“We don’t know that for certain.”

She gave him an amused look. “Nothing in life is certain, *Yianni*.”

“True... I suppose *Koubelos* told you about the coin?”

“Perhaps.” Kera Maria put her head to one side and gleamed at him, coquettish.

He laughed, put a hand into his pocket, and withdrew the ducat. "Here it is."

It lay on the table between them. Jack noticed that, like Koubelos, she seemed to have no desire to touch it. It was a strange reaction, he thought. Most people when faced with gold were eager to get their hands on it. Perhaps it was because of what he'd said to Koubelos before, that the coin was Turkish tribute. Despite Greek independence being more than seventy years old, the islanders had long memories and little inclination to forgive past insults.

Skitos had no such concerns. The cat picked himself up from the wall and wandered over to bat at the coin with one paw. He meowed when it moved across the table and then lowered his head to sniff the coin, giving it a tentative lick as if unsure whether or not it was edible.

"Stupid beast," Kera Maria said, but with affection.

"Perhaps he's testing to see if it's pure gold," Jack suggested, rescuing the ducat before Skitos decided to eat it after all.

"Is it?"

"I don't know. I didn't study numismatics. Numbers give me a headache." Jack put the coin back into his pocket and watched Skitos jump from the table to return to his place beside the pithos. "And I'm certainly not going to bite it after the cat dribbled over it just to see what happens."

"Skitos is not mad," Kera Maria said, and then she took a long draught of ouzo. "However, I heard today that you called Father Gregory mad."

Jack turned his glass of water around in his hands. "I did, and he is. I could understand it if I had dug up one of his parishioners, but the skeleton is nothing to do with him!"

"The grave is beside the church," she said, neutral.

"The grave was there long before the church was ever built," Jack said grumpily. "It's Bronze Age—I'd stake my reputation on it. The fact that there's a seventeenth century skeleton inside is just an anomaly."

Kera Maria rocked with laughter. “You’ll need to do better than that, Yianni.”

Jack shook his head, but knew she was right. The whole town was aware of the grave and its anachronistic occupant, and unless he came up with a viable explanation soon, he feared that Father Gregory would encourage the demarch to close down the dig.

“He’s just a skeleton,” he sighed. “Nothing more. Father Gregory is acting as if Satan himself had leapt from the grave breathing fire and inciting the volcano to erupt again.”

“It is unusual to find a body outside hallowed ground,” Kera Maria said, pouring a second glass of ouzo. “Be patient with him.”

“Patient! When I went back to the site just before sundown, I found Father Gregory and two of my workmen trying to re-inter the skeleton. He was throwing holy water over it and mumbling prayers as fast as he could. And then when I complained about his behaviour, he threatened to excommunicate me. You want me to be patient with him?”

Kera Maria lifted her shoulders. “He is a priest. We listen to him.”

“Well, you shouldn’t. Not in matters such as these, anyway,” Jack said. “I can’t trust him not to try burying the skeleton again and I can’t camp out on the site every night to make sure nobody else does the job for him. So I’ve had to take precautions.”

“You moved the corpse?”

“Skeleton. Yes.”

“Then where is it?” Kera Maria asked.

“Safe.” Jack tried to banish the image that came to mind of the tea chest he used to store smaller, more valuable finds from the excavation. The little Cycladic idols, the delicate potsherds with their swirls of red and black paint, the lumps of inscribed masonry, all now sat in a heap beneath a layer of hessian at the bottom of his wardrobe. Inside the tea chest, even more contracted than it had been in the grave, was the skeleton, wrapped carefully in the linen sheet.

Kera Maria stood up and brushed cat hair from her apron. “I only hope that the horrible thing is far away from my home.”

“It’s far away,” he said reassuringly, and she nodded, pleased.

Before she could clear the table, Jack reached out and took the glass of ouzo. There was only a drop left but he drank it down, grimacing at both the taste of aniseed and the unaccustomed kick of alcohol. It burned his throat as much as the lie he’d told, and for a fleeting moment, he felt ashamed.

Chapter Three

The evening was well advanced by the time Jack retired indoors. When Kera Maria left him, he gathered up his papers and took them into the sitting room he shared with his landlady. There he fastened the wooden shutters against the night and lit the lamps. He sat on the rag-rug, balanced his sketchpad on his knees, and started to re-draw the map of the entire site.

Skitos came winding in amongst the table and chair legs and sat down beside the hearth. For a while the cat watched as Jack measured and scribbled and sharpened his pencils, then he grew bored and curled up to sleep.

After two hours of sitting undisturbed in the same position, Jack became aware of aching muscles and a cramp in his right foot. He gave Skitos an envious look, wishing that he could fall asleep with such ease. The cat's ears flicked minutely as if it could hear his thoughts, but made no other move.

"Goodnight, fleabag," Jack said. He got to his feet and piled his work in a corner. He blew out the lamps, leaving the room lit only by the glow of the dying embers. Just before he pulled the door shut, he saw Skitos lift his head and regard him for a moment. The cat's eyes reflected gold from the firelight, and then he looked away and all was darkness once more.

Jack stumbled across the small internal courtyard separating his rooms from the rest of the house. On one side was a wall only half-built, covered with climbing plants and topped with a spiky row of succulents. Originally the space was meant to form an extension joining with the rooms that Jack occupied, but the man responsible for doing the work

had allegedly moved to Tenos in pursuit of his ladylove. Kera Maria had not yet got around to hiring new builders, and so the courtyard was filled with rubble and household bric-a-brac, plus a deep stone trough carted in from the fields that, to Jack's dismay, provided the perfect breeding ground for mosquitoes.

Jack put out his hand to open the door to his rooms. He jerked backwards with an exclamation of surprise as something leapt from the door and winged upwards, only to settle a few yards away where it started to whirr aggressively. Within seconds a second cicada and then a third answered its call. Jack muttered at the insects and went inside, careful to avoid looking at the portrait of Kera Maria's husband as he fumbled with the matches to light a lamp.

He yawned as he shuffled along the hallway, passing the tiny bathroom that had a thick woollen curtain in place of a door and the niche that housed a card table set with icons of dubious authenticity. Jack unlocked his bedroom door and went inside, crossing the threshold before he realised there was anything amiss.

The lid of the tea chest was askew, a piece of linen sticking out like a white flag. Jack put down the lamp and walked slowly towards the chest, suddenly aware that he had been extremely foolish to store the skeleton in a place of no real security. Although he'd locked the doors, the window had been left open and was accessible enough if one were particularly determined.

Jack knelt beside the chest and lifted the lid. Before dinner, he had folded the ends of the sheet into layers above the skeleton until it resembled a large baklava. Now the cloth was rumpled and twisted as if someone had taken a handful and tugged at it sharply. He was almost afraid to look further, fearing that somebody had broken in with the sole purpose of mistreating the poor skeleton.

Peeling back the crumpled linen, Jack sighed and let his shoulders sag with relief. Still tucked away in its foetal position was the skeleton, its skull seemingly pillowed on its hands.

“So who opened the lid, hmm?” he asked it. “Did you get up and wander about, as Father Gregory is convinced you do when nobody’s looking?”

The skull gaped at him silently. Jack smiled and sat down properly, leaning over the side of the tea chest to rest his chin on his folded forearms. The wood still smelled of Earl Grey, and the scent of it combined with the lingering dust of over two hundred years’ worth of mouldering bones was enough to make his nose twitch. For a while he stayed there, looking at the jumbled skeleton not as the remains of a human being, but almost as a piece of art.

Like the little idols found in these islands, the bones were the colour of weathered limestone, stained through with iron oxide in places where the chain had touched them. They curved and twisted, tapered and swelled. Without thinking of what he was doing, Jack put a hand inside the chest and ran his fingers over the uppermost femur. Perhaps because it had been so carefully wrapped, it felt warm rather than chill, as pleasant to the touch as were the marble figurines. He walked his fingers up the length of the femur, noting the lesions that earlier he’d attributed to anaemia. Vaguely he wondered if they had not been caused by malaria instead, and then he stopped, puzzled, as his fingers ran repeatedly over an area of the bone high up towards the hips.

Jack frowned down at the skeleton, and then he gently lifted out the femur. In the raking light cast by the lamp, the marks were unmistakable. His examination at the graveside had been necessarily brief, but still, how could he have missed these?

Across the top of the femur where it rounded into the ball-joint, a series of shallow cut-marks could be seen. He turned the bone to find more, this time deep and pronounced, as if the knife had jammed in the bone and been pulled out with force. Along the shaft of the femur he spied evidence of scraping, the bone glossy with wear.

Jack took out the other femur and compared the two bones, and then he jumped up to fetch the lamp, returning to hold it close to the tea chest so he could examine the hips. The cut-marks were clear, nicked all

around the outer edge of the hips, and the scraping continued along the flat of the curved bone.

He set down the lamp in front of him and stared at its flame for long minutes. Jack had seen cut-marks on bones before, but never on human bones. The implications disturbed him, although they also intrigued him. This was what he'd been looking for, something unique, something significant... Or was it satanic?

The flame flickered, spilling a black thread of smoke. A sound came from the window and Jack lifted his head to see Skitos sitting on the sill, blacker than the night sky. For a moment they looked at each other, and then the cat leapt down into the room and walked over to the tea chest. He sniffed the wood with interest, and then reared up to sink his claws into the linen sheet that still protruded.

Jack pushed the cat away. "So it was you, was it? I should've known." He wagged a finger at Skitos. "Leave my property alone, *gata*."

The cat blinked his great green eyes and meowed plaintively. Unmoved, Jack stood up and went over to the window to close the shutters. He was about to tell Skitos that he could sleep out in the hall when he noticed two items on the old wooden table he used as a desk and storage space.

Usually the table was neatly ordered, despite the mess of papers he managed to accumulate, but now the empty surface held an envelope and a small package. Both were sitting in full view and so, for the third time that day, Jack wondered how he could have failed to see them before.

Curiously he picked up the envelope, noting that it had no postage stamps and no direction—just his name, written in black ink and with the letters carefully formed in an almost childlike manner. The package was wrapped in brown paper and tied with parcel string, his Christian name inked on the top and underscored twice.

Perturbed, Jack took both items over to his bed and sat down. He was certain that Kera Maria hadn't mentioned any post for him today. Usually the arrival of a letter was cause for discussion as she tried to

prise out information to use later in gossip. For her to stay silent was impossible. She never forgot to mention such things. Her mind was a steel trap.

He opened the envelope and unfolded the letter, leaning back against the wall to read it. At first he just stared at the words, uncomprehending, and then he began to make sense of them.

The letter was written in a form of Greek unfamiliar to him. Jack had learned both ancient and modern Greek and could easily remedy his lack of ability with island Greek by asking Kera Maria for the necessary explanations. This, however, seemed to be a type of demotic he had never seen before, mixing island and ancient Greek with careless abandon. The letters were printed rather than cursive, which again gave Jack the impression that the author was almost childlike.

The contents of the letter were at odds with the simplistic formation of the words. As he puzzled over it, Jack barely noticed when Skitos jumped up onto the bed to sit beside him. He petted the cat unthinkingly, letting him rest his head on his thigh as he translated the extraordinary message.

Dear Yianni,

Do not be alarmed by my writing this note to you, nor be afraid of the unorthodox methods I employed to get it to you. Know only this. I am in a position to make your name as the man who discovered the most extraordinary archaeological site since Mycenae. I would go further and be so bold as to suggest that Mycenae is but a footnote in history compared with the treasures you will find, should you accept my proposition.

For myself, I have a deep interest in antiquities, although I am deficient in the necessary application to excavate and record such things. While I may lack the motivation, I am blessed with an intimate knowledge of several sites that would doubtless be of great interest to you and your colleagues in the French and British Schools. I enclose, in a separate packet, some examples of finds taken from these sites. I am sure you will

recognise their value. You may choose two of the pieces. They will be yours to keep, regardless of whether you accept my proposition or not.

My proposal, therefore, is as follows. I will direct you to one or more of these sites, dependent upon your choice from the enclosed pieces. In return, I will require something from you that I must necessarily refrain from discussing until our next communication. Suffice to say that what I shall ask of you will be neither unpleasant nor injurious to your person.

I trust you will give my offer the consideration it deserves. Your reply will reach me by the same method as this letter came to you, so do not trouble yourself with directions or any other such nonsense.

I am, believe me, very cordially,

Yours,

Belas.

Jack absently stroked the cat, feeling Skitos begin to purr beneath his fingers. His first thought was that the letter was some kind of hoax, and so he turned instead to the package. The cat rolled onto his back and watched unblinking as Jack untied the string and pulled off the brown paper. Skitos meowed faintly as the paper landed on his head and batted it away with a paw.

Four small objects wrapped in tissue paper tumbled into Jack's lap. He grabbed at the first one, his hands shaking. It was an earring of granulated gold in the shape of a bee clinging to a leaf, of exquisite workmanship and of definite Hellenistic date. Jack dropped it and opened the next, a sherd so delicate he nearly broke it in two in his haste. It was of smooth, bisque clay, decorated with dark reddish-brown spirals. Unmistakably, it was Mycenaean.

The third object, a seal-stone of red agate, took his breath away when it rolled out of its protective wrapping. Holding it up to examine it more closely, he could see etched into its surface the tiny image of a bull charging towards an altar.

The fourth object was heavier than the others and revealed itself to be a fragment of rather ugly-looking cookware. The sherd was of deep red clay winking with gritty inclusions. One side was scorched black.

Jack considered the four fragments of antiquity with some trepidation. If the letter was real and there were four sites for him to discover, it was imperative that he made the right decision as to which were the most important. He sat back with a stifled groan, rubbing his hands over his face.

"I don't know," he said aloud, and Skitos looked at him. Jack picked up the golden earring and held it out to the cat. Skitos sniffed it tentatively and then lost interest in it.

"Exactly," Jack said morosely. "How do I choose? This one is Hellenistic. A treasure-trove would be very nice, but it would hardly rival Mycenae."

Skitos sprawled across his knees and yawned.

"The seal-stone," Jack said, suddenly making up his mind. "I'll take that. And—and..." he held up the two potsherds, almost pained to be making a choice between them, "this one. The cook-pot."

He wrapped the other two pieces back in the tissue paper and read the letter again. It would not be the first time that a local offered to share his knowledge with an archaeologist. Arthur Evans had benefited from local informants at Knossos, as had Hogarth at Psychro, and Boyd at Gournia. No, that was not the issue.

"What does he want?" Jack asked of the cat. "What is it that he thinks I can give him that none of the others can?"

Skitos was asleep.

"I should reply," Jack continued. "But... tomorrow. Not now. I should think about it a little longer."

He put the letter back into the envelope and placed it on the bedside table, along with three of the objects from the packet. The fourth he held on to as he shifted the cat from his knees and lay down on the bed. He looked at the seal-stone for several more minutes, conscious that, if his unknown correspondent was correct, he had found a Minoan colony.

“Is that worth selling my soul for?” he murmured, turning the agate so the lamplight glowed across its surface. He smiled at his words, reflecting that the Greeks had no concept of Faustian pacts. With this in mind, he said aloud, “Well, then. Whatever you want, Belas, I will gladly give it.”

Jack rolled over and blew out the lamp, settling down to sleep with the seal-stone still clutched in one hand.

He awoke only once in the night and found Skitos curled beside him, watching him with luminous green eyes.

Chapter Four

The splash of cold water was enough to chase away the vestiges of sleepiness. Jack stood for a moment with his head bowed over the sink, feeling the water trickle down his face, and then he looked up at his reflection. The mirror was old, cracked and frosted at the edges, but he could see well enough to reassure himself that he appeared to be respectable. He dipped his hands into the sink again and then ran wet fingers through his hair, smoothing it back so it lay flat and sleek. Doubtless it would be messy by the time he reached the site, but at least he had made the effort.

Jack reached for a towel and rubbed his face dry, peering at his reflection again over the edge of the cloth. He'd awoken still dressed in yesterday's clothes, something that hadn't happened since he was an undergraduate on his first fieldwork season in Greece. He had been somewhat irritated to discover that Skitos had lain on the bed all night and was even more annoyed when he found the agate seal-stone between the cat's forepaws.

"That," he'd said coldly, pushing Skitos away with his knee, "is mine."

By the time he returned from the bathroom, the cat had disappeared. Jack was momentarily nonplussed, looking under the bed and inside the wardrobe to see where Skitos had gone. The shutters at the window were still closed. Just as he was beginning to think he was going crazy, the door to the courtyard banged in the breeze. Jack turned to stare at it, looking down the length of the corridor to see the door rattling against the frame.

"I'm not crazy. Just forgetful," he said aloud, unable to recall whether he had locked the external door. He shrugged and began to get dressed,

wrinkling his nose as he discovered a clean, pressed shirt hanging in the wardrobe. No matter how many times he told Kera Maria not to iron his clothes, still she insisted upon it. He put it on, buttoning it incorrectly as he shuffled across the room looking for a shoe that matched the one on his left foot.

He found the missing shoe behind his bedside table. As he leaned down to pick it up, he noticed that the packet he'd left there last night had vanished. The letter was still there, along with the two objects he'd chosen, the seal-stone and the sherd of burnt cookware. There was no sign of the Mycenaean sherd or the golden bee earring.

Jack searched the immediate area around his bed but found nothing. Briefly, he wondered if Skitos had somehow managed to eat both objects. He went to the window and unlatched one of the shutters, leaning his arms on the sill and looking out at the view.

In the distance, Anafi swam out of the heat-haze. A comma-shaped island humped at one end, it had the most perfect beach in all of the islands glittering into a curve at the other. The sea was choppy, green mixing with the deeper blue. In the foreground, the road wended by Kera Maria's, passing fields of barley and wheat that rolled from the ridge where Fira perched, down to the coastal village of Monolithos.

Immediately outside his window was a flat roof that had once formed part of a chicken coop. It was notoriously unstable and smelled as bad as it looked, giving off a noxious stench of ancient chicken dung and cheap pitch of the kind that wept every time the sun shone too brightly. In his wisdom, Skitos did no more than look at it. Even the bright-eyed sparrows refused to land upon it.

Jack could not see how anybody could have climbed into his room without crawling across the chicken coop. He was certain that if anything—human or animal—even attempted to put a foot on the roof, the whole structure would collapse.

There was no other rational way for letters and packages to appear in his room. Jack turned his back to the view and glanced around, willing to entertain even the remotest possibility. He gave it his full attention for

a minute or so, and then decided he didn't care. As long as his mysterious correspondent delivered what he promised, Jack was happy to remain in ignorance.

From the terrace he heard Kera Maria calling his name. He finished dressing and was about to leave the room when the white sheet hanging out of the tea chest caught his attention. Jack knelt down to replace the lid correctly, and then hesitated as a thought came to mind. Before Kera Maria could come looking for him, he reached into the chest and took out a femur, wrapped it in the nearest piece of cloth, and then carried it with him out into the courtyard. This time, he made sure to lock all the doors behind him.

"Whatever is that, Yiannakki?" Kera Maria asked, her eyes widening at the scrappy bundle shoved under his arm.

"A find." Jack folded himself into a chair and put the bundle on the table beside his elbow. "I thought I'd get a second opinion on it from one of the British archaeologists."

Kera Maria handed him a plate of seedcakes and sliced bread, and then poured his first cup of tea. Jack stuffed half a cake into his mouth, trying to talk around it as he noticed the watery brew.

"Swallow it before you choke on it, child," she said patiently.

Jack waved his hands and then did as he was told. "My tea!"

Kera Maria sighed. "We come to the end of it. I have made it weak in order that these final few leaves can last a few more days."

"It's disgusting." Jack took a sip and grimaced. "Neutered tea. Ugh! I'll send to Athens for more. And I'll see if I can't borrow some from the chaps at Eutimia's." He drank down the rest of it, and then stood up, taking the bundle with him.

"You didn't eat yet!" Kera Maria protested. "Ah, Yiannakki, you will waste away and become—"

"An *exotiko*. Yes, I know." He snatched the remaining half of the seedcake and gave her a huge smile. "I have to go."

“And you are not properly dressed, either!” she shouted after him, but Jack merely waved at her and hurried out of the front door, banging it shut as he went.

* * *

Jack loped up the road, nodding to a farmer leaning on a gate and then stopping for a few words with the grocer who ran a small shop on the east side of the main thoroughfare. The grocer was one of those convinced of Jack’s otherworldliness, and so was quite happy to agree to order a shipment of tea as long as he didn’t linger in the shop. This small task accomplished, Jack wandered at a more sedate pace into the jumbled warren of little streets of Fira’s Old Town.

The bell in the Dominican monastery clanked as he turned onto the street that skirted the edge of the caldera. He checked his watch. It was nearly eight o’clock, and Jack hoped he wasn’t too late. The other British archaeologists complained about the March sun burning their skin, so they often began work several hours before civilised people ate breakfast.

The Hotel Europa was a long, two-storey building arranged in a U-shape around a three-tiered terrace that spilled over the cliff of the caldera. Despite its tired exterior, the views from the terrace were truly stunning. A shame, then, thought Jack as he strolled into the lobby, that the landlady was not as pleasant as the scenery surrounding her hotel.

Behind the reception desk, Eutimia froze in the act of reading a letter addressed to one of the French scholars. She stuffed the envelope into the wrong pigeonhole and tried to smile in a welcoming manner.

“Mr. Hunter, how nice! Do you come to say you have returned to your senses and that you wish to take a room here? There is but one suite left, and for you I will make a good price...”

Jack shook his head. “I am quite happy at Kera Maria’s, thank you. I was hoping to see Dr. McKeown, if he is still here?”

“Of course. He is taking his breakfast. Perhaps you could join him... unless you have already eaten.” Her tone and look suggested that she very much doubted this. “Come this way, please.”

She ushered him through the dining room and out onto the wide sweep of the terrace, where tables and chairs were grouped as if they'd been set out on a grid. On the lower level sat a man reading a newspaper and taking occasional bites out of a piece of toast, looking as if neither activity impressed him much.

“Dr. McKeown, the—a visitor to see you!” Eutimia cried.

Jack brushed past her and went over to the table, apologising for interrupting McKeown's breakfast.

“Nonsense,” McKeown responded, glancing sidelong at Eutimia. “It's not every morning one gets the chance to sup with an *exotiko*.” He waved a hand at the chair opposite and Jack sat.

They looked at each other with interest. Jack knew of McKeown more by reputation than by acquaintance, although they had exchanged pleasantries once or twice. Dr. Anthony McKeown had come late to archaeology, having spent twenty years as a surgeon in the Army. Most of his service had been spent on General Gordon's staff in the Sudan. There he had discovered an enthusiasm for excavating the ancient dead. After the debacle at Khartoum he had left Africa for good, and now he divided his time between Greece and Italy, offering his help on whatever excavations were current. He was fiercely Irish and held in contempt all Englishmen apart from those who'd been his commanding officers, which occasionally led to trouble on site. Above all, he cared not a jot for what people said about him, and extended the same courtesy to everybody he met.

“Jack, isn't it? Believe I read one of your papers about Pherendaki a couple of years ago. Not bad,” McKeown said. He folded up the newspaper and dropped it onto the table where Jack could see that it was over two weeks old.

“Yes,” McKeown said, following his gaze. “But old news is better than no news at all. The only problem is, I wish the bloody football scores would change.”

Jack grinned. “I would agree with you there, sir.”

“Sir? Don’t bloody well call me sir,” McKeown began, waving a butter knife in emphasis. “Rank is all very well in the Army, but it’s a bloody nuisance when you’re in Civvie Street, let me tell you. For some reason, people think you’re rich. Rich! I wish most of my family would bugger off and let me alone, rather than carp on about money. But look now, you didn’t come here to hear me badmouth my bloody family.”

“Not entirely, no,” Jack agreed with levity.

McKeown glowered at him through heavy black brows. “I heard you studied with that German chap, Dörpfeld. It comes out in your writing, you know. Very German. Interesting stuff, but almost impossible to read.”

Jack put a hand over his mouth to stop from laughing out loud. “Professor Dörpfeld is a very eminent archaeologist.”

“What’s that? Stop mumbling,” McKeown said. “Of course he’s very eminent. All German academics are very eminent. It’s just the English who are the layabouts. Nothing personal, you understand.”

This time Jack gave up and laughed. McKeown’s severe expression changed almost immediately and he offered a vague smile.

“Look, lad. I didn’t mean to offend you.”

“You didn’t,” Jack said. “Dörpfeld can be a bit... well, particular.”

McKeown pushed the plate of toast into the centre of the table, indicating they should share. “He’s an obsessive. That kind of person becomes rather particular. Bloody fool.”

Jack took a slice of toast and dipped one corner into a pot of honey. “He was good to me. The first time I ever came to Greece was as a fieldwork student in Athens. Dörpfeld made sure we were all working before daybreak. I was slightly unpopular because I was the only one who had a clear head after the night before.”

“Don’t drink, eh?” McKeown lifted his eyebrows. “Dörpfeld must’ve loved you. Did you find anything there apart from his damn theatre?”

“Bits and pieces. Mainly votives.”

“And nowadays?”

Jack dropped the toast and leaned forward. “Now I need you to help me.”

“I see.” McKeown’s eyes gleamed when Jack placed the cloth bundle on the table. “Is that what I think it is?”

Unable to resist a flourish, Jack tugged at one side of the cloth and let the bone roll out across the table. McKeown caught it with an exclamation of pleasure and then held it in one hand while he fumbled for his spectacles with the other.

“Left femur of an adult male about six feet tall and I’d say no more than forty years old,” McKeown began. “No evidence of fractures, although lesions in the bone would suggest some genetic or contracted form of debilitation.”

“I thought anaemia,” Jack said.

McKeown nodded. “Hmm. Very likely. Malaria is a possibility too, of course.” He turned the femur around and peered closely at the ball-joint. “See here—a touch of inflammation. The muscles surrounding the area must have shoved the bone out of alignment.”

“Under what circumstance could that happen?”

“Some kind of trauma, usually. A fracture or a break, and we have neither on this bone. Perhaps our man was compensating for an injury to the right leg?”

Jack shook his head. “There are no breaks on the other leg.”

“Well, normally this kind of inflammation is consistent with surgery for a major fracture requiring reduction and immobilisation of the limb,” McKeown said, fingering the ball-joint. “A major fracture takes up to twelve weeks to heal—longer in the Sudan, since the men necessarily had to walk about and shoot at the bloody Mahdists—and during the time of immobilisation, the bone can become inflamed if it’s misaligned.”

Jack put his chin in his hands. “What if I told you that the burial was contracted?”

“It makes no difference. Inflammation cannot occur after death.”

“Are you certain?”

McKeown looked at him over the rim of his spectacles. “Are you calling into account my abilities as a surgeon, lad? I’ve set more broken limbs than you’ve had hot meals.”

Jack gave a placatory smile. “No, nothing like that. It’s just that some cultures cut through sinews and soft tissue to enable a contracted burial, and—”

“If they did that, there’d be no inflammation at all,” McKeown interrupted. “It’d be like cutting the strings on a puppet to bend it whichever way you wanted. No, this was done in life. For some reason, he was kept immobilised for at least three months—and if it wasn’t due to trauma, then...” McKeown let his voice tail off.

They both looked at the bone, and then Jack said softly, “There’s something else. Look again. I hope the two things are not connected, but... I begin to get the feeling that they might be.”

“Huh. Feelings have no place in archaeology.” McKeown snorted as he peered again at the femur. “A science, that’s what it is. Or didn’t bloody Dörpfeld teach you that... Good God. Those are cut-marks!”

“Yes. But only on the femurs and hips, nowhere else. I found it strange.”

“It’s not strange, it’s butchery, plain and simple,” McKeown said. “Only in those areas? That doesn’t fit the type.”

Jack frowned, picking at the toast again. “What type?”

“Defleshing the bones tends to mean one thing, and one thing only,” McKeown said. “Cannibalism.”

Jack suddenly lost interest in his food. “That’s impossible.”

“Not so.” McKeown shrugged, and then leaned across the table to whisper hoarsely, “Last season, Arthur Evans showed me a pithos burial he’d uncovered in the foundations at Knossos. He’s kept it very hush-

hush for fear of what local reaction would be. It's the skeleton of a young child with cut-marks all over the bones."

"Ritual sacrifice."

McKeown snorted. "Ritual cannibalism."

They looked at the femur with horrified fascination until Jack asked, "But why those parts? Why no cut-marks on the tibia or humerus?"

"Because the thighs and belly are the tastiest part of the human body to eat," McKeown said, his answer so swift that Jack gaped at him in fresh horror. Seeing his expression, McKeown gave a twisted smile. "Best not ask, lad. Best you don't know."

Jack looked away, desperate for a distraction. Out in the caldera, the volcanic island of Nea Kameni bubbled the sea around it, snoring underwater. A seagull shrieked as it landed on the roof of the houses beneath the terrace. Jack shivered and forced his attention back to their conversation.

"You're suggesting that, in light of the evidence, this man was bound and kept prisoner until he could be slaughtered and eaten?"

McKeown leaned back in his chair and considered the femur again. "In light of the current evidence, yes. I'd like to see the whole of the skeletal remains, if that's possible, to look for other evidence of trauma."

Jack put his head in his hands and sighed wearily. "I suppose you heard already that this skeleton is only seventeenth century? That's why this troubles me so much. Ritual killing of this sort isn't exactly standard Ottoman procedure."

"I agree. Far too fancy," McKeown said. "Much easier to just cut people's heads off and have done with it. This grave of yours—the contraction, the chains, the coin—yes, we've all heard about it. Well, it sounds very ritualistic, even to a layperson. You can't blame Father Gregory for becoming so rabid about it."

Jack groaned at the reminder. "That old fool."

McKeown was about to reply when there was a sudden crash as Eutimia came across the terrace, saw what they were looking at, and promptly dropped the tray of tea things. China cups smashed across the

marble pavement, and the tea spilled out to glisten in the morning sunlight, releasing the scent of the leaves and a delicate hint of bergamot.

“Earl Grey,” Jack whimpered. “What a waste!”

“Gentlemen! What is that horrible thing?” Eutimia shrieked, oblivious to the mess at her feet. Her hands flew to her mouth when McKeown waggled the femur in her direction, and then she sat heavily on the top step of the terrace.

Jack stood, concerned. “Are you all right?”

“I can’t believe you brought it here—to my hotel! To the breakfast table!” she said faintly, pale with shock. She shrank away when Jack came to help her up, and got to her feet in an undignified scramble. “I must go—Father Gregory must know—the other guests...”

McKeown watched her leave and then let out a crack of laughter. “That moment will live with me for a long time and will serve to enliven the duller occasion,” he said. “Eutimia brought low by a three-hundred year old bone. That’s something you don’t see every day.”

Jack scuffed his feet through the spilt tea and looked down at it wistfully. “She’ll probably make us pay for this.”

“No doubt. The British School will be happy to foot the bill for such riotous larks.”

Jack put his hands in his pockets, about to return to the table, and then he paused as he felt something cold and small in his left pocket. Puzzled, he withdrew it and stared down at the palm of his hand where the red agate seal-stone lay gleaming.

He knew he’d left it in his room on the bedside table—and yet here it was. This time he could not blame Skitos for transporting it into places it should not be. Jack felt a slow, heavy worm of unease uncoil in his belly, and then McKeown called to him, asking what he was looking at.

Jack sat down again and, after a moment of deliberation, he held out the seal-stone. He had no idea how he should preface the find, so he decided to let the quality of the piece speak for itself.

McKeown took one look and forgot about the femur. “Where did you get this? Athens? There’s nowhere on Santorini that sells seal-stones.”

“It’s from here,” Jack said.

McKeown glanced at him, his expression sharp. “And Evans doesn’t know?”

“I only found it yesterday.”

“Bloody hell, man. Not in your damned grave, I hope!”

Jack smiled faintly. “No. Not quite. I can’t tell you where it’s from.”

“Keeping it a secret, eh? Well, can’t say I blame you. There’s plenty of buggers here that’d leap at the chance to discover anything that would parallel Evans’ finds.”

“You really think so?”

McKeown snorted, and then nodded emphatically. “I know so. If that seal-stone is anything to go by, you and your Ottoman skeleton could be sitting on a veritable goldmine. You want to be careful, lad—there are people on this island who would kill for a site like that.”

Chapter Five

By the time he arrived at the dig site, the morning was nearly over. Koubelos was leaning against the church wall waiting for him. Several workers suddenly became very industrious when Jack walked down the slope towards them.

“Mr. Jack, see what we have found!” Koubelos said, holding out a handful of grubby objects. “I got a team to dig near the grave and there we found these things—Classical, yes? Not Late Hellenistic?”

Jack put the femur, now re-wrapped in its cloth, down onto the wall and held out his hands for the finds. They were unexciting, a shard of glass, thick and opaque with rainbows trapped inside, the foot of a terracotta votive, and a sherd of a glossy, black-slipped kylix cup.

“Hellenistic. And so is this one. But this is early Classical. Boeotian, probably,” he said, giving them back. Seeing his foreman’s dejected expression, he added, “It’s a start. Did they all come from the same pass?”

Koubelos nodded. “We only went down by three feet. Five passes in all, with nothing until the fifth.”

“That begs the question of why we have finds spanning some two hundred years in the same stratum,” Jack said.

“The volcano?” Koubelos suggested. “My men did not jumble things on purpose.”

“I should hope not,” Jack said, faintly alarmed. “No, I don’t think it’s the volcano. We already know that the grave is prehistoric, yet there’s a seventeenth century burial inside it. So that means we don’t have a

secure deposit. It also means that sometime before we came along, somebody else dug through the earth looking for something.”

Koubelos glanced nervously at the bone in its cloth parcel. “They were looking for the grave.”

Jack shrugged. “Maybe. But until we find more evidence, there’s no point in positing theories, is there?”

He picked up the bone and put it under his arm, and then walked across the site with Koubelos following after him. Jack indicated an area covered by only a thin scattering of soil and a thick fold of tephra. “I want to open a new trench over here.”

The foreman examined the ground with a gloomy expression. “The ash layers are very deep.”

“Increases our chances of finding undisturbed deposits,” Jack said briskly. “I want to make a start on it now. Take the team away from the bothros and get them started here. I’ll finish off over there.”

After some complaint, the workmen began hacking at the tuff. The pickaxes made a sharp ringing sound as they hit the rock, and soon, combined with the glare of the sunlight and the disheartening realisation that he’d left Kera Maria’s without his lunch, Jack began to get a headache.

He wilted over the drawings of the bothros and wished he could ask Koubelos for a drink of water or a bite of food. His foreman sat on a lump of tephra nearby and cheerfully ate a large *spanakopita*, oblivious to the pain he caused. Jack wanted to snatch the spinach pie from him and devour it whole, but he did no such thing. Instead, he forced himself to respond politely to whatever Koubelos said.

By the time Koubelos stood up and brushed the last of the flaky pastry crumbs from his fingers, Jack’s temper slipped its leash. He crouched low over the sketchpad to stop his stomach from rumbling and succeeded in breaking the point of the pencil when he leant upon it with too much force. He sharpened it, but then his angry scribbles tore a hole in the paper and he had to begin the drawing again.

The second drawing was useless. His frustration spilled out onto the page. Just as he was contemplating colouring the entire thing in black, a shadow fell across the sketchpad. Jack blinked at it, and then looked up slowly.

Father Gregory stood before him, his hands clasped, an expression of pious conciliation upon his face. "Good afternoon, child."

Jack could not even summon the effort to be polite. "What do you want?"

"Yesterday we both said things we may now regret. Things hurtful and untrue," Father Gregory began, nodding his head so his unkempt grey curls wagged up and down.

"I meant them." Jack abandoned the drawing and stood. "And I still mean them. If you came for an apology, you won't get one from me."

"Alas! What I feared has already come to pass!" The priest's voice rose in volume and the workers nearby stopped to listen. "You always had respect for the Church, but now, since the grave was opened, you abuse God's natural law!"

Jack stared at him in bewilderment. "We have never had any but the most tenuous of dealings outside of this site," he said. "What is discovered here is not your concern."

"It is when it threatens my parishioners!" Father Gregory cried, raising his hands dramatically so his black robes flapped in the breeze. Behind him, a number of the workmen made the sign against the evil eye before edging closer.

"Really, now," Jack said, "you said quite enough yesterday. The only threat the grave could possibly pose to any of your flock is if they happen to wander across the site and fall into it."

Father Gregory crossed himself. "God forbid such a happening! That tomb is cursed. Cursed! I spent all night looking back through the church records and what did I find? In 1650, a shepherd came walking across this very place after dusk, and he was struck down by the evil that lingers here."

“With all due respect, that proves nothing. The ground here is very uneven. He probably fell and cracked his head open.”

“I have not yet finished,” Father Gregory said, waving a finger in remonstrance. “The same thing happened in 1707 and again in 1866... and 1870, when a Frenchman died right here.”

Jack tried to think clearly through the headache clouding his mind. “Those were the dates? You are sure?”

“Of course I am sure! See here, I even brought the accounts for you!” The priest thrust a handful of wrinkled yellow pages at him.

Jack took them, horrified by the careless handling of such irreplaceable records. He looked at each page, touching the jagged edges where they had been torn from the books, careful not to let the manuscripts deteriorate any further. They felt like butterfly wings, crumbling beneath his fingers and fluttering to the ground, taking with them hundreds of years’ of history.

“These dates. The same thing happened on each occasion,” Jack said slowly.

“Yes! Good Christian men were killed when they walked near the grave!”

“No. More than that.” Jack handed the pages back to the priest. “You would remember 1870—or more to the point, 1866. What happened then, Father?”

Father Gregory had the grace to look ashamed. “I do not know. I was in Athens, studying for the priesthood.”

Jack turned to the workmen. “What happened in 1866?”

There was a pause, a moment of indecision and restlessness as each man conferred with his neighbour, and then Koubelos spoke up. “The volcano. It erupted.”

“Thank you.” Jack folded his arms and glared at the priest. “When a volcano erupts, there are earthquakes, fire-bombs, sulphurous smoke. Any and all of these may have caused the deaths of these people—not some kind of demon from the grave! This discussion is over, Father. Please return those documents to their proper place.”

“Not until you have returned the body to its rightful place,” Father Gregory said slyly. “Where is it? It must be buried again, with the proper rites given to it.”

“I will not return it until I have made a full and proper study,” Jack said. “And when I re-inter it, you will have nothing to do with it. This man was buried as a pagan and so he shall remain as one.”

The priest’s beard twitched in outrage. “Have you so little regard for the feelings of those around you?” he boomed in tones so stentorian that Jack fancied that he heard the loose pumice nearby rattle in protest. “If you do not think of the living, how can you deny the dead the chance of the Resurrection and the care to which we are all entitled in God? How can you be sure that your actions in disinterring this body—without having a priest on hand—will not be the cause of further misfortunes?”

“This is... You’re being ridiculous,” Jack said. “Please leave now.”

“Not until I have the body!”

So saying, and with a nimbleness that belied his sixty-odd years, Father Gregory reached down and seized the cloth bundle from the ground. Before Jack could prevent him, the priest dragged away the cloth to reveal the femur, and then held it aloft in triumph while the workmen made sounds of horror and disgust.

“Satan, get thee gone!” Father Gregory bellowed, and he flung away the bone with all his strength.

Jack stood paralysed with shock, watching the femur arc high up into the air. It reached its zenith and began to fall, tumbling end over end, dropping faster and faster until, with a sharp crack, it hit an outcrop of tuff a hundred yards away, bounced once, and then was still.

In a tone almost strangulated with fury, Jack turned to the priest. “You came here asking for permission to bury the body, and yet now you most wilfully desecrate the very same body you claim to want saved. That was a human bone, belonging once to a human being—and you threw it away like it was so much rubbish. How dare you come here bleating to me of respect when you are incapable of giving it to the meanest, most lowly of things!”

Father Gregory shrank back, but rallied enough to say, "That was not a human being, even when it was alive. It was a demon! A monster! A—"

Jack raised his hand. "Get out of my sight."

Koubelos hurried to intervene before the argument could degenerate into physical violence. "Mr. Jack, Father, let us not be hasty..."

"Get him away from me," Jack said. "Tell him that if he ever sets foot on my dig again, I won't be responsible for my actions."

"You are upset, you don't mean it," Father Gregory said, even as the foreman hastened him away. "I give you my blessing, child."

"I do not want your blessing!" Jack shouted. "Get away from me!"

Father Gregory clutched at Koubelos's restraining hand and hurried from the slope, muttering loud benedictions to the workmen as he went. A few of the men downed their tools and accompanied him, glancing back furtively.

Jack kicked the sketchpad and forced himself to walk away from the box of pencils. He had no desire to spend the rest of the afternoon picking up splintered pieces of wood from beneath various rocks. The image made him think of the femur and the state it must be in. Taking a deep breath, he headed purposefully towards the outcrop.

The ash deposits from the Bronze Age eruption of the volcano differed in appearance all over the island, but here at the southeast they looked like sand dunes dismantled by a strong current. Eddying and curving, they rolled over the underlying rock, sometimes providing incongruous decoration. Subsequent eruptions and centuries of weathering had blasted the tuff into giant, deformed shapes that resembled the devil's playground.

Jack managed to keep his balance as he climbed over the outcrop, but when he stopped to get his bearings, he felt his feet began to shift. Looking down, he noticed a hairline crack in the tuff, crumbling and widening as he watched. Fascinated, and not quite comprehending that what he was seeing was even possible, he moved to one side and stared at the tuff as it split asunder.

It did so with barely a sound, just a faint popping from the rock and then a wheeze, an exhalation, from the earth below. There was a belch of stinking yellowish vapour that made Jack's eyes water. As he turned away to wipe them, the entire section of tuff he stood on slid downwards, taking him with it into the newly opened chasm. Jack yelped in alarm as he fell, and then the breath was knocked from his body when he landed.

"Mr. Jack, sir! Where are you?"

Jack blinked up at the crack of daylight some eight feet above him. When he felt sufficiently recovered, he called out, an action that brought a shower of ash and pumice down upon him. Anxious to avoid being buried alive, he lay still until Koubelos's worried face appeared overhead like a crinkled moon.

"You are all right?" the foreman asked.

"Perfectly," Jack said dryly. He sat up and made a feeble attempt to brush himself down, wincing at the tiny cuts inflicted by the rock during his descent.

"You are certain?" Koubelos said, unconvinced.

"Just fetch a rope and get me out of here."

When Koubelos disappeared, Jack climbed unsteadily to his feet, coughing at the drift of ash floating around him. He had grit in his hair, in his eyes, even in his mouth. It tasted flat and vaguely cement-like. As he stumbled away from where he'd landed, he heard a clunk and looked down. There at his feet lay the femur, as whole and as perfect as it had been that morning.

"Thank God," Jack muttered, crouching to pick it up. He patted the bone absently as if it were a favoured dog, and was about to stand up again when he noticed what the femur had been lying upon.

A pavement. Carefully selected slabs of marble sunk into the ground, forming a pavement some four feet wide. On one side it disappeared beneath the tuff. On the other, closest to where Jack knelt, it led to a series of three shallow steps, which in turn led inside a building—or what was left of it. The walls extended out from beneath the tuff for only

a foot or so, but the masonry was solid enough, reaching a height of five feet.

“Mr. Jack?”

From above came a shuffling sound, and then the end of a rope dangled in front of him. Jack batted it aside impatiently, forgetting his cuts and bruises as a surge of excitement ran through him. Still clutching the femur, he brushed his knuckles over the pavement, then the steps, and finally the nearest of the walls.

“Mr. Jack! What has happened?”

“A miracle,” Jack whispered, and began to laugh.

* * *

Hours later he was still jubilant, and told Kera Maria no less than six times of what he had found and how he had found it. Jack sat at the table and fed Skitos most of his dinner, too excited to eat, until Kera Maria banished them both from the terrace by waving a broom at them.

“Yianni, you need to wash,” she said bluntly. “The ash, it gets everywhere in my nice clean home. You look like a creature of dust. It makes you grey before your time. Go now and bathe.”

Jack just laughed until she made him look in a mirror. Then, abashed, he slunk away to his rooms, taking the femur with him and replacing it in the tea chest. He locked the external door and closed the shutters, not wanting Skitos to follow him inside again tonight. He dropped the keys and the agate seal-stone onto the bedside table and looked around the room carefully, but there were no more strange letters or parcels ready to claim his attention.

Satisfied that his evening would remain undisturbed, Jack looked for his excavation notebook pertaining to the part of the site where the tuff outcrop was located. He flicked through a few pages of his careful handwriting and started to read as he unbuttoned his shirt. A puff of dust accompanied this action, and so he dropped the shirt and kicked it away. He picked up the notebook and carried it over to the bed.

Last season he'd done a field walk over the tuff with Koubelos and another of the workmen, but they'd found nothing of note, save fragments of yellow-glazed medieval pottery and a couple of pieces of blue Byzantine ware that, at the time, he'd assumed had been washed down the slope from other settlements.

Jack kicked off his shoes without bothering to untie the laces. He left the notebook on the bed while he went to the bathroom. Between the lamplight and the damaged surface of the mirror, he thought he looked truly spectral. The flame accentuated the hollows beneath his cheekbones and at his temples, and made his eyes darken and glint. The powdered ash smearing his face and dusting his hair made him look like a mummer, so he pulled a few outlandish expressions at his reflection before he washed off the ash.

The water was warm this time, having sat all day in direct sunlight in a copper basin. Jack made an appreciative sound as he lifted the basin and poured the water over his head. He scrubbed a hand through his hair to clean out the gritty residue of the tephra. Reaching for a towel, he wrapped it turban-like around his head, then stripped off and made an attempt to wash the rest of his body.

He wished he could take a proper bath, but did not dare risk waking Kera Maria by dragging the cauldron back and forth across the courtyard from the well. Instead he made do with splashing about in the last of the water and then rubbing himself clean, a concerted effort that left the towels a murky shade of grey and his body faintly sore where the cuts and bruises from his fall had awoken in complaint.

Jack ruffled his damp hair and put on his bathrobe, the one sartorial extravagance he permitted himself on excavation. It was Chinese silk, its fabric like black water, and it always felt coolly soothing against his skin. He tied the belt, collected up the towels and dropped them all out in the corridor, and then went into his room.

The first thing he saw was the envelope that lay on top of his open notebook. Jack exhaled slowly and leaned back against the door. This time he was certain of it. There was no way anybody could have climbed

in and left the message there. Not unless they could pass through locked doors and closed shutters.

“Or are you a ghost?” Jack asked the room at large. He shivered when the lamplight dimmed slightly. He laughed at such a foolish fancy and moved from the door onto the bed to read the letter. As he opened the envelope, something soft and slithery dropped out. He picked it up curiously.

It was a blindfold of inky black satin, warm and sinuous in his hand. Jack dropped it immediately, suddenly alarmed. Hurriedly he scanned the letter, not quite taking in the import of the words until he forced himself to read it a second time.

My dear Yianni,

I am most gratified to see that you are all I hoped you to be. Your choice of artefacts pleased me more than I can say. Believe me, we shall do very well together and a great many partnerships in the world will envy us.

I should congratulate you on your discovery today, except you know as well as do I that it was found not by accident, but by design. We both know who is the author of that design, although I will allow you full credit for the discovery... as a gesture of my goodwill towards you, shall we say? As for the other site I promised to you, it is much greater than the one revealed today, and much more worthy of your endeavour. I shall show you far greater treasures than you could ever imagine, as soon as you keep your side of our agreement.

Now for my demands—for that is what they are, and I will make no secret of it. I need you in a way you could never dream possible. You will have heard, no doubt, of those people who devour the flesh of their dead in the belief that the qualities of the deceased can be consumed and made to live again. While I do not need anything quite so drastic as human flesh in order to survive, I do require certain bodily fluids—blood, semen, sweat. I need these in the same way that you require physical sustenance,

although the quantities I shall take from you will be much less than your daily intake of food and water.

I shall visit you as often as you permit, and will take my fill of these fluids, in any combination I see fit. In addition, there are three things further that I must insist upon.

First, you will not look upon me. Wear the blindfold whenever I come to you. I cannot reiterate this point enough—you must not see me, ever.

Secondly, you must not touch me, nor attempt to do so.

Thirdly, do not wear anything knotted when I come to you. This may seem like an odd demand, but you must humour me in this request, as in the others.

Should you attempt to defy my wishes, our arrangement is rendered obsolete and I shall take back what I have given.

I am certain that now, my dear Yianni, you are wondering what you have agreed to. Let me assure you once more that I will not harm you. This arrangement is purely for our mutual benefit. It may be true that no sensible man would countenance the things I have told you, and would put aside this letter in haste. But I have hopes—no, I have proof—that you are not a sensible man, but one who would engage his senses if only opportunity would permit.

I offer you that opportunity now.

I remain, most eagerly,

Yours,

Belas.

“Oh, God,” Jack said aloud, pressing his knuckles to his mouth. He crumpled the letter in his fist and then smoothed it out again, re-reading it until he was sure he knew each line by rote. Questions and thoughts jostled for attention, and he found himself rejecting first the notion that Father Gregory was the mysterious Belas, and then pondering the wisdom of reneging on the agreement, and from thence to how had Belas known what his reply had been, and—most insistent of all, “Why me?”

Another, deeper knowledge nagged at him and Jack examined it reluctantly. There was a name for those who lived off human blood, a name that had come out of the Slavic countries and terrified the whole of Western civilisation for centuries.

Vampire.

As he read the letter again, Jack could not bring himself to say how ridiculous he was being. Vampires did not exist. They were *exotiko*, no more real than the Lamia or the Gello or the Nereids. Whatever his predilections were, this Belas was not some kind of spectral creature, but a flesh and blood human being.

Jack flung the letter to the floor and lay down upon the bed. He stared at the ceiling, his thoughts whirling. The lamplight danced, casting crazy shadows from the beams, making him feel less certain of what was real and what was illusion.

It was a simple enough arrangement, Jack thought. There had been other, more painful and publicly humiliating deals between academics in the past. And if nobody ever found out...

He rolled over and snuffed out the lamp with one sudden, decisive gesture. As the room plunged into darkness, Jack found the blindfold, and put it on.

For the first blind moment, he felt afraid. This was swiftly followed by self-consciousness, and then a whole gamut of emotions that came to an abrupt halt when he heard footsteps in the corridor outside. He forced himself to lie absolutely still, to wait for a knock at the door. It did not come, and the silence stretched out and became loud to his ears.

And then, so soft that he nearly missed it for all he was listening for it, came a voice that called his name once.

"Yes. Come in," Jack said, his voice sounding over-loud in the darkness. In the pause that followed, he had a brief, comically horrific image of what would happen if the voice belonged to Kera Maria. His landlady forgave him many eccentricities, but he suspected this one might take some explaining.

The door opened and closed again with a click, and once more there was a silence so deafening that it hurt. Shifting restlessly on the quilt, Jack turned his head as if he could sense his visitor. He could hear the silk slipping over his skin and the rougher sound of his feet against the coarse wool of the blanket folded over the lower half of the bed. He held his breath, straining to hear beyond the noises he made, beyond the thump of his heart...

“Breathe,” commanded the voice, rich and husky in timbre and faintly amused in tone.

Jack took a breath that turned into a gasp. “Who are you?”

“You may call me Belas.” Amusement still coloured his voice. “At least, I hope you were expecting me and nobody else, considering how provocatively you are dressed.”

Jack felt even more ill at ease, despite the reassuring tones. He twisted on the bed, anxiety forcing him into action, and for an instant he wondered what would happen if he sat up and tore off the blindfold. What would he see? And what would be the consequences? He tried to think not of his own irrational fear, but of the seal-stone. He reminded himself of the promise Belas had made. His site would be greater than Mycenae...

He jumped when the floorboards creaked as Belas came closer. Then he heard Belas pause and recoil slightly, and Jack worried that he might not be as pleasing as Belas hoped, and that he would lose everything before it had really begun.

“But what is this? Already you disobey me, Yianni. I am disappointed that you should flout my wishes so early in our relationship.”

Jack moved his head in the direction of Belas’s voice. “What do you mean? I have done all you asked—at least, I think I have...”

Belas purred, making Jack squirm. “Your robe, Yiannakki. It is tied. With a knot. I dislike knots.”

“Oh!” Appalled at his forgetfulness, Jack reached down and fumbled with the knot until the belt of his robe lay flat, the two ends only loosely woven together.

Close beside him, Belas laughed. “You do not need the robe at all. Undo it. Show yourself to me.”

Jack did as he was told, albeit reluctantly. He plucked at the belt and let the ends slide free before he eased open the robe until his body was exposed to the night air—and to Belas. He was glad the lamp was no longer illuminating proceedings, as he was certain he was blushing as fiercely as a sunrise.

He heard Belas’s intake of breath, and then he whimpered in sudden fright as the mattress bowed beneath a second weight.

“Are you always this nervous?” Belas asked genially.

“I’ve never done this sort of thing before.”

“And what do you mean by that, exactly?” Belas continued. “Have you never had another man make love to you? Is that why you are afraid of me?”

Stung, Jack bit at the lure. “I am not afraid! Merely... Well. This is strange. That is all. I certainly have no consideration for your gender. Doesn’t Homer tell us that the blood-loving shades of the dead are all men?”

In reply, he felt a fleeting caress across his cheekbone, and turned his head in an attempt to follow it.

“I did choose well,” Belas whispered, and then louder he said, “But I shall be easy on you this time.”

Jack flinched involuntarily when he felt Belas take his right hand. The difference in their body temperature was startling. Belas’s skin was cool and dry, as cold as obsidian. In contrast, Jack imagined himself to be running a temperature, so warm and damp with unease he had become.

Belas stroked his hand, rubbing the pad of his thumb over Jack’s palm, beginning just below his index finger and then spiralling inwards to tickle at the very centre of his palm before caressing outwards again. Then he slid his thumb down over Jack’s wrist and held it there against the pulse beating beneath scant layers of flesh.

“You didn’t hurt yourself when you fell today?”

Jack had relaxed into the strange, lulling quality of the caress and so he faltered a moment before responding. “No. Just a few cuts and bruises.”

“Good. I don’t want you harmed.”

Jack wriggled a little, seeking comfort, and then he made a tiny noise of shock as Belas lifted his hand higher and licked at the palm. It tickled. More than that, it was weirdly intimate. Jack tried to pull away, but Belas took a firmer grip on his wrist and held him still.

“Please, don’t,” said Jack, fretfully.

Belas paused, and Jack felt his breath whisper against his wet palm until he asked, “Does it hurt?”

“It feels strange.”

Jack felt Belas smile against his hand. “I promise it will not feel strange for long,” and then he continued to lick at his palm. After a moment, Belas slid his thumb back over Jack’s wrist to push at the soft mounds of flesh of his palm. Jack hissed as he felt a brief, sharp pain from one of the cuts he’d staunched earlier, and then Belas nuzzled into his hand with a sound of satisfaction.

Jack wasn’t sure what was more peculiar, the fact that Belas was licking at his blood or the fact that he was beginning to find it arousing.

Belas transferred his attentions to Jack’s left hand, this time using his teeth to tease out the blood from the cuts and scrapes. Pain blossomed as sharp as pleasure, and Jack baulked again.

“It hurts,” he said, his voice small. His palms felt as if they were on fire, throbbing and burning, and he fancied he could feel the impressions of Belas’s teeth upon his flesh, all washed with saliva. Even though it hurt, Jack wanted it again, and gave back his hands willingly when Belas reached for them.

“I am not entirely the monster you think me to be. Any time you feel uncomfortable or in pain, you must tell me, and I promise I will stop,” Belas said, closing his own cold hands around Jack’s. He bent his head and playfully bit Jack’s forefinger, then closed his lips around it and sucked gently.

“That feels... nice,” Jack said, tumbling headlong into desire.

“Yes, it does, doesn’t it?” Belas said, lifting his head. “And you enjoy it, I can tell. Touch yourself. Show me how you like it.”

Jack shivered, half-turning away from Belas. “I—I couldn’t. I mean, I can’t...”

“Don’t you know how to give yourself pleasure? Really, you cannot be so innocent...”

“I am not, but—” Embarrassment cut through the drowse of pleasure, and Jack did not know whether he was pleased or not when Belas interrupted.

“But nothing. Feel, now. Your palm is wet and slick. Touch yourself, enjoy yourself. You cannot be ashamed.”

Jack mumbled something halfway between a negative and a plea, but Belas insisted, guiding his hand down over his body.

“I will not watch,” Belas told him wickedly and returned his attention to the cuts on his left hand. Jack groaned, trapped. For a heartbeat he concentrated on the sweep of Belas’s tongue around his fingers, and then he rolled onto his side towards Belas and began to stroke himself.

His shyness lingered. Jack hid his face against the pillow, glad of the blindfold for the first time that night. His usual dreamy fantasies tangled and fled, opposed by the reality that Belas offered and he was almost afraid of the strength of his lust.

As he found his rhythm and need kicked in, Jack writhed once, sighing. Belas purred against his hand, gratified, and then moved down beside him to lick at his throat. Jack moaned in instinctive response, tilting his chin to allow Belas where he willed. His skin felt so hot now he wished he could slough it off, but Belas’s touch cooled him, comforting and caressing.

And then Belas moved again, slinking lower, his tongue working around Jack’s fingers and disrupting the rhythm he’d set. Jack yielded the struggle, abandoning himself to Belas. In the midst of confused, drugged desire, the only thing he could remember was that he should not touch Belas, but oh, how he wanted to. As he broke and died in Belas’s

mouth, Jack reached for him, but felt nothing beyond helpless drowning pleasure.

He lay still and gasped, one hand splayed over the blindfold.

Belas said, "I told you never to touch me."

Jack shifted on the bed, his body still languorous. "I'm sorry. It was just... I thought that perhaps—well, what about you?"

Silence, and then Jack heard and felt the moment when Belas slid from the bed. Cautiously he reached out with one hand, feeling a whisper of fabric against his fingertips before Belas moved away.

"I am flattered you should think of my pleasure, but it is unnecessary," Belas said softly. "This is not an agreement based upon sexual satisfaction, although I intend for you to enjoy what I do. You feed me and I please you. The perfect symbiosis."

Jack withdrew his hand. "You must have—desires."

"I have but one desire, Yiannakki, and you do not feature in it."

"What is it?"

He was answered again by silence, and even when he asked the question a second and then a third time, there came no reply. Finally, he lifted the blindfold and stared around, but the room was empty, and Belas long gone.

Chapter Six

Kera Maria waited by the table, rocking forward on her toes. Jack glanced at her, and then continued playing with his breakfast. He had no appetite, but felt listless instead, as if it were too much effort for him to summon the desire for food. He stirred the spoon around in the thick, creamy yoghurt, watching the drizzle of honey spiral inwards... the way Belas's tongue had traced over his palm.

Jack let go of the spoon immediately. It fell slowly against the side of the bowl, and the soft chink of metal against porcelain made him start. He looked up at his landlady again, this time with a confused expression.

"I think I'm still asleep and dreaming," he said.

"You are awake, Yianni." Kera Maria rapped the edges of two envelopes against the back of his hand as proof. "These came for you this morning."

Jack reached for them. "I was not expecting any correspondence."

"Maybe you have a secret admirer."

"Or two, since I have two letters," Jack said dryly, turning the first envelope over and reading the direction. The handwriting looked familiar and so he picked up the spoon from the yoghurt, sucked it clean, and reversed it to open the envelope with the handle.

He unfolded the letter, which was written very closely on both sides of the paper. Jack held it up to the light to see more clearly. As he did so, he realised that Kera Maria had similarly moved her head, her gaze fixed unwaveringly on the page in his hand.

"It is written in English," Jack said. "You told me you could not understand that language."

Kera Maria shrugged. "I can understand you well enough."

"I speak Greek with you."

"Not all the time, you don't," she said. "I have heard you speaking English. Also German and French in the town when you see the other archaeologists," she added, seeing from his expression that he did not fully believe her.

"Well." Jack waved the letter at her. "Would you like me to translate?"

Kera Maria looked shocked. "Yianni! That is a private letter!"

"I'm glad we agree on that point."

Jack began to read with his full attention, only to lose track a few moments later when Kera Maria sidled around behind him to read over his shoulder. It amused him more than it annoyed him, and so he gave up and began to paraphrase the contents for her.

"It is from my fiancée," he said. "She writes of the weather in Edinburgh. There is ice on the ponds and still some snow to be seen in the parks."

Kera Maria brightened with pleasure. "What a terrible place it must be!"

"Yes, indeed," Jack said, distracted as he read on. "There is news of my family and of everybody we know and... really, this is a remarkably dull letter. I don't even recall Mr. Smythe, let alone do I wish to know about his gastric problems."

"Such things can enliven a man's day," Kera Maria said.

"Not mine." Jack continued to read, scanning ahead rapidly and turning the page. Then, about halfway down the second side, he paused. "Ah."

Kera Maria looked at him, scenting important news.

Jack sat back in his chair and sighed with resignation.

"What has happened?"

He lifted the letter from where he'd let it drop to the table. "My fiancée has married."

Kera Maria beamed. “But that is happy news!” she cried before she realised the contradiction. Puzzled now, she asked, “Yianni, how can she be wed when her bridegroom sits before me?”

“She found another.” Jack put the spoon back into the yoghurt and stirred it again. “She says she grew tired of waiting for me to, I quote, ‘stop acting like a vagabond’, and that she can scarcely remember what I look like, it has been so long since I deserted her.”

“How long?” Kera Maria asked.

Jack picked up the sugar pot and idly poured a small pyramid of sugar into the centre of the bowl, watching it sink into the yoghurt. “We were engaged eight years,” he said at last, marking the past tense with emphasis.

“That is a long time,” she said. “For myself, I was engaged barely three months. But then I was eager for marriage and for Konaires.” She cackled in a way that made Jack stare at her in alarm. She sobered quickly and said, “Women like reassurance. Konaires gave me a gift each week of our engagement—flowers, fresh eggs, wool.”

Jack snorted. “I don’t think Dorothy would appreciate that sort of thing.”

“When did you last see her?” Kera Maria persisted.

“About...” He paused, working it out, and looked genuinely startled when he said, “About two and a half years ago.”

Kera Maria’s eyes widened. “Yiannakki, a woman needs more reassurance than that! Little wonder she looked elsewhere for affection!”

Jack bowed his head and stirred the heap of sugar into the yoghurt. “I cannot blame her. She thought that once I had my degree, I would settle into teaching and become somebody quite respectable.”

Kera Maria huffed. “You are very respectable, Yianni. The most respectable of the archaeologists on this island and more than likely of any other of the islands, too.”

He smiled a little at how quickly she had swung between expressing sympathy for his fiancée to defending his reputation. Before he could

keep up with her wandering wit, she seemed to decide upon a course of action that she put to him slyly.

“Now you are released, you could do worse than secure yourself a Greek bride. Mr. Schliemann, now, he married a good Greek girl and she was very pretty and all that is charming. I shall make enquiries today on your behalf...”

Jack held up his hands. “No, please! I don’t think that would be a good idea.”

Her expression fell, and almost he felt guilty at having deprived her of the chance to pick out his future mate. But she soon rallied, saying with a wise nod, “Of course, how thoughtless of me. You will need some time to mend your broken heart. My poor Yianni! How sad you must be. What a cruel girl is this Dorothy to treat you so badly.”

Jack was about to protest that his heart was entirely unaffected and the only damage was a slight dent to his pride, but then he realised that such a confession would spur Kera Maria on in her efforts to find him a wife. Instead, he contrived to look sorrowful.

His deception worked almost too well. Kera Maria suddenly burst into tears and embraced him in a fierce hug. When she let go, she dabbed at her eyes with the corners of her apron.

“How brave you are!” she sniffed dramatically. “I shall let you grieve for your lost love, this faithless woman, and when you are recovered, we shall speak more of finding you a proper, more suitable wife.”

Jack could only nod, wary of being embraced again. She seemed satisfied with this and hurried away into the corridor. Within minutes, she had flung on her shawl and was making her way up the road towards Fira, her apron still tied around her ample waist to signify the importance of the news she carried.

Mystified, Jack looked back at the letter that had caused such a fuss. He tried to summon an emotion for Dorothy, but none came, not even righteous indignation. He was more puzzled as to why she had simply not said at the start of the letter that she had broken their engagement.

Jack wondered if they were both guilty of procrastination. Eight years was a long time, after all. He supposed Dorothy had decided to marry because she wanted a child, and so again he searched his soul for any desire for offspring. He found none, and so began to think that they had been unsuited all along. Dorothy's actions had saved them both from a tedious marriage. The thought cheered him, and so Jack took a spoonful of yoghurt, only to grimace at the gritty sweetness from the mix of honey and sugar.

As he pushed away the bowl, his sleeve caught on the second envelope and brought it into view. Dorothy's letter had caused so much excitement that he'd forgotten the other. Jack immediately recognised the childlike hand. He tore open the envelope and fumbled for the sheet of paper within, nearly ripping it in his haste.

The page was folded into quarters, and when he smoothed it out upon the table, he could see it was a map, crudely drawn but comprehensible. Jack traced the road from Fira down to the southwest of the island, and then tapped the large bold cross placed some distance south of the road. His site just outside Emporio was similarly marked, but with a smaller cross.

Jack thought of the numerous goat tracks crossing the back of Santorini and leading to the coast. It would be a simple matter for him to reach the area indicated on the map from his own site. He would go there this morning and undertake a preliminary surface survey, and then he would apply to the eparch for approval to take a second excavation permit.

His spark of enthusiasm dulled only when he realised that there was no message of any kind contained within the envelope or upon the map. He looked three times to be sure, even turning the envelope inside out.

"But then, what did you expect?" Jack said aloud. He shook his head at his sudden need for reassurance, and then placed the blame squarely at the door of his former fiancée. With a sigh, he ate another spoonful of yoghurt and then left the table, ready to find the site that would bring him greater riches than the treasures of Mycenae.

* * *

Koubelos was in a bad mood that morning, Jack noticed. When he'd called at the foreman's house, Koubelos's six-year old daughter Despoina opened the door and beamed up at Jack before yelling for her father in a dialect so thick that he understood little of it. Koubelos hurried forward, swept the child out of the way, and slammed the door closed behind him. He was still eating his breakfast, a piece of bread and cheese held in one hand, and he refused to respond to Jack's greeting or attempts at conversation.

As they passed through the main square, Jack became aware of the stares and whispers. This time he was not an object of terror as an *exotiko*, but a man to be pitied as a jilted lover. He wasn't sure that he liked his new status. While the women seemed to regard him as heroic in his resilience—when he smiled at a group of matrons, they sighed and fluttered—the men were quite different in their reaction. They turned away from him and looked back only furtively. The sign against the evil eye appeared more frequently than it had been when he was just an *exotiko*.

Jack stuffed his hands in his pockets and affected not to care, but privately he worried that he would find himself without workers.

"It is not a good thing when a man wears horns," Koubelos said around his final mouthful of breakfast. "He is the unluckiest of men, and others will fear to associate with him in case his bad luck disrupts their happiness."

Jack stopped walking. "I wasn't cuckolded," he said mildly. "It is a broken engagement, nothing more."

Koubelos did not stop but continued on. Jack was obliged to catch up with him to hear his next words.

"Then you look careless because you cannot keep a woman."

“Keep her?” Jack repeated. “I doubt Dorothy would take kindly to being kept in a box. She is perfectly entitled to choose another husband if she likes him better. And that is all I have to say on the subject.”

Koubelos nodded sagely. “I see. You suffer from a broken heart.”

Jack bit back a retort and walked faster. By the time he reached the site, Koubelos was trailing half a mile behind him in the dust. While he waited, Jack gave the day’s orders to the workmen. Despite, or perhaps because of, his public argument with Father Gregory and the morning’s revelations of his private heartbreak, Jack found he had an excess of workers. He set them to their tasks, some to continue cleaning back the trenches, some to explore the area around the cist grave, and the rest he sent to cut away the layers of tuff that had split open yesterday.

Within half an hour, the site resounded with noisy activity. Koubelos had just arrived and was already drinking from his water flask. Jack told him briefly what to do in his absence, and then he picked his way across the site and took the closest goat track down the slope into a landscape of hummocks and mounds of volcanic spew.

As soon as he was out of sight of his workers, Jack took the map from his pocket and used it to orient himself. He looked up at the sun, fierce despite the early hour, and then walked with his back to its rising heat. His shadow went before him, undulating over the smooth lumps of tephra and the sudden, violent up-thrusts of igneous rock. He wished he could be one half as nimble, frequently stumbling as loose pebbles rattled underfoot, frightening away the shaggy island goats that sprang up from the rocks and ran bleating in scattered directions.

He paused to look around, hearing nothing now but the breeze through the scrubby grass and the far distant sound of waves against the cliffs. He crouched down to collect a few potsherds, which were Byzantine by their gloss of greenish-blue glaze. Jack dutifully marked the findspot on the map and then walked on, his pace slowing as he began to feel the effect of full sunlight on his bare head.

He had not thought to bring a hat. On site, he usually sat in the shade. Only in high summer did he wear a hat. Unforgivably, he had no

water with him. Yet again he had left Kera Maria's without his lunch, and without a flask of water.

Jack twisted around to look up at the face of the sun and considered going back. Then he reasoned that there were plenty of streams from which the goats drank, and so he went on jauntily, hopping across a series of tuff lumps that looked as if they were puffball fungi.

The terrain on this part of the island was unlike anything he'd seen before. Vast and barren, the tuff and tephra were blinding, limitless shades of white and cream and grey. The ash had weathered into petrified sand dunes, as if the rolling tide of the Sahara had been brought to a halt and then bleached white beneath the sun and the salt. Jack wondered if the surface of the moon looked this way, for there was something alien about it.

But then he discovered more potsherds, and these he recognised as Mycenaean. The unknown shrank away and became something understandable. Jack was happy as he made notes to record the find. He followed the track around the curve of a ridge that tumbled towards the sea, to the place the map indicated with a large cross.

"X marks the spot," Jack said to the breeze, and he scrambled over the ridge only to be confronted by yet more glaring tuff dunes.

He looked again at the map, certain he had followed it correctly. Over there was a large outcrop. Below him and to the right he saw a small ravine from whence, faintly, he could hear running water. Between the two features lay a plateau of tephra, flat and dull, except for a piece of stone jutting from the centre of it like the fingers of an Orthodox saint in an icon.

Jack hurried towards it, suddenly anxious. All morning he had pushed aside the thoughts of Belas and their arrangement, but now he worry nagged at him. What if Belas had cheated him? What if there was nothing here but a rock? Already feeling foolish, Jack reached the stone and examined it carefully.

It was almost shoulder-height, a boulder of rough-hewn marble with a series of letters carved into the side facing the sea. Above the Greek,

Jack noticed there had once been another set of words, but time or man had obliterated the phrase into illegibility. He wondered if the original phrase was the same as the one carved there now.

ΠΕΝΤΕ ΑΠ' ΕΜΟΥ ΠΕΝΤΕ ΑΠΟ ΣΟΥ
ΘΗΣΑΥΡΟΝ ΟΡΥΤΕ

“Five from me, five from you, dig for treasure’,” Jack read. He turned around to look in all directions as if he would see something to help him with the riddle, but the landscape defied him.

“Five what?” Jack asked the stone. “Five inches, five cubits, five yards?”

He walked around it, checking again that there was not another set of instructions upon its back, and then he leaned against it to think.

Jack did not like riddles. They reminded him too much of mathematics. In order to understand it, one needed a key. At school, he had frequently arrived at the correct answer to a sum in a disjointed and unorthodox manner. When challenged to show his method of working, he'd been unable to do so and had been sent to stand in the corner for his stupidity. Mathematics had frustrated him ever since, and so now too did the riddle on the stone.

He went back to face the inscription and took five steps away from it. “Five from me, five from you,” he muttered. “That’s surely an impasse. Nonsensical. It must be a direction.”

Jack tried five cubits, a matter of a few paces away from the stone. He looked hard at the ground, but saw not a single sherd to show that his guess was correct. With a sigh, he decided it must be five stadia. Returning to the stone, he set his back to it and began to pace, shortening his stride in an effort to approximate how long an Ancient Greek pace would be. By his reckoning, although he was unsure of the precision of his sums, five stadia would be close to one mile, give or take a few yards.

He counted one hundred paces and then turned to check his alignment with the stone. After another forty paces, he suspended the count as he negotiated a dry stream cut through the tephra. By three hundred and sixty-three paces, Jack was off-course and certain he stood on the wrong side of the ravine he'd seen earlier. He retraced his steps, flapping a hand in front of his face as the sun rose higher. Despite being so close to the coast, not a breath of air disturbed the stillness of the day. The wind had dropped and the Aegean lay a silent, deep blue, unruffled by waves.

Jack climbed down into the ravine and stood for a moment in the blissful cool. The stream crawled past his boots, and when he crouched to wash his face, the water felt deliciously cold. His skin seemed too hot in comparison, and he was reminded of Belas's touch. Confused and ashamed at how his body reacted to the memory, Jack rose and left the ravine without drinking from the stream.

He regretted the impulse as soon as he clambered out onto the tuff. The sun burned blindingly hot now and forced him to shade his eyes and squint when he looked back at the stone. Even at a distance of nearly four hundred paces, the heat-haze rose and shimmered, distorting the alignment.

Jack began to walk back towards the stone, pocketing a hard piece of rock from the ground. He reasoned that he could scratch a line into the tephra as he went, and then he would know for certain if he was going in the right direction. This plan started out well enough, but after fifty paces Jack felt dizzy. His back hurt from having to bend over to make the line, and his mouth so dry it felt like the tuff beneath his feet. He dropped the rock and continued onwards, his stride faltering and his mind clamouring for a cool drink rather than on the job of keeping pace.

He reached the count of five hundred and looked around. Ahead of him stretched nothing but endless blue as the Aegean melted into the sky. The haze obscured even the distant blur of clouds over Crete. Dispirited, he turned his gaze up at the heavens, watching as the blue changed colour and became paler. He flinched from the glare of the sun and brought his attention back to earth. There was nothing in any

direction, just pale whitish-grey tuff shining in the sunlight. No lost city, no great treasure, not even a single piece of potsherd.

Jack sat on the tuff and put his head in his hands. His hair felt hot and damp with sweat, and his face burned. The shade afforded by his cupped hands made him want more, but while the sun beat so fiercely upon his back he did not want to move any further than necessary.

He turned, and his boots scraped the tephra with a dry, dusty sound that made his throat close up in sympathy. Not a splash of shade anywhere. Jack felt too weary to pick himself up and look beyond the next ridge. He decided the best thing would be to rest, perhaps sleep for a while. Then, when the sun had passed its peak and was weakening, he would go back to the stone again.

Jack curled onto the sun-baked tuff and closed his eyes against the searing blue of the sky. As he drifted off to sleep, he thought, if he were lucky, he might even dream of the answer to the riddle.

* * *

A cry brought him to his senses. Harsh and chattering, it reminded him of his mother's rain-drenched garden in Oxford, where, as a child, he would stare up at the dome-built nest of a pair of magpies. Now he heard the garrulous clatter again and forced open his eyes to stare at the empty sky.

The sun's strength had lessened. It was no longer directly overhead, but Jack felt too addled to care where it now sat in the heavens. A light breeze drifted over him that at first he thought tasted of sea spray, until he realised he had salt on his lips. He moved his head and felt the world tilt on its axis. Suddenly nauseous, he pressed both hands to the tuff beneath him and tried to breathe calmly.

Panic came slowly, mired in a bone-deep weariness. Jack could not keep his eyes open, and so turned his face to the rock below and felt the grit scratch. His mouth felt full of dust and his head heavy with imploding sunbursts. From nearby he heard the magpie again and then came the feel of the heavy beat of its wings to rival the breeze. As it flew,

the bird cast a shadow over him. Jack wished it would linger, and then he murmured as something touched him.

At first, he thought that the magpie had decided he was dead, and was scavenging. Then he recognised it as a human touch, a cool hand against the back of his neck, so soothing he whimpered with relief and tried to turn.

“Careful.”

Jack did not recognise the voice, which sounded sharp with anxiety. He tried to answer, but could summon no words. Helpless and frustrated, he let his rescuer gather him up into a sitting position.

“Today has been unseasonably hot,” his rescuer said. “Not a good day to go walking alone and without supplies, especially so far from the villages.”

Jack managed to mumble a protest, but was ignored. His rescuer held out a flask and he found enough strength to grab at it. The water was cold and pure, the first draught past his lips the sweetest he’d ever tasted, but the second mouthful made him gag. Jack almost dropped the flask as he spat and choked out the water, and then he hunched over miserably, his stomach cramped and his throat sore.

His rescuer took the flask and moved behind him, kneeling down and drawing Jack back against his chest. Rigid with affront, Jack resisted until another coughing spasm made him too weak to object. He sat tense within the circle of his rescuer’s arms, and shook his head at the second offer of the water bottle.

“You must drink.”

His rescuer set the flask to Jack’s mouth, tilting it enough to moisten his lips. He tried to drink, but before he could choke himself in his greed, the flask was moved away.

“Don’t snatch at it. Just a little or you will vomit it all out, and then you will feel much sicker than you do now.”

Jack nodded and tried again, taking slower draughts of the water. He flinched when his rescuer stroked his throat before he remembered that men often made the gesture when encouraging distressed animals to

drink. He wasn't sure he liked the analogy and was relieved when the flask was removed again.

He yelped as the remainder of the water spilt over his head, dampening his hair and trickling down his scalp to runnel through the dust on his face and neck. It felt blissful, and Jack relaxed.

Behind him, his rescuer chuckled. "Stubborn, aren't you? I've known mules with more sense."

Jack made a sound of displeasure, still waiting for words to surface from the jumbled chaos of his mind. He pulled out of the embrace and turned around to look at the man who had rescued him.

He was slight, but with a wiry strength that put Jack in mind of the island goats, and dressed like a shepherd, in heavy trousers gathered into stout boots and a plain white shirt unadorned with buttons. The sleeves were rolled up over strong forearms, around which wrapped tattoos—blue and red spirals, dots and rays formed into encircling bands. Used to the designs on sailors' arms that featured women or beasts, Jack found the simplicity of the tattoos pleasing.

He let his gaze wander upwards and found it met by a patiently amused expression. His rescuer looked to be the same age as he, sharp-featured like a feral cat and with skin gilded only slightly by the sun. Through his left ear he wore an earring. He had a light moustache and imperial, and his hair was streaked through with copper and gold. The sunlight drew out the green in his eyes, which gleamed now at the curious but thorough examination.

Jack found words at last, although his voice sounded rusty. "Who are you?"

"My name is Kanenas."

It sounded familiar but Jack shook his head, unable to recall where he had heard it before. "I'm sorry."

Kanenas seemed surprised. "Why are you sorry?"

Jack gestured at the desolate scrap of land. His store of Greek vocabulary deserted him again, and he put his hands to his forehead in despair. Fragments of language came to him, tangled skeins of English

and French and Latin, but not the melodic pacing of Greek. Finally, in English, he said, "For my pride."

Kanenas gave no indication he understood. "You should be away from here before it gets much later. I will help you as far as the road."

He rose to his feet, brushing dust from his knees, and as Kanenas stood with his back to the weakening sun, Jack looked at the fire gleaming in his hair and wondered why he could feel the sunlight full on his face.

It was a fleeting thought, gone in a second. Kanenas smiled at Jack and held out his hand. "Five from me."

Jack stared at him and then reached out to clasp the proffered hand. "Five from me, five from you..." he muttered in Greek.

Kanenas pulled him up and they stood together, hands still entwined until Jack disengaged his and looked at it curiously, as if he had never seen the appendage before. "Five fingers," he said. "One hand. Of course."

"The words on the stone, yes?"

"Do you know what it means?"

Kanenas shrugged. "Who knows? Old things."

"Old things are important to me."

"More important than your own life?" Kanenas gave him a pointed look. "As somebody once said, 'Nothing to excess'. What was true in those halcyon days remains true today."

Jack smiled briefly. "You seem well-educated for a shepherd."

"I am not a shepherd."

Kanenas offered his arm for Jack to lean on and they began to pick a tortuous route across the tephra. Jack's head ached with the effort of walking and he found it better to think of nothing more than setting one foot in front of the other. They stopped often to rest, and at each stop, Jack would note the position of the sun and the fall of his shadow. It struck him as strange that Kanenas cast no shadow at all.

At length they reached the road, a dust-beaten track with its potholes filled with gravel. Inferior pieces of marble were placed at intervals along its length to demarcate the width, and a cicada whirred from the undergrowth that covered some of these stones. Jack realised he hadn't heard any of the insects since he'd left the dig site that morning.

Beside him, Kanenas said, "The village lies ahead. Somebody there will take you back to Fira."

"You are very certain of these things."

Kanenas sighed. "I know my own people. It is you I do not understand."

"If only I could be as certain about myself as you are about... no, that's not right..." Jack frowned and his head thumped with the effort of thought. He sagged against Kanenas. "I don't know what I mean."

"Sun-dizziness scatters a man's wits," Kanenas said.

Jack made a sound of agreement. As they reached the road, he half-turned to face the breeze. At last he could see Crete, sixty miles distant, where the clouds piled up over the land. Pleased that his sun-fogged vision seemed to be clearing at last, he brought his gaze back to Santorini and found he could look at the tuff without flinching. Below the road and close to the coast, he saw a deep excavation cut from the cliffs to reveal the scars of the Bronze Age eruption.

Something stirred in his mind. Jack shook off Kanenas's restraining hand to walk towards the cliffs. Bands of grey and white turned and folded in on themselves, and at the foot of the quarry, blocks of pumice stood ready to be loaded onto carts.

Kanenas followed him down to the edge of the cliff.

"What is this?" Jack asked hoarsely.

"A quarry," Kanenas said. "Pumice can be found elsewhere on the island, of course, but this is where the heaviest flow from the erupting volcano settled. The British and the French came here for the ash, to make cement for their Suez Canal."

Jack looked at Kanenas as hope flared. "'Five from me, five from you, dig for treasure'," he said softly. "How old is the quarry?"

Kanenas scuffed at the dusty grass at his feet. "Very old. The Romans used it, and the mainland Hellenes before them. You can make very fine cement from volcanic ash. Very smooth and good for frescoes."

"What's the name of this place?"

"It's named for the village nearby." Finally, Kanenas met Jack's gaze, and his look was guileless. "It is called Akrotiri."

* * *

In a daze engendered as much by hopefulness that he had undone the riddle as from sunstroke, Jack found himself in the village. A farmer making ready to drive to Fira with a cartload of melons had offered to call a doctor when he saw Jack's dishevelled state, and then said he'd drive him to the town.

"Did you get yourself lost?" the farmer asked as he helped Jack up onto the front of the cart. "The land to the west of the village is strange. Haunted, some say."

Jack braced himself as the cart began to jolt over the ill-made road. "Yes, I got lost," he said. He pointed to Kanenas standing on the side of the road. "But he helped me."

"I see nobody," the carter said, and then he looked askance as Jack started to laugh. Not the normal sounds of humour, but a laugh cracked and nervous, almost that of a madman.

"I see Nobody," Jack repeated as tears stung at his eyes and his stomach cramped with the effort not to weep. "*Vlepo Kanenas*. And yet Nobody helped me. Am I then Polyphemus, made blind by the sun rather than Odysseus' cunning?"

The carter, a kindly man, patted Jack's shoulder. "The sun has touched you. He can make you believe all manner of things. It is not wise to anger the sun."

"It was not the sun I angered," Jack whispered, and lapsed into silence.

He was as good as asleep by the time the cart neared Fira, but roused himself when he heard the exclamations of relief from Koubelos and several of the workers who ran towards them. The fug of exhaustion wrapped around him so totally, he had to be carried to Kera Maria's house. There his landlady praised God and several saints for his safe return, forced a warm posset down his throat, and led the way to his rooms.

Koubelos half-dragged Jack into the courtyard after her, and then, noticing the trough full of rainwater, he called out to Kera Maria. Receiving an affirmative, the foreman went towards the trough. Jack woke from his daze long enough to protest at the greenish scum on top of the standing water, and then Koubelos swung him round, seized him by the scruff of his neck, and ducked him under.

Jack did not have time to draw breath. The water was warm rather than cold, and though it brought brief respite, his disgust at sharing the same space as several hundred mosquito-larvae made him struggle to be free. Silvered bubbles trailed in his wake as he threw off Koubelos. Streamers of weed arced out of the trough, tangled in his fringe. Jack pushed his hair back from his forehead and glared furiously at Koubelos, who shrugged.

"Those who suffer from the sun should bathe in cold water."

"That was not cold. It was disgusting." Still unsteady on his feet, Jack stalked away from the trough and pushed past Kera Maria, who clucked her annoyance at the way he dripped water over the furniture.

"I will bring water for a proper bath," she told him, and then issued rapid instructions at Koubelos.

"I want to sleep."

"You will wash yourself first," Kera Maria said fiercely. "This is the second evening you come home stinking of things unholy."

Jack leaned against the doorjamb and flicked weed from his hair. "I stink of pondweed and stagnant water. And that is not my fault."

"Huh." Kera Maria folded her arms and stared him down. She only looked away when Koubelos came in, staggering under the weight of two

buckets from the well below the terrace. Then she left to direct the preparation of the bath, leaving Jack to contemplate his bed wistfully.

Ever the tyrant, Kera Maria insisted Koubelos help Jack to wash, a task that embarrassed both men, accomplished by Koubelos standing out in the corridor asking questions every few minutes to be sure that his employer was still awake and not drowned in the tub. Finally dressed in his Chinese robe, Jack emerged from the bathroom. Despite the cold bath and the way his teeth chattered, he still felt too hot, his skin dry and stretched.

Koubelos made him lie down and then fetched an extra pillow from the wardrobe. Too late, Jack realised that the foreman might find the small collection of displaced antiquities. He started up from the bed in horror, but when Koubelos opened the wardrobe door he saw nothing on the floor but the pillow and a heap of shirts fallen from their hangers.

Jack's breath of relief was audible. Koubelos handed him the pillow awkwardly, and then looked around the room. At length his gaze lit on the tea chest, and he went towards it curiously. The lid was ajar, and from where he lay Jack could see the smooth dome of the skull's cranium. He felt too tired to stop Koubelos from discovering where he'd hidden the skeleton, and so he hoped his foreman would not be too shocked.

"Why are you still here? Yianni needs his rest," Kera Maria said as she returned, carrying a selection of towels and cloths soaked in water. Koubelos came away from the tea chest meekly and slunk from the room, too embarrassed even to accept Jack's words of thanks.

"Koubelos is a good man, but he knows nothing," Kera Maria told him as she crossed to the window and pulled tight the shutters. "You need darkness, no light at all, and you need to sleep. Do you feel sick? Does your head hurt?"

Jack nodded carefully. "Mainly I feel too warm. As if I was still in the sun."

She came back to him and piled the cold towels on his chest, and then told him to close his eyes. "This will ease your head and help you

sleep,” she said, placing a cloth wrapped around a poultice across his eyes and forehead.

“What is it?” He could smell lemon balm, cucumber, and a trace of bergamot, and suspected she had used the last of his Earl Grey in the concoction.

“It’s a secret. There are plenty who would pay for the knowledge of this recipe. You will see, Yiannakki, you will feel better in the morning.”

Kera Maria placed a second cold towel over the top of the poultice, draping him in darkness. “Sleep now.”

Jack lay still and listened to her bustle away. Kera Maria shut the doors behind her and even locked the outer door. Only when he heard her footsteps fade from the courtyard did he properly relax. Gingerly, he reached up and prodded the cloth holding the poultice. It was cool and squashy, and when he touched it, it released another wave of fragrance he recognised as lavender.

“Yes, it should help you sleep,” said a voice close beside him.

Jack jumped, startled, and half-turned on the bed. The towels on his chest tumbled sideways and landed on the floor with a wet thump before he could catch them. Conscious that he should at least keep the poultice on his head, he sank back onto the mattress and waited for his visitor to speak again.

“You went wandering today.”

Now he was certain, and glad he could not see. “Belas?”

Out of the dark came a caress, cool and soothing. “Yes. It’s me. But Yianni, you should be careful. I expected you to take the road to Akrotiri, not for you to clamber like a wild goat over that rough terrain.”

“It seemed better,” Jack murmured.

“And now you suffer the sun-dizziness.”

Jack chuckled, but it sounded more like a croak. “How can you tell?”

“I can smell the sunlight from your skin. You blaze with it and it makes you feverish.” Belas nudged across the bed to lie beside him and dipped a hand inside the Chinese robe. His fingers traced abstract

patterns across Jack's chest, and then he bent his head to lick at the hollow of his throat.

"You even taste of the sun," Belas said. "Too hot, too ripe."

"No," Jack breathed, lifting his hands to trap Belas and hold him there.

"Don't touch me," Belas warned, and Jack, flustered, let his hands curl around the bars of the bedstead.

"I want—I mean, will you...?"

"Will I what?" Belas asked, amused.

Jack wriggled with shame, not wanting to put into words what he most needed to ask. He felt mortified he had so little modesty or self-control. The sun had made him hot but Belas's presence made him burn with longing. It confused and dazzled him at the same time, and made him wonder if this was normal.

"What you did to me yesterday," he said finally, the words rushing from him.

"I? I did nothing," Belas said, his voice dancing. "You did the hard work."

Again, Jack felt glad he could not see. The cold towel over the poultice was rapidly becoming warm. He shifted with embarrassment, and then stilled, eager, as Belas slid open the robe. He felt cool hands wander at leisure over his body, and lifted himself unconsciously for a rougher caress.

Belas moved aside. "No, I will not do as we did last night. You are tired, you need sleep."

"I don't."

The answer came out so fast that Belas laughed. "Yes, you are stubborn. But whatever you think, Yianni, you do need to rest. I will not risk taking anything from you tonight. Except, perhaps, just a little..."

Jack made a soft sound of pleasure when Belas licked his throat again. The sound spilled into gasps, and then into words as Belas pushed the robe aside with impatience and feasted on Jack's body. It

was a tongue-bath of the most exquisite kind, rousing desire only to deny it, and while Belas would not speak, Jack did talking enough for them both, almost afraid of the words that came to his lips.

And then Jack writhed, his shame reaching such a peak he could not tell whether his strongest emotion was bitter or sweet, nor could he tell what excited him and what made him despair. "Please," he cried, but Belas denied him.

"Tomorrow," he promised. "Tomorrow, as often as you wish."

With this Jack had to be content, although it was some time before he could quieten his wilful body. When Belas had finished his teasing, sinful licks and had retreated from the bed, Jack asked, "Was it you today on the rocks?"

Belas stayed silent and Jack thought he had his answer, but he wanted to hear it. "It was you, wasn't it? You are Kanenas."

At that, Belas laughed. "Should I be insulted that you call me a Nobody? I will forgive you and ascribe it to your sun-touched state."

Jack reached out and seized a handful of cloth, feeling beneath it the sudden stillness of Belas's body. "Tell me, please. I need to know if it was you who rescued me this afternoon, out there on the tephra."

"It is our agreement that you do not see me," Belas said, gently tapping Jack's fingers until he relinquished his hold. "And neither do you touch me."

"Why can't I see you?"

Belas hesitated. "Because it pleases me that it should be so. These are my rules, Yianni. All rules exist for a reason, as do all boundaries. Recognise them and respect them. You did neither today."

Jack turned away. "It was you. I know it. You have not denied it."

"And neither have I confirmed it, my foolish one."

Beneath the weight of the poultice and the cool towel across his eyes, Jack felt the warmth of frustrated tears stain his cheeks. "Nobody else knew I was there."

“I gave you a map, but how should I know precisely where you were?” Belas wondered, his tone reasonable. “You seek to give me powers I do not have.”

Jack shook his head. “I do not think so.”

Belas brushed the back of his hand against Jack’s cheek. “Perhaps you saw your guardian angel. It has been known before.”

“He did not have wings,” Jack said facetiously before he remembered the chattering magpie. “And he did not look like an angel, but like a—a cat.”

Belas sounded amused. “How very satanic.”

“Are you?” Jack demanded, suddenly aggressive. “Who are you, Belas?”

Another pause, longer and deeper than before, until Jack thought he had slipped away into the night. And then, from the silken darkness came his voice, rough with emotion, “I am someone who needs you. But you should not take comfort from that, for the knowledge can only hurt you.”

Chapter Seven

Jack slept long into the morning and awoke heavy-eyed and scented with lavender and lemon balm. When he looked into the bathroom mirror, he realised Kera Maria's poultice had banished his headache at the cost of leaving a tidemark of tannin banded across his forehead. He wet a finger and rubbed at it, certain now that his stock of tea had been depleted. The action made him feel tired and Jack contemplated returning to bed for the rest of the day. Instead he forced himself to dress, and then ventured out into the courtyard.

The stunted shadow of the water trough made him shrink back against the walls. Crossing the short distance to the house made him feel vulnerable, and Jack ducked his head to avoid the sun's glare. Inside, Kera Maria had left him a note informing him that she had gone to Oia, that he should rest and drink plenty of water. This last instruction was underlined several times.

Jack smiled and stuffed the note into his pocket. On the kitchen table she had left him a plate of honey-cakes and a tall jug of lemonade. He poured a glass of lemonade, and then leaned against the table to drink. The lemonade tasted almost as sweet as the honey-cakes, and after half a glass Jack guiltily tipped the rest down the sink and took plain water instead. He managed to eat one and a half of the cakes before he began to feel sick. He covered the plate and wandered around the kitchen in search of a water bottle, and found one hanging from a hook in the pantry. He filled it up and tightened the cap securely, and made sure that it went with him when he left the house.

It was just past eleven o'clock and the sun was at its fiercest. Jack moved from shadow to shadow or else hurried his pace when out in

direct sunlight. As he passed through Fira, one of the women broke away from her gossip and came towards him, offering out a faded blue cloth cap.

“It was my son’s,” she said as Jack looked at it with bemusement. “He would get the sun-sickness every summer because he would not wear a hat. Take it, sir. Take it and wear it, and may the Prophet Elijah look kindly upon you.”

Jack bowed to her solemnly and set the cap on his head. It did not sit well until he teased out the front of his fringe, which he was certain made him look foolish. Nevertheless, the woman nodded her approval and let him be on his way.

Habit took him to the dig rather than to Akrotiri. He thought of Belas’s map and decided he would enlist Koubelos and a few of the workers to accompany him to the quarry on Sunday. Today, though, he would see how they fared with the stratigraphy around the chasm.

He was met by a gruff comment from Koubelos that suggested he should have stayed indoors, but eventually his foreman relented, peered closely at Jack’s still-pale complexion, and then said, “Nice hat.”

One of the workmen behind them sniggered and Jack put a hand on his head to shove the cap down more firmly. A breeze gusted from the southwest, bringing cool, damp air from the Mediterranean. It felt pleasant and so he took off the cap before he was halfway to the gash in the tuff.

“What have you found?”

Koubelos spread his hands wide. “Nothing at all, Mr. Jack. The rock is hard on the surface and takes a long time for the men to break through.”

Jack jumped up onto the roll of tephra and stamped down with his right foot. The tuff felt solid and gave back a dull sound. While Koubelos watched, Jack repeated the exercise over different areas of the tuff, gradually working closer to the split that had tumbled him to the bedrock. Finally, Jack whooped in triumph.

“Here. Listen.” He stamped his foot again. The sound seemed lighter, more resonant, as if what lay beneath was not a solid layer of tephra, but an empty chamber.

Jack dropped to his knees and scratched at the surface. He looked up and said, “Bring some of the men. Close down trench four and tell Andreas not to bother cutting back the tephra where they were working yesterday. I want all of this lifted off right down to the bedrock.”

Koubelos chewed his moustache. “We will surely need dynamite to move that amount of stone.”

“No.” Jack got to his feet. “The tephra goes down only a short distance. Underneath there’s pumice, and that will come out easily.”

He crossed over to peer into the chasm, and then turned back. “Bring me a pickaxe, too, would you? I want to get started as soon as possible.”

By the time Koubelos came back, a half-dozen men in his wake, Jack had clambered down into the chasm. He heard his foreman complain loudly about his foolishness, but Jack disregarded his remarks. His attention focused solely on the structure buried beneath the ash deposits.

He stepped onto the ancient pavement and felt his way along the mortared walls to the point where they disappeared under the tephra, and then he pushed against the rock. Just as he had done on the surface, he sounded the tuff, bit by bit, this time using the flat of his hand.

He worked, oblivious to the fresh scrapes he battered into his palms. Even when Koubelos clambered down the rope and offered him a stone to sound with, Jack shook his head.

“Can you hear it? It’s pumice. I can clear it away. Give me the pickaxe.”

Koubelos handed it to him. “Should we not wait for the men above to cut back the layers? It would be dangerous to dig from both top and bottom. The rock might collapse.”

Jack glanced at him. “It might. But I will risk it. Look here,” and he pointed at the bulge of pumice that blocked the doorway of the building, “I think this isn’t solid—it’s a plug. I just need to break through.”

Koubelos retreated to a safe distance as Jack took up the pickaxe. There was barely enough space for a man to walk, but Jack’s stubbornness gave him strength. Within a few minutes, through a haze of dust, part of the rock-face gave way.

Jack felt the tip of the pickaxe break through. It startled him so much that he unbalanced and fell forward to embrace the rock. The pick dangled by its head from the hole he’d smashed open, and as he moved, he could feel a faint draught stirring.

“What is it?” Koubelos asked.

Jack tilted his head and peered through the hole. Pitch-black and cold, it gave off a strange smell that put him in mind of old tombs. “I can’t see, it’s too dark,” he said. “Could you fetch a light? We’ll need it when we get inside.”

As Koubelos shouted up to the workers to fetch a lamp and tinder, Jack reclaimed the pickaxe. He eyed the hole in the rock, judging where his next strike should fall, and then he swung the pick again. It took another five attempts before the pumice began to crumble into large boulders that were easy to remove. Jack worked in a feverish daze of anticipation as he cleared the debris from the doorway.

“Mr. Jack, the light,” Koubelos said, holding out a small brass oil lamp that had clearly been borrowed from the church.

“What will Father Gregory say?” Jack asked, and was rewarded with a grin.

“He will not know. The next service is tomorrow morning and it will be back in its place by then.”

Jack wiped his hands down his shirtfront and took the lamp, automatically cupping one hand around the flame to protect it as he ducked inside the building beneath the rock. Koubelos followed, crowding the doorway for a moment until he stood beside him. They were silent, listening to the sounds about them—their breathing, the noise of

the workers far above, and then Koubelos asked, “What manner of building was this?”

Jack lifted the lamp towards the nearest wall as if it held the answer. Beneath a fine layer of ash, he saw a surface stuccoed and painted in plain colours—cream and yellow ochre, with a dark band of red separating the two.

“It could be a house,” Jack said, his voice hushed both from the weight of rock above him and from the sense that here was something of great import. “A Minoan house. Perhaps we will find frescoes, such as those at Knossos.”

Koubelos squinted at the wall. “Not in this room, though. The wall is bare.”

“Wait.” Jack trailed the lamp across the breadth of the wall, stepping over fallen lumps of pumice and stirring the ashy dust as he moved. His fingers explored blindly, scant seconds ahead of the glow of the lamp, and so he felt the niche before he saw it.

“Here,” he said, and Koubelos came to him. Heads together, they stared in awe at the painted image before them, at a half-dozen dolphins leaping from the waves, their bodies bent in a graceful arc, the light streaming through the water to colour them green and blue and grey.

“Beautiful,” Jack whispered.

“Yes. Very fine,” Koubelos said gruffly.

Jack smiled, lowering the lamp to see the rest of the painting. Below the leaping dolphins were all manner of sea-creatures—tunny, crabs, octopus, jellyfish—and below, another band of red paint as demarcation. Just as Jack crouched to examine the detail of the painting, Koubelos moved aside and tripped over something.

Jack turned, holding out the lamp so the light flickered wildly around the room. Koubelos cursed and sat down on the floor with a thump, holding his left shin and grimacing with pain.

“It is a bath, Mr. Jack—a trough. Why does it sit in the middle of the room?”

Jack crawled over, not to sympathise with Koubelos's injury, but to stare at the tub he had fallen over. About two feet high and five feet wide, it was made of carved stone with moulded terracotta around the rim. When he put his hand inside and felt around, Jack was unsurprised to find a small plug set into the base.

"It's not a bathtub," he said. "Not as we think of one, anyway. It's a lustral basin. Priests and worshippers would wash in it before a ritual as part of purification." Jack gestured back at the niche so that the sudden flare of light made the dolphins leap from the darkness. "That's why they painted the seascape on the wall. What could be purer than the ocean?"

Koubelos seemed to think about this, and then shrugged.

"It was a rhetorical question," Jack reassured him. "Come on. If there's a lustral basin here, it suggests there's a shrine elsewhere."

They stood up cautiously and Koubelos limped forward a few paces. Jack tutted and ventured into the darkness alone. He called out when he found a doorway, and then stood silent.

"Mr. Jack," Koubelos asked, moving towards the doorway, "did you find something?"

Jack reappeared, the lamp held tight against his body. When he spoke, his voice sounded high and fluttery with anxiety.

"Koubelos, do not... You must do something for me. It's important," Jack said, becoming more decisive as he stepped closer. "Go to the Europa Hotel and fetch Dr. McKeown. Bring him here as fast as you can."

Koubelos frowned. "The old Irishman?"

"Yes. And hurry. Tell nobody about this except Dr. McKeown."

"It might take some time for me to find him," Koubelos said as he edged towards the door.

"Just do it. Please." Jack felt his smile grow taut under the lamplight. "Quickly."

Koubelos gave him one final glance, and then turned to go.

When he left, Jack sighed with relief, only to catch his breath at the realisation that he was alone in the darkness. Alone with what he had found in the inner sanctum, for this was indeed a shrine, as he had told Koubelos. The first glance as the lamp had swept the room had told him all he needed to know, that his foreman should not come in and see what he saw now. Not yet, not without proper warning. The sight had unnerved Jack. He did not want to think about what it would do to the superstitious workers. And as for Father Gregory...

Jack turned back into the tiny room and let the unguarded flame shed its light around him so he could glimpse its hidden horrors once more. In the cold, the lamp burned clear and bright. The first few feet of floor-space were empty even of dust, as if somebody had entered the room after the eruption that had entombed it and swept it clean. Its order was in stark contrast to what lay beyond—an altar made from a solid block of whitest marble with a hollow in the centre and two channels leading from it. The stone was splashed and stained dark. Upon it and around it lay strewn dozens of bones of all shapes and sizes.

They were not animal bones. Jack recognised that immediately. Neither were the bones dislocated from one skeleton. He'd counted at least six sets of ribs. This was no charnel house or burial as he'd first hoped. The bones were scattered and smashed, broken into two and flung upon the floor with complete disregard for the preservation of the corpse.

Worse still were the long bones and the hips, all of which displayed the same cut-marks he'd identified on the skeleton residing in his tea chest. Jack picked up each bone, praying he was wrong and that what he saw could not possibly be true, but the evidence continued to mount against him.

But worst of all was what lay on top of the altar. Barely recognisable, in places pulverised into dust, lay the fragments of a human skull.

Jack had seen the burials of executed criminals. He had dug up the pathetic, tiny corpses of infants. He had unwrapped a mouldering Egyptian mummy. But nothing shocked him as much as this wilful desecration of human bones. And it had been done with such rage.

It was no mere sacrifice that slit the victim's throat and let the blood drain away, but piled fury and desperation, something that had fed upon agony and death-throes.

The enormity of what he'd found almost crushed him. Jack set the lamp on the altar and brushed together the pieces of the skull. He hoped that enough remained intact for McKeown to distinguish the victim's gender. Bone dust clung to his fingers, softer than the ash.

Jack shivered, suddenly cold. His shadow trickled across the wall behind the altar, and finally he made sense of the image looming there. Detail started to emerge from beneath the gouts of blood that had sprayed up from the altar, and he found himself looking back in time, into the Late Bronze Age.

In the painting, a city spread out before him, prosperous and content, its citizens lacking for nothing. Its harbour bustled with activity. Animals grazed in the fields. Vines and crops grew beneath blue skies. But above it all rose a mountain, black and terrible, its summit lost in tongues of fire and streaks of thick, grey smoke. It dominated the landscape below, its growling authority unmistakable.

Jack knew with absolute certainty he was looking at a picture of Santorini before the eruption that would devastate the island and its neighbours. This shrine had not been built to sway some benevolent deity, but to placate the wrath of the volcano. For the first time in his life, Jack felt a genuine wash of terror crawl over him as he suddenly understood the nature of the sacrifices around him.

And then the lamp went out.

* * *

Later, he would not be able to remember his headlong flight out of the black shrine. He would not recall climbing from the chasm so hurriedly that for the next few days his hands bore the twisted imprint of rope-burn. Only when he stood on the tuff and stared at the sea did Jack

fully realise he was away from it, away from the horror that had suddenly put to flight his professionalism and excitement.

Andreas came to him, expressing concern. The other workers clustered behind, waiting for the chance at gossip. Jack walked as far as the bothros and then sat down, feeling desolate and ridiculous both at once.

“You look pale,” Andreas said. “You do not balance your humours well. As you spent all day in the sun yesterday, you should spend all of today indoors, so the sun cannot touch you.”

Jack shuddered. “There is a shadow at the bottom of the trench.”

“But not a healthy shadow,” Andreas said, misunderstanding him. “It is in the bowels of the earth, like a cave. This is not good.” He dropped his shovel and put a hand to Jack’s forehead, and then clucked. “You are warm, yet you shake with cold.”

“I am perfectly well, thank you.” Jack slapped away the hand. “I do not need you to physic me with mangled extracts from Hippocrates!”

Andreas leaned on his shovel and grinned. “It was Kera Maria who told us to watch that you balanced your humours. She is more man than I. I will not cross her. And if you value a quiet life, sir, you will take my advice and rest a while.”

Jack grumbled.

“Just for a while, until Koubelos returns,” Andreas said. “You can sit in the church. The doors are always open, and Father Gregory is visiting the sick. He will not be back for some time.”

Jack looked towards the little white church with its domed roof and green-tinted bell. He imagined it would be cool and silent within, restful, unlike the shrine beneath his feet. He weakened. He should go back into the chasm and begin to record what he had found, but he told himself it could wait until McKeown arrived.

“Tell me as soon as Koubelos returns,” he said, getting to his feet, his gaze still on the shape of the church.

“Yes, sir.”

“And I want that tuff cleared to at least a depth of six feet,” Jack added, turning back to frown at the sudden note of cheeriness in Andreas’ voice.

“Of course, sir, it shall be done with all speed,” Andreas said, his smile easy and not in the least way reassuring.

Jack wagged a finger in warning at the workmen, and then walked across the site to the whitewashed boundary walls that enclosed the church of Agios Eleutherios.

The church door opened smoothly and without sound. Jack shut it behind him and stood for a moment in the light, open space. He took deep breaths, drinking in the solitude.

Agios Eleutherios’ was built too late to be truly Byzantine, but it aspired in that direction. Of a simple apsidal construction, it hid its vaulted brickwork beneath centuries of crusted whitewash. A painting of Christ hung on one wall. On a nearby shelf stood a red candle with a dead wick and a scatter of dried flower heads at the feet of an icon. The floor was of poor quality marble, the grain raised and rough enough on some slabs to catch at his soles when he walked.

At the back of the church stood a few wooden chairs Jack guessed must belong to the older members of the community. Whenever he had attended an Orthodox service, he had found the congregation to stand or sit upon the floor as the rites decreed. To someone raised to view the busy pews of Anglicanism as the norm, it still disconcerted Jack to see so much empty space in a church.

He moved towards the altar, which was draped with purple cloth for Lent. A wooden crucifix stood upon it, flanked by two creamy beeswax candles. Jack closed his eyes and inhaled, hoping for the scent of the candles, but all he could smell was a fusty trace of incense. Still, it calmed him. He opened his eyes again and looked up at the sunlight filtering through the tiny, thick glass windows to strike the crucifix.

Jack was half-admiring the simple play of light and shadow when Belas spoke behind him.

“Sacrifice,” he said. “I have yet to learn of a religion that does not demand it.”

Jack did not dare to turn around. “You’re in a church.”

“As you say. Why, Yianni, are you of the opinion that I should not be here?”

“If you were what you claim to be, then theologically speaking you should be unable to walk on consecrated ground,” Jack said. “But I admit I am more than a little confused as to what you really are.”

Belas’s laughter rounded up into the dome. “I have claimed nothing for myself. You alone have decided that I am—what, precisely? A demon? Satan’s imp?”

Jack felt foolish. “You want blood. To me that suggests vampirism.”

“Certainly I am a predator,” Belas purred, his breath hot and sudden against the back of Jack’s neck. “And what predator does not relish the taste of blood?”

Jack turned his head, enough to glimpse a flash of copper-streaked hair, enough to feel the press of Belas’s cheek against his neck. “I fear you find me poor game, if you see yourself as a hunter.”

“Not at all,” Belas replied, cheerful. “You constantly surprise me. I can think of no other creature I’ve encountered that came so willingly, and then behaved with such contradiction. How many times have I told you not to look at me? And yet you keep trying.”

Jack jerked his head to stare fixedly at the altar in front of him. As an admission of guilt it was unmistakable and Belas laughed again.

“Oh, it’s not just that. Did I not direct you to Akrotiri, where great treasures lie beneath the ash? And yet you insist on grubbing around in that horrid little shrine.”

The mention of the shrine made Jack want to turn. “What do you know of that?”

“Enough.” Belas’s voice slid against him. “But I did not come here to discuss it.”

“No?”

“Your innocence will be my downfall,” Belas said. His hand rubbed through Jack’s hair, starting at the nape of his neck and ruffling upwards. It was too strong a touch to tickle, and yet Jack shivered in involuntary response.

“I have things to ask you,” he said. “About Akrotiri. And about the shrine.”

Belas made an impatient sound. “Later. Now is the time for more pleasurable pursuits. On your knees, Yianni, and let us pray together.”

“Pray?” Jack repeated even as he sank down before the altar.

Belas’s laugh wrapped around him. “Yes. We will pray. An activity that requires thought and words, contemplation and repose. So close your eyes, and we will begin.”

Jack obeyed, even clasping his hands together before him. He tried to summon the opening words to the Lord’s Prayer, but found himself too aware of the presence behind him.

Belas’s hair tickled his face and neck. Belas’s scent was heat and dust and darkness. Jack liked the way that Belas knelt behind him. It felt both protective and possessive. And he liked most of all the slow, nuzzled licks Belas gave him along the side of his neck and into the vulnerable hollow of his jaw.

“Pray for pleasure,” Belas said against his skin, “and I promise I will give it.”

Jack tilted his head, his breath sharpening. “We shouldn’t do this. Not here. It’s a church.”

Belas chuckled. “Where else would you go to worship? I will treat you with all due reverence, Yianni.”

Jack wriggled uncomfortably on the cold marble. “It’s not how you treat me, it’s the location.”

“Oh, Yiannakki! Suddenly you have become an idealist.” Belas’s hands slid around Jack’s arms and swept down his chest and into his lap, where his fingers made swift work of the buttons on his trousers.

“I will have to persuade you back to empiricism,” Belas continued, and Jack could hear his smile of satisfaction as he explored. “If you can touch it, then it must be real, yes?”

“But I can’t touch you,” Jack replied.

“No. But I can touch you.”

For a brief moment, Belas moved away. Jack lifted his head in the direction he’d gone, unerring in his aim. He listened nervously to the faint sounds Belas made, and when Belas came back to him, Jack felt relief even as his anxiety tightened and made him ask, “What were you doing?”

“I went to fetch this.”

Jack felt Belas lean against his back. His breath tickled past his ear. And then Belas pressed something into his hands. Jack kept his eyes closed as he explored the object with his fingers. Small and cold, it was a fragile thing made of glass, rounded at the base and with a narrow, elongated neck that ended with a cork stopper. When he tilted it, he felt a slow, subtle shift of its contents.

“What’s inside it?”

“Chrism,” Belas said. He seemed to ignore Jack’s gasp of shock as he removed the stopper with a faint sound. “Why so aghast, Yianni?”

“It’s for anointing the dead,” Jack whispered. “And I—I...”

“You are not dead?” Belas supplied archly. “It is not just to anoint the deceased. It is to ensure resurrection. That which is dead can live again, if God wills it so. For myself, I am beyond the reach of the Christian God...”

“Am I, too?” Jack asked. “Because of this—because of what we do together?”

“Are you seeking penance or blessing? I will provide neither. I am a man, not a god, but still, your deliverance is in my hands.”

Jack laughed, but it sounded weak to his ears. The scent of the oil filled his head, and he breathed it in, gulped it down as if to do so would steady him. It made no difference. He could hear Belas’s hands as they

moved, heard the wet, viscid sounds of the oil worked into Belas's flesh, making his palms slippery.

He heard another noise as the glass bottle was moved away, and then he felt Belas rest his chin on his shoulder.

"Say 'please'," Belas whispered.

Jack had barely parted his lips when Belas touched him. The word emerged sibilant and breathy, and then was suddenly cut off.

Belas laughed and tightened his grip.

"Oh God," Jack said, in surrender rather than petition. For such a wicked deed, it felt altogether too good, and soon enough he forgot he was in a church, and knew instead only Belas's touch. It did not matter that his back ached when he arched his spine. It meant even less that the muscles in his thighs burned in protest at his penitent position on the floor. The only importance was the feel of Belas's tongue against his throat, the sinuous way Belas curled around him and the constant, desperate pleasure of being led towards orgasm.

Jack was accustomed to the way Belas licked him, was so used to it, so eager for it, that he noticed the moment Belas did something different. He had felt the edge of Belas's teeth against his neck before, but this time he felt Belas's lips press against his skin.

A kiss.

Jack opened his eyes and stared at the altar, suddenly dragged out of his dream and thrown back to reality. His breath came short, the sound loud in the disapproving quiet of the church, and he tried to worm free of Belas's grasp.

"Close your eyes! Do not look at me!" Belas snarled.

"I'm not—" Jack began, and then he cried out in shock as Belas forced all his weight against his back and made him double over on his knees until his forehead touched the cold stone. Eyes wide, he saw only white marble beneath him. Belas was all darkness above him, and the heat he felt came not from innocent pleasure but from shame. Denial came too late. He could no more stop Belas's hands on him than he could stop the earth from spinning.

Belas was rough, dragging him onwards rather than caressing. To his humiliation, Jack realised he was enjoying it. A sliver of awareness suddenly opened up a whole new realm of possibilities before his mind clamped down on it and rejected it. Too late, too late. He exploded between Belas's fingers and felt his breath mist the marble beneath him as he sobbed out the remains of his lust.

The pressure on his back lifted, but Jack remained bowed before the altar.

"Why are you so determined, so stubborn?" Belas demanded. "How many times have I told you that you must not look at me? What have I done to disappoint you, Yianni, to make you such a wilful fool?"

Jack lifted his head. "All I wanted—all I wanted was..."

"What?"

Belas's voice sounded so cold that Jack shuddered and declined to reply. Instead he uncurled himself from the floor, blanching at the splashed pool of musk. He buttoned his trousers and then hesitated, looking down with mixed fascination and revulsion at his spilled semen. He had the vague thought that he should clean it up, and so got to his feet saying, "I—I must..."

Belas's voice was suddenly harsh and urgent. "You must do nothing! That is mine. My prize, my reward."

Jack hesitated as if he would protest, and then nodded dumbly.

"Now go," Belas continued. "And a word of warning—do not look back, my Orpheus. Do not look back."

Jack walked stiffly towards the door, his heart thumping. His back itched crazily, as if he expected a bullet to be shot into his spine. The urge to turn around was unbearable. Only with a great effort of will could he continue to move forward. Never had such a short distance seemed so far.

Jack found he was aware of the tiniest detail of his surroundings—the line of dust not quite level with the far wall, the dangled clutch of an old cobweb from the brass lamp that matched the one he'd abandoned in the trench. His footsteps echoed across the marble floor, and he could

hear the wheeze of air puffed out from between the loose slabs over the crypt. When he had first entered the church, it smelled of damp incense. Now he knew it smelled of sex, or at least of his own release.

As he put his hand on the door, Jack stopped. He couldn't do it. He couldn't leave the church in the knowledge that he had desecrated the sanctuary. Although he could not undo what had already been done, at least he could clean away the evidence of sin.

Jack turned around.

Crouched on the floor and lapping hungrily at the pool of semen was Skitos. At Jack's startled gasp, the cat lifted its head and stared directly at him. Skitos' pink tongue darted out to lick around his whiskers, and then his green eyes hardened, his fur fluffed out. He hissed, long and loud in the confines of the church.

For the second time that day, Jack fled from a sanctuary.

Chapter Eight

Jack blundered out of the church and leaned against the boundary wall where he stood, shaking uncontrollably. His first instinct was to vomit. His second was to run to Father Gregory and beg for an exorcism. If there was a sensible explanation for what he had just experienced, he wanted to hear it.

“Steady on, lad. You look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

Jack looked up to see Anthony McKeown leaning against the church gate and fanning himself with his straw boater. Relieved, Jack went to him, gripped his hand, and held on for dear life. “I think I have.”

“Huh. Me too. A whole bloody heap of them.” McKeown disentangled his fingers. “That’s some bloody massacre you found in that shrine.”

“You’ve been there already? I told Andreas to find me as soon as you and Koubelos arrived.” Jack frowned at the flouting of his request. “I’m sorry. It must have seemed awfully rude when I wasn’t there.”

McKeown waved away the apology with his hat. “Don’t be daft. You don’t need to stand on ceremony with me. And anyway, Koubelos stayed in Fira. His youngest daughter has been taken ill and he clucks like a hen after a chick with that one. Nice to see some of these chaps concerned about a girl-child. Makes a change.”

Jack’s frown deepened. “Little Despoina? But she was bright and well yesterday. She opened the door to me when I called on Koubelos.”

“She’s taken poorly now. According to her siblings, she was playing with her rag doll one moment, and then laying as if dead the next. Her mother was all for calling the priest, but Koubelos asked me to look at her first. Poor wee mite!”

“And what is it?” Jack asked. “If she needs medicine, I will send for it from the mainland. Koubelos need not worry on that score.”

“A strange thing, this,” McKeown said as he put his hat back on his head. “I have no idea what’s causing the child’s sickness. At first I thought it was a fainting fit, maybe even epilepsy... but she lies on her bed, her eyes wide open, and makes not a sound, nothing to even suggest that she knows anybody’s near her. It’s as if she’s in a trance.”

Jack perched on the boundary wall and looked at McKeown. “And you’ve never seen such symptoms before?”

The doctor gave a humourless grin. “Oh, yes. I’ve seen them. Amongst my soldiers in the bloody Sudan when they’d had a leg blown off or seen one of their pals dismembered by the Mahdi. Neurasthenia, we call it. But why it would affect a young lass is beyond me.”

“How dreadful,” Jack said, not knowing what else to say.

“Aye, it is,” McKeown agreed. “They’ll try one of the island remedies, I suppose. I wouldn’t go offering to help if I were you, though. The mother blames you for the child’s illness.”

“Me?” Jack felt betrayed.

“Koubelos says you’re innocent of any mischief,” McKeown said hastily, “but his wife hasn’t been happy since you opened that grave a few days ago. Rumour has it you’ve not been too well yourself, and that you’ve suffered a few reverses.”

Jack crossed his arms but lifted his chin. “You shouldn’t listen to gossip.”

McKeown gave a crack of laughter. “Why the hell not? It’s often a good source of information. Damn it, man, practically the whole island knows you came back from Akrotiri last night drunk on the sun and burbling about lost cities and buried treasure.”

Jack felt his back stiffen. “I did not burble!”

McKeown grinned. “I heard you even mentioned Atlantis.”

“Oh, God.” Jack put his head in his hands.

“Don’t despair, lad,” McKeown said, clapping him on the back. “Not only are you an *exotiko*, you’re also a lunatic. That’s no mean achievement.”

“A lunatic *exotiko* who brings harm to children,” Jack responded, running his hands slowly through his hair until his fingers touched at the nape of his neck. He remembered Belas stroking him the same way and thrust aside the memory. He stood up and gestured across the site towards the chasm. “Tell me instead what you found down there.”

McKeown fell into step beside him as they began to walk away from the church. “I found most of your site deserted, for starters,” he said.

Jack stared at him, and then he looked again at the dig. Andreas and the rest of the workers were nowhere to be seen. “They never did this before,” he protested. “Yes, they could be lazy, but out-and-out desertion...”

“It’ll blow over,” McKeown said. “These things always do. If they think you’re cursed, no amount of money will induce them back. You just have to be patient. A witchdoctor put a curse on me once and I’m still here today. Spooked the men a bit, but they soon came round.”

“I don’t have time to waste,” Jack said bitterly. “There’s a Minoan shrine down there and I need it cleared so I can record it properly. I can’t wait for a couple of months for the locals to decide I’m not cursed anymore. They still think I’m a damned *exotiko*.”

“If you’re an *exotiko*, you’re already damned,” McKeown pointed out.

“Don’t play the pedant with me!” Jack snapped, and then he saw the doctor’s expression and he laughed. It was a relief to laugh again.

McKeown watched him with an assessing look in his eyes.

“What?”

“I’m just wondering if you should be out and about if you caught the sun as badly as they all say you did,” McKeown said. “If you were asleep in the sun, you should be as pink as boiled lobster. I think you’re whiter now than when you first arrived on the island a few months ago.”

Jack shrugged. “I feel perfectly well.”

“No headache? No dizziness?”

He paused, thinking of the moment before he went inside the church, and then said firmly, “No. I am well, thank you.”

McKeown nodded. “At any rate, you’re in better health than the individuals you discovered earlier.”

“Yes.” Jack paused and patted down his pockets for his cap. It was getting hotter and he was more self-conscious after McKeown’s comments. At least if he put on the hat, he would be saved from further jibes. “Did you see the cut-marks?”

“I did.” McKeown waited for Jack to stop his search before he continued. “And I brought some of the bones out into the light so I could see better. Remember the lesions on the bones of your skeleton? Well, now, there are the same lesions on the majority of the bones down there.”

“Then it must be malaria,” Jack said, giving up on finding his cap, “if all of the bones are riddled with it.”

McKeown held up a hand. “Not all, lad. There’re the bones of an adult female, and they hold not a trace of the lesions. If malaria were endemic, she would carry the marks, too.”

Jack looked at him. “So?”

“So, I think you’re right. It’s something like anaemia,” McKeown said. “Something genetic. The woman doesn’t have it, but the children do.”

“Children? Those bones belonged to children?” Jack felt his head begin to spin. “What are you suggesting?”

McKeown shrugged. “It’s mere speculation. I’d need to get a better look at the remains—and the skeleton you spirited away—but it is possible your man and the kiddies in that building were related.”

“Oh no,” Jack said, the horror of the dark shrine coming to surface, and then he stumbled away and was sick behind a rock.

McKeown watched him in silence. He waited until Jack had stopped retching before he asked, “When was the last time you ate?”

“What? I don’t know,” Jack said, wiping his hand across his mouth and grimacing in disgust. “Breakfast, I think. Honey-cakes.”

“And before that?”

“I don’t know! Breakfast yesterday.”

McKeown came close to him and, before Jack could react, he felt his forehead and then set his hand at his neck to feel his pulse. He kept time with his pocket watch, and as he removed his hand and snapped shut the watch, McKeown asked, “Are you sick very often?”

Jack turned away in irritation. “Of course not. It’s just the sun.”

“And how much water have you drunk today?” McKeown was merciless.

“Are you my nursemaid? I don’t remember. It doesn’t matter.”

“It does matter! If you will not take the advice of a colleague, then by God you will bloody well take an order from a doctor,” McKeown said. “You will rest, you will eat proper food, and you will take some medicine even if I have to force it down your throat myself.”

Jack shuddered and protested, “I am well enough, thank you.”

“Well!” McKeown roared so suddenly that Jack swayed backwards. “You are not well. You have sunstroke—”

“I do not!”

“You listen to me, lad,” McKeown said, “you listen to me, because I have seen too many men die to want to see it happen again with you, even if you are a goddamned Englishman! Stop being so bloody proud and wilful and accept an ounce of help for once. That’s a goddamned order!”

Jack stared at the doctor in astonishment. He didn’t think he’d ever been spoken to in such a way. He nodded meekly. “What shall I do, then?”

“You need to see Arthur Evans,” McKeown said, suddenly brisk in the face of a capitulation. “I told you he found the slaughtered child in Knossos. Go see him about it. He has a specialist with him, not a sawbones like me. Evans is a decent fellow. He’ll help you.”

Jack smiled. “I didn’t mean about the shrine, although thank you for the advice. I meant, what should I do about myself?”

“Oh! That.” McKeown sounded embarrassed, looking away. “I think you need a second opinion there, too. Evans’s specialist can probably help you. He’s a Cretan, but a good chap all the same. Delendas is his name.”

“Second opinion?” Jack echoed. He had the distinct impression that McKeown had already come to some unpalatable conclusion. “It’s more than sunstroke?”

McKeown’s smile was anything but reassuring. “I can’t say for certain.”

Jack’s disquiet intensified. “But if it’s not sunstroke, what is it?” he asked, although his mind whispered that it was Belas, greedy Belas, who took his blood and sweat and semen, and with it took away his life force.

But that was a ridiculous thought, and as McKeown had failed to answer, Jack kicked a pebble and said angrily, “It doesn’t matter, anyway.”

McKeown grabbed Jack’s arm. “It matters, lad. It matters very much when you’re puking blood.”

“But I...”

McKeown let go and Jack took a cautious peek over the rock to see blood curdled amongst the remains of his breakfast. Horrified, he turned back to the doctor and whispered, “I didn’t know—I... That doesn’t happen with sunstroke, does it?”

“Not unless you’ve spent the whole night vomiting,” McKeown said bluntly. “God save you, lad. You’re dizzy, you’re faint, you’re far too pale, and now you puke blood. If I were a betting man, I’d be testing you for pulmonary tuberculosis by now.”

* * *

McKeown regretted his impulsive diagnosis within moments when Jack turned so white and still that it looked as if the life had already fled

from his body. Concerned, he managed to coax Jack to stumble along the road to Emporio. He noticed that Jack kept looking back, and once, when he turned to see what was so compelling, McKeown saw a skinny black cat padding in their wake.

By the time they reached the village, he was heartily sick of the creature. Like most medical men, he had a healthy disregard for superstition, but a black cat clinging so keenly to their heels was too suggestive of bad luck even for McKeown.

Besides, it seemed to upset Jack. McKeown already felt guilty at offering an entirely unprofessional opinion where it had not been required, and so he decided to get rid of the other source of Jack's agitation. Just before they reached the village boundary, McKeown bent down to pick up a stone, and then he turned and flung it at the cat.

Jack turned with him, torn from his inertia. "No!"

The stone flew true to its target and struck the cat on its flank. "Mangy creature," McKeown said roughly.

"It's Kera Maria's cat," Jack said, looking shaken. He went a few paces back along the road to where the animal lay and dropped to a crouch beside it. "Oh, I hope you haven't killed him!"

McKeown felt embarrassed by his error. "A glancing blow. The damn thing's shamming. Look." He put out his hand to shove the cat onto its feet. Suddenly the cat snatched out with its forepaws, gouging a deep scratch into McKeown's hand. He swore and jerked backwards, but the cat hung on grimly, hissing and spitting.

"No, please don't," said Jack to the cat, his tone one of abject apology. To McKeown's astonishment, the beast retracted its claws and twisted its head to meow up at him. Jack extended his fingers towards the cat's face and after a moment the animal licked him.

McKeown spat on the wound and wiped away the blood against the corner of his jacket. He eyed the cat warily, not quite trusting its sudden docile appearance. To his disgust, it licked at Jack's fingers with almost indecent eagerness. "Careful, lad, it'll wear you away."

Jack shuddered, seemingly coming to his senses with a gasp, and he tried to move back. The cat hissed again and bit him, catching his forefinger and drawing a bead of blood.

“For God’s sake!” McKeown exclaimed as the cat craned its head to lick at the injury. He jumped up and planted a solid kick at the cat’s hindquarters, heaving it away from Jack. “Bloody thing might have rabies.”

The cat scampered out of the way and then turned back to spit its hatred, its tail lashing. McKeown collected another stone and weighed it in his hand, but did not throw it when the cat fled.

“Bloody thing,” he said again, walking over to where Jack crouched in the dust, staring after the cat. “Sorry about that,” he continued, holding out his hand to help Jack to his feet. McKeown stood for a moment, waiting, and then he grabbed Jack’s arm and dragged him up.

“You, my lad, are not going anywhere further than Emporio today.”

“Kera Maria will worry,” Jack said faintly.

“She’s not the only one.”

McKeown steered him into the village, shouting greetings to several people who had come out of their houses to stare at the two archaeologists. His Greek was largely imperfect, his grammar nonsensical, but the villagers seemed to understand. When they reached the largest house in Emporio, a small crowd had gathered behind them, including several of Jack’s workers, who had the grace to look embarrassed at being caught out.

“Here we are,” McKeown said in an undertone, his arm flung around Jack’s shoulders as if to keep him upright. “The demarch’s house. I’m going to leave you here for the night.”

Jack protested. “I am quite capable of getting back to Fira.”

“I don’t doubt it, lad, but just humour an old man and stay here tonight.”

* * *

McKeown left him standing as he went forward to greet the demarch and his wife. They were a handsome couple in their late forties who nodded at Jack and listened to the doctor with all seriousness. McKeown introduced them, although Jack remembered he had met Symphorian once before when he had formally sought permission to dig on the village's outlying lands. His wife, Charis, stared at Jack so intently that he flinched and looked away, flustered.

"It's all settled. They'd be glad to look after you for the night," McKeown said, turning to face Jack. "Kera Charis will give you something for your... condition." Seeing Jack's expression, he added, "Christ, man. I'm sorry. I could be totally wrong. But you've got to take it easy."

Jack's smile was twisted. "I'll take it easy when I'm dead." Out of the corner of his eye he saw Charis cross herself vigorously. The sight prompted him to say, "I'm cursed, McKeown. Half the island thinks I'm one of the undead. Maybe that's what I'll become."

McKeown went white beneath his ruddy complexion. "For God's sake! I only meant to frighten you a little, to impress on you how badly you needed to rest..."

"Consider me impressed." Jack felt a tickle at the back of his throat and tried to suppress it. The more he tried, the worse it became, and so he coughed. When he put a hand to his mouth, his fingers came away clean. There was no blood.

"See? I could be wrong," McKeown said again.

"Maybe."

"I will send word to Kera Maria," McKeown said, shuffling his feet as he prepared to go. "I'll come by in the morning to see how you are. Get some bloody rest, man. Give yourself a break."

Jack smiled weakly and allowed the demarch's wife to shoo him inside the house. He was offered Symphorian's own chair, but chose instead to sit on a pile of cushions close to the hearth. The day had not been as hot as yesterday and Jack felt the need for warmth. He extended his hands towards the fire and sat watching the flames in silence.

It had been a day of shocks. Jack did not know which one to deal with first. As soon as he tried to think through the ramifications of one, the others would crowd in and disrupt him. The idea of confronting his own mortality left him strangely devoid of emotion, as if he could pick up the thought of his death, turn it around and examine it, and then put it back into its box and hide it away. Briefly, he wondered if anyone would mourn him if he died in Greece. He struggled with the answer for a moment, and then came a sudden realisation.

Belas had known he was dying. Belas had offered him a site greater than Mycenae, knowing all along that he would not live to see the work through to completion. Belas was using him. Belas was killing him.

The realisation hurt so much that Jack made a soft, wounded noise, drawing the attention of his hosts. Symphorian made as if to get up and come over, but his wife anticipated him. Charis came across the floor and sank to her knees before Jack, taking his hands.

“My child,” she crooned, but with such tenderness Jack forgave her for addressing him thus when she was no more than ten years older than he, “you are haunted.”

Jack tried to disengage his hands. “By many things.”

“It does not profit a man to hold on to hauntings.”

“Would that I could let them go,” Jack said with a sad smile. He turned his head as a tickle wormed its way up his throat, and then he jerked away from Charis as he coughed and tasted the blood in his mouth. He couldn’t bring himself to swallow it, but neither could he spit it out. The coppery taste intensified as he panicked, and then Charis held out a handkerchief, clean and white.

Jack snatched it from her and spat into it. His head spun to think that the blood was brought up from his lungs, and the thought made him want to vomit. He clamped down on the wave of nausea, but kept the handkerchief close to his mouth. Faintly, he could smell Charis’ scent—animal warmth mixed with wildflowers and indoor smoke. Intricate and scratchy lace edged the handkerchief. He felt guilty at ruining it, and was disturbed once again by the way she looked at him.

“Give me that,” she said peremptorily and took back the soiled handkerchief before he could stop her. She unfolded it and looked down at the mess of blood and saliva. “Ah. But this can be cured.”

Jack looked at her in astonishment. “It can?”

Charis nodded and got up, crossing to her sewing-box near the window. She leaned over it, going through the skeins of wool and thread, and then she took two colours and a pair of scissors. Returning to Jack, she knelt down and measured a length of each thread, one white, the other scarlet. She cut it and tied a knot, and gave the knotted end to Jack to hold. He watched, bemused, as she twisted the two threads together, over and under, until it formed one skein, tightly woven.

She knotted the other end and then indicated that Jack should hold out his hand. Charis leant close as she tied the white and scarlet thread around his wrist. Jack could feel her breath whispering across his skin as she muttered either an incantation or a prayer.

She sat back and looked satisfied. “There. Tomorrow you will be well again.”

Jack touched the knotted thread and summoned a smile. “Thank you, but—”

“Now you will eat,” Charis said loudly, drowning his protest. “Then sleep. And tomorrow you will be well.”

Jack glanced over at Symphorian, who shrugged and winked in a way that suggested he had learned not to argue with his wife’s decisions. Charis smiled over at him, both of them partners in complicity. Jack felt out of his depth, and so he nodded. “Dinner would be good.”

After they had eaten, Jack insisted on helping to clear up. He carried a stack of plates to the dresser beside the back window, and as he slowly put away each item as directed by Symphorian, he looked out at the garden.

It was more pleasant in aspect than Kera Maria’s, with a smaller terrace crowded with chairs and a woodpile that spilled split logs over the slabs, hemmed in by raised flowerbeds. Jack idly set himself to identify

the herbs growing there, and counted four before he saw the long, sleek black shape of Skitos half-hidden amongst the southernwood.

The plate he held slipped through his fingers and shattered on the floor. Jack babbled an apology and crouched to gather the sherds, sweeping the pieces towards him with scant disregard for sharp edges.

Charis brought a bucket and let him throw away the broken plate. She looked at him speculatively, and then glanced out of the window. Jack stood up so quickly that he felt dizzy, but still he tried to edge into the line of her vision to prevent her from seeing the black shape outside.

"I'm so clumsy," he said. "Amazing I ever became an archaeologist, really. I'm always breaking things. Or maybe that's why I'm a good archaeologist, because I like putting broken things back together..."

Charis gave him a look that told him to stop talking, and then she touched his arm to move him aside. She looked out of the window. "The cat is yours?"

Jack shrugged. "It belongs to Kera Maria."

"But you named it," Charis said. "That makes it yours."

"No," he said, finally daring to look outside again.

Skitos had come out of the flowerbed and sat on the terrace, his tail curled around his feet, his ears pricked and his nose up, scenting the air. He meowed at Jack as if angry at the denial.

"No," Jack said again. "It is not mine."

"It would like to be." Charis began to turn away, and then Skitos moved, jumping up to land on the deep windowsill. Charis grabbed a sherd from the bucket and threw it at the black shape in the window, forcing Skitos to leap away.

Jack stared at Charis, resisting the urge to look out of the window again to check on Skitos. "Why did you do that?" he asked instead.

Charis shifted the bucket onto her hip and gave him a placid smile. "I do not like black cats."

After a hesitation in which he was relieved to hear Skitos' plaintive meow, Jack accepted Symphorian's invitation to sit beside the fire and

play draughts. Despite the distractions his mind offered, he won several games before his hosts retired. He was shown to his bed, a mattress thick with dust and counterpaned with cobwebs. After making an attempt to clean it, Jack crept back into the main room to sit beside the dying embers of the hearth. He shivered in his borrowed blanket and counted the beat of his heart against the ticking of the clock as, outside, Belas called his name over and over again.

* * *

The morning dawned bright and clear, but for Jack it seemed as though the world had turned grey. He awoke slowly, his eyes bruised from lack of sleep, to see a drift of ash spilling from the hearth. It coated the top of his blanket, and when he lifted his hands, he saw that his fingers were also covered in fine, grey dust.

Charis stepped around him and began to sweep up the ashes with brisk economy. Jack watched her for a moment and then sat up and stretched the knots from his shoulders. She gave him a quick smile, emptied the ashes outside, and began to lay the fire. She did it with deliberate slowness, until Jack offered to help.

“No,” Charis said, her voice low. “Tending the hearth is women’s work. It is the heart of the home, the heart of the family.” She looked him full in the face. “That’s why you came here last night, to sleep by the fire. To hide in the safety of the hearth.”

Jack opened his mouth to deny it, but could not. He remembered the long minutes spent huddled by the embers, when half of his soul clamoured at him to open the door and go outside, to go to Belas. But every time he’d started to get up, he would remember why he mistrusted Belas, why he could not allow himself to chase his desire.

Now, with Charis awaiting his response, he hung his head and doodled in the ash he’d shaken from his blanket. He was aware it was childish, but she made him uncomfortable. He watched sidelong as she kindled the fire, and then blinked in disbelief. She barely touched the flints before they sparked. The tinder caught instantly and sent fire

crackling along the branches, warming them both so quickly he drew back to look up at her.

Charis held out her hand. "Come with me."

Wary, but not wishing to offend his hostess, Jack went with her into the garden. He glanced around, but Skitos was nowhere to be seen. He wasn't sure if he felt relief or disappointment, and then he pushed aside the thought of Belas and concentrated instead on the morning.

It was warm and pleasant, with the sound of the church bells carried distantly on the breeze, each note deeper than the shrieks of the gulls. Closer at hand, the stems of the plants rustled and the stand of olive trees at the far end of the garden glittered in the sun.

Charis came to a halt beside one of the trees and set one hand to its trunk. She stroked it for a moment, and then reached up and undid the black headscarf that covered her hair. She was blonde, her hair the colour of dark honey, caught up in a pleat that exposed the back of her neck.

Jack stared at her nape and felt something akin to lust flicker deep within. He forced himself to gaze at the ground. He had to look up again when she came close and asked for the thread bracelet. Jack offered out his hand dumbly, expecting her to untie it with her fingers. Instead, she took his hand in both her hands and bit through the knots. Her lips touched the inside of his wrist and he started back as if burned.

Charis gave him a laughing, scornful look and fastened the white and scarlet thread to a branch of the olive tree. "Now you are cured," she said.

"But your tree will sicken," Jack said. "That's how it works, yes? You cast the illness from me into the tree?"

She nodded. "Yes. But this tree has lived nearly three hundred years. It is fine and healthy. It can bear the loss of one branch much better than you could bear the loss of your breath."

Jack touched the tree and felt the flutter of the rounded leaves slip through his fingers. "Then thank you both."

Charis inclined her head. "You are welcome."

She draped her headscarf over her bright hair and fastened it before she led the way back to the house. Jack followed her, watching the way her stiff Saturday-best skirts stirred the dust from the path. He felt not a single drop of desire for her now and wondered what had possessed him before.

Inside, the demarch greeted them. “You slept well?”

“Well enough,” Jack replied.

Symphorian nodded and waved him to sit down at the table. When Charis went into the kitchen, he said, “My wife has the gift. She hears things, sees things, few others can. Her grandmother was a Nereid, so Charis inherited both the beauty and the supernatural gifts of her forebear.”

Jack studied the lace tablecloth intently. Every village in Greece had its tales of Nereids, the water nymphs of antiquity that had transformed over the centuries into creatures whose fatal charm drove men to distraction and sometimes to their death. He thought of the moment in the garden and swallowed. After the events of the past few days, Jack was not so hasty to dismiss superstition. He summoned a smile and met the demarch’s gaze. “In Fira, they say I am an *exotiko*.”

Charis returned to the room bearing a tray of food. “Ha! No, you are a man. But the company you keep... or that which greatly desires your company—he is *exotiko*. More than that. He is a *vrykolakas*.”

Jack paused in the act of tearing apart a piece of bread. He took a breath to settle the leaden weight that had shifted in his belly. “Are you sure?”

Symphorian and Charis exchanged a look, but the demarch spoke first. “Last night, we heard it cry out. It was calling for Yianni. Over and again it called, just as the vixen cries for her mate.”

“But you did not answer,” Charis said. She stood behind her husband and placed a hand on his shoulder. “You could not answer because this is not your home. It is not your place to offer fire and water to strangers who might cross the threshold. That is why you sought sanctuary by the fire. There, you were safe.”

Jack picked at the crust on the bread, letting it flake beneath his fingernails. He frowned and tried to keep his voice level as he said, "I was cold. That's all. And I heard nothing. It must have been a dog."

"Or a cat?" Charis suggested. "You heard it, Yianni. There are not many who can resist the call of the *vrykolakas*."

"He wanted me to go outside," Jack said softly, unable to deny it any longer.

"And there he would have killed you," Symphorian declared. "A *vrykolakas* has no mercy, no feeling. How can it? It is a dead man walking, animated only by hatred and the desire for vengeance."

Jack looked up. "Vengeance?"

"All revenants seek revenge upon the society that spurned them," Symphorian said. "Even if they were mild men during their lifetime, they become bloodthirsty and ferocious after death. And who can be surprised at this? They are denied proper burial rites. No mourners attend their passing. Little wonder that their bodies do not dissolve naturally, that they wander at will through the fields and villages."

"The body I uncovered was dissolved," Jack said. He dropped the remaining lumps of bread onto his plate and started to pull them apart. "Only the skeleton remained. He cannot be a revenant."

"I heard the skeleton was bound," Charis interrupted before her husband could speak. "That there was a capstone upon the grave and that the body was contracted. Even, I heard, there was a coin to speed the soul on its way."

Jack nodded. "The grave is also outside consecrated ground. Pagan rites mixed with Orthodox..."

"It is a *vrykolakas*," Symphorian said decisively. "Whoever buried him did not want that man to walk again. In my grandfather's generation, there was a man who murdered two travellers for their money. He mutilated their bodies before he buried them. Cut off their hands and feet so they could not condemn him. But he was plagued with ill-health after his crime, and so confessed to the eparch."

"What happened to him?"

Symphorian shrugged. “They hanged him and made sure his corpse was chained when he was placed in the earth. He did not come back.”

“Not all *vrykolakades* are evil,” Charis said. “I knew a woman on Amorgos who had been promised to her man from the time they were both in the cradle. Almost as soon as she’d wed, she was a widow. Her husband committed suicide when his business failed. He was excommunicated and buried outside the churchyard. Two months later, the villagers were terrified by strange noises, lights flickering in the trees at night, and their belongings were tossed around. My friend confessed to the priest that her husband was visiting her nightly, and that she was with child. The priest gave orders to exhume the body, and it was found intact, shrivelled and hardened, the heart still beating. The villagers took out the heart and burned it, and cut the body into pieces.”

Jack stared at her with fascinated revulsion. “What happened to the baby?”

She gave a twisted smile. “It was born a monster, and God be praised, it died shortly after it took its first breath.”

Jack shuddered and turned back to the pile of crumbs that had accumulated on his plate. “If what you say is true, then why should a *vrykolakas* haunt me? It is not a djinn to follow around whoever opened the bottle and released it.”

Charis and Symphorian exchanged glances again, and were slow to answer this time.

Jack remembered his second year as an undergraduate, when he’d been chosen to play one of the Erinyes that pursued Orestes. At the time he was sure he’d been asked only because of his height and for the sheer incongruity of draping him in black robes while spiking his hair into jagged blond waves. He and his two “sisters” had made a laughable spectacle during rehearsals, but on opening night they had delivered a performance that terrified the audience. It had been easy enough to call on anger to become a Fury, cold and devoid of all emotion except the pursuit of vengeance.

He still remembered the lines and recited, “A double scourge of sighs awakes the dead; the Avengers rise, though late; blood stains the guilty pride of the accursed who rule on earth, and Fate stands on the children’s side.”

Charis looked at him sharply. “The old tongue is not often heard these days.”

Jack smiled. “Aeschylus’ *Choephoroi*. It’s true, though, isn’t it? Ancient literature has revenants, or at least vengeful ghosts, in almost every great story. Antigone, Ajax, Patroclus. They either transgressed the laws of society or suffered sudden, violent death. They came back either to warn the living or to seek revenge.”

He sat back in his chair and sighed, spreading his hands. “I do not hate anybody. I have not done anything particularly wicked in my life.”

“You do not need to be an evil man in order to transgress the laws of society,” Charis said. “You talked of Antigone. She was a courageous woman. She loved her brothers, as a sister should. She looked forward to her marriage, as a bride should. But then she flouted the laws of her city by giving her brother the burial denied to him by the king. Did that make her an evil woman?”

Jack scrubbed his hands through his hair. “I don’t know. And I don’t know what to think now, either. Suppose I am haunted by a *vrykolakas*. What can I do? There is no flesh to be dissolved on the corpse.”

“Give the bones to Father Gregory. He will destroy them, and your troubles will be no more,” Symphorian said.

Jack looked pained. “Can I not just rebury the skeleton?”

“It follows you in the shape of a cat. It calls your name at night. And it has given you the wasting sickness,” Charis exclaimed. “You cannot fling earth upon it and pray for it to go away, Yianni. Evil can be fought only by the Church.”

“No. I don’t believe that.” Jack pushed aside his plateful of crumbs and rose to his feet. Unconsciously he found himself looking out of the window, hoping to see Skitos, and so he turned back to his hosts. “You don’t believe in this revenant nonsense any more than I do! It was an

animal you heard last night, if indeed you heard anything. Father Gregory is desperate to destroy those bones, and I will not let him. I will record them and then rebury them, and that will be the end of it.”

Symphorian shook his head. “You are a stubborn fool.”

“No,” said Charis, “you are in danger. He has seduced you, and will use you until you have nothing more to give. He is trouble, Yianni.”

Jack laughed. “*Belas*. Yes, that is his name. *Belas*. ‘Trouble’.”

She looked alarmed. “You named him so?”

“He wrote to me and signed his name.”

“But you said his name out loud?” Charis left her position by her husband to come closer, clearly agitated.

Jack frowned, trying to remember. “I think so.”

Her face crumpled. “Symphorian is right, you are a fool,” she cried. “You named him and so you made him real. Stupid man! Everyone knows not to answer a *vrykolakas* when it calls, and everyone knows not to fall for its tricks. Say its name out loud and you make it real, you bind it to you. You have cursed yourself, Yianni, and the only way you can escape it is to leave here as soon as possible. Leave Santorini and never return.”

“I cannot do that,” Jack said.

“Then you will die, and I cannot save you.”

Charis turned her back on him and hurried into the kitchen. Jack and Symphorian sat at the table awkwardly and listened to her muffled sobs.

“She gets this way sometimes,” the demarch said at length, but offered no further explanation. They sat for a while longer, and then Symphorian got to his feet and went to his wife. Jack tried not to listen to their whispered conversation, but looked up when they moved together across the room. Charis had put on a black shawl covering her head. He could not see her face.

At the door, Symphorian hesitated. “We are going to church,” he said, turning back. “Perhaps you should join us?”

* * *

Jack shoved his hands in his pockets and hunched over in an attempt to look incognito. It didn't work, of course. The villagers of Emporio straggled in a line along the road to Agios Eleutherios' to stare at him. They all wore their best clothes, their heads respectfully covered by scarves and hats. Only he stood out, dressed in dusty black and with the midday sun scoring light through his hair. He slowed his pace to keep up with Symphorian and Charis, but within moments he was ahead of them, propelled onwards as much by nervous energy as by the length of his legs.

He didn't know why he was going to Mass. There were too many reasons for him to decide which one was best suited. He was going to please his hosts. He was going to placate Father Gregory. He was going to make amends for his transgression in the church yesterday.

Jack faltered in his stride. Transgression. Only his was nowhere near as noble or well intentioned as Antigone's. He shivered, recalling Charis' insistence of the curse, and then he walked on. Surely the best place for a sinner to repent was during Holy Communion. God would forgive him and then he could forget that this whole ludicrous affair had ever happened.

Still he hesitated as he approached the open doors of the church. With a quick glance behind him to be certain that Skitos was nowhere in sight, he entered and sidled over to a quiet spot beside the icon. Today the red candle was lit, the flame burning brightly. The dead flowers had been replaced with those freshly cut, and the scent of incense spiralled through the air to mask any other smell that might have lingered.

Jack could not bring himself to look at the sanctuary. Instead he lifted his gaze to the dome of the roof and waited for the deacon to begin the service. More villagers crowded in around him, shuffling into position and muttering to one another. Andreas offered him a greeting before he helped an old lady onto one of the chairs at the back of the nave. Jack

turned to ask Andreas why he had closed the dig so early yesterday, but fell silent when Father Gregory's voice boomed out.

For the next twenty minutes, Jack followed the liturgy and antiphons, standing and sitting and bowing when required. It took some effort on his part to recall the correct procedure, and so it was not until the Entrance that Jack finally managed to look at the sanctuary, when Father Gregory progressed towards it carrying the Gospels. Jack wondered if the priest had cause to miss his bottle of chrism yet, and then he hung his head as he felt himself blush.

To Jack's surprise, the homily was not long. He expected a diatribe, but Father Gregory, when not roused by the presence of old bones, proved a remarkably concise and lucid speaker. The villagers listened intently and nodded, occasionally turning to one another to debate a point or emphasise it. Jack felt ashamed for his treatment of the priest and resolved to try to make amends at the end of the service.

During the Great Entrance, Jack cleared his throat and tasted a backwash of blood. His attention strayed from the liturgy and he stumbled over the next few responses. The tickle in his throat got stronger the more he tried to suppress it, and so he put a hand over his mouth and tried to cough politely the next time the deacon spoke. The old lady with Andreas tutted noisily and shook her head. Jack gave her a watery smile and swallowed hard on another cough.

"Not long to Communion," Symphorian whispered. "The water shall soothe your throat."

Jack smiled at the unintentional blasphemy and then watched the priest break a chunk of the sacred bread and place it in the cup. Father Gregory poured warm water over the bread and took Communion for himself, saying at the end of it, "This has touched my lips, taking away my transgressions and cleansing my sins."

Jack nodded. Transgressions again. He had been right to come to church. He joined the queue of people moving towards the sanctuary. His throat scratched a second time, and he coughed, irritated. Then Father Gregory was before him, and he was standing on exactly the same spot

where he'd collapsed yesterday. For a brief moment when he opened his mouth to receive the sacred bread, Jack remembered the heat and brutal glory Belas had coaxed from him.

The moment passed. Father Gregory smiled at him and Jack received the bread.

It stuck in his throat.

Horrified, Jack tried to swallow it. He could not spit it out, but neither could he swallow it, and all the while he stood trembling in the sanctuary with the press of the villagers behind him and Father Gregory beside him. Jack put a hand to his throat and turned, panicked, to the priest, who looked first confused, and then alarmed.

He was going to choke to death. Jack shook his head violently. He didn't want to die, not yet, not like this. He felt his legs give way as his breath vanished, and then he was on the floor, crouched over just as he had been yesterday. The marble was still cold, still unforgiving. He tried to snatch back his hands from the chilly embrace, but fell farther forward instead.

With a massive effort of will, Jack forced himself to cough. It hurt to do it, made his back and chest feel hollow, and for a second he thought he had expelled his own life with that cough. So much blood came out that it made him vomit with fear until his stomach cramped and he wept with the shock of it.

Charis knelt beside him, her arm across his shoulders and her voice strident as she called for someone to fetch Dr. McKeown. Father Gregory and his deacon tried to quieten their agitated flock, but everybody had seen what had happened and everybody had an opinion on it.

Jack could hear the babble of voices, but could make no sense of it. He managed to take deep breaths, one after another, feeling the cool air slide down his injured throat. He felt Charis lean against him, and then Symphorian was at his other side, and together they tried to lift him. Jack resisted and so they let him slump back onto the sanctuary floor on his hands and knees.

Revenant

There was a swirl of black in front of him and he managed to look up at Father Gregory. He had never seen the priest look so shaken, nor so angry nor terrified.

“What have you done?” Father Gregory cried.

Jack could only shake his head helplessly. He didn't understand. Everything was too painful. His lungs were on fire, his chest felt crushed. And then he followed the priest's pointing finger and he looked into the puddle of blood purged from his body, and he finally understood Father Gregory's fear.

There, untouched amidst the blood, as white and as pure as it had been when it lay in the basket, lay the piece of Communion bread.

“God has rejected you,” Father Gregory whispered.

And Jack knew he was damned.

Chapter Nine

Darkness wrapped the shrine in silence. The circle of light cast by the lamp reduced to a sliver set on the ground, but sometimes even that little seemed too much. Whenever Jack felt the rise at the back of his throat and tasted the coppery blood, he crawled into the darkest corner to spit it out. If he couldn't see it, it wasn't real. Wasn't that the empiricists' way?

The thought made him want to laugh, but it also reminded him of when Belas touched him, Belas's proof that empiricism was better than idealism. Jack had never questioned his beliefs before, but here he sat, faced with a series of tenets so strange as to be unbelievable—except he could touch them, and so they were real.

He hugged his knees and stared at the flame. Its presence should have warmed him, but instead he felt nothing but the cold that oozed from the altar room. If he had been in a better frame of mind, he would never have sought sanctuary here. Only his pride kept him from climbing out of the trench and going back to Emporio.

Father Gregory had been remarkable. After his horrified pronouncement, he had rallied to help Charis and Symphorian. He had even apologised to Jack for believing him to be damned. It was not true, he said loudly, so the milling congregation could hear. Jack was a good man who suffered with the wasting disease, and that was all. There was nothing sinister about it.

Robbed of any further sport, the villagers dispersed back to their homes while the deacon hastily blessed them on their way out of church. They were seemingly unperturbed at missing Holy Communion. They had enough gossip to feed off for the rest of the week.

“He is sick. He needs help,” Symphorian had said, while beside him, Charis had argued for more than medical aid.

“He is haunted,” she told the priest. “A *vrykolakas* has ensnared him.”

Father Gregory had looked between them and then at Jack. “Do you believe?” he had asked, and Jack, who had never been less sure of anything in his life, nodded that he did.

It was enough to satisfy the priest. “Andreas has gone for the doctor. Charis, you know it is against canon law for me to intervene in supernatural affairs. The Bishop would be angry if I took these matters into my own hands without his permission.”

Jack found his voice. “And yet you had no compunction about ordering me what to do when I opened the grave.”

“That was God’s law you broke, not human law, and I am one who interprets God’s law,” Father Gregory said. “The dead should be left to their rest.”

“But this one wanders,” Jack said, raising himself onto his knees. “He does not wish to rest. What does he want with me?”

“Your life,” Charis said simply.

“I have done nothing to harm him. There is no reason for him to do this!”

“Reason?” Symphorian laughed. “A *vrykolakas* is without reason. Vengeance drives them onward. Perhaps you offended him in a previous existence.”

Father Gregory tutted at the blasphemy, but did not contradict him.

“You must be able to do something,” Charis said.

“For a haunting? No. I have not the skill to undo that bond. There is one on Naxos, Father Alexandros, who is renowned as an exorcist. I could ask him to come.”

“The demon is not within him!” Charis got to her feet, angry. “He does not need an exorcist. His body purges itself all too well. It is the revenant who must be destroyed.”

“But for that I would need the corpse,” Father Gregory said, and they all turned to look at Jack.

He bowed his head. It would be so easy to tell them where he’d hidden it, but he couldn’t do it. He couldn’t justify the desecration of the skeleton. He couldn’t bring himself to betray Belas. Even if Belas was a *vrykolakas*, so far he had kept his word.

Can you trust the word of a dead man?

“I don’t know,” he said, although he did not know whether he answered his own question or the demands of the priest.

Father Gregory sighed. “Then the only thing I can do is to give you a blessing. That is, if you are not too proud to accept it.”

Jack remembered his anxious fury of two days ago and blushed. Then, it had been he who had rejected God. It had come full circle already. He shook his head and waited for Father Gregory to intone the words of the blessing.

Instead, the priest moved towards the back of the sanctuary, saying, “It is best, I think, if I also anoint you with the oil for the sick...”

Jack lifted his head, aghast. He was on his feet and backing away from the altar even before Father Gregory lifted the lid on the wooden box. He was halfway out of the church when he heard the priest’s cry of alarm on realising that the chrism had gone, and by the time Charis ran from the church in pursuit, calling his name, Jack had fled onto the dig site and taken refuge in the shrine.

Nobody would find him there. Nobody would come.

For the first few hours, he buried himself in work. His sketchpad and a few pencils lay where he had left them, and he found the box of matches that Koubelos had brought into the trench with the lamp. With some trepidation, he lit first one and then a second match and ventured into the altar room in search of the bronze lamp he’d left there the previous day. The sulphurous stink from the struck match gave a hellish aspect to a place Jack already saw as full of despair.

He shivered as the light flickered over the shattered bones, and then yelped as the match burnt out and caught his fingers. He saw the glint of

bronze and snatched up the lamp, retreating back into the larger room and the welcome slice of faint daylight.

And then he drew, hunched over on hands and knees, heedless of the dust that tickled his throat. He drew whatever he could find in there—the lustral basin, the leaping dolphins, the ashlar masonry, and then he drew the pieces of broken pottery littering the floor, their elegant spirals and curlicues interrupted by the smashed edges.

He drew until the light faded and his eyes hurt, and then he dropped the pencils and lay down with his head on the sketchpad and listened to the slow beat of his heart.

After a while, Jack stirred himself to sit up and light the lamp. He felt better for making the drawings. It was something important and functional. It made him feel almost human again, the way he'd felt a few days ago, before Belas and before everything else.

He remembered when his father had left them, his mother would spend hours cleaning the house. She used to say that when his father came back, he wouldn't be able to fault her housekeeping. Jack remembered the time he'd come in from the garden to show her the broken pottery he'd found, and she scolded him for leaving mud on the floor, and then her anger had turned, and she held him and sobbed dry racking tears that frightened him. And Jack, with all his six-year old wisdom, had realised that cleaning the house had nothing to do with his father coming back.

Just as his drawings had nothing to do with recording the site for posterity. He sat and doodled along the inside cover of the sketchpad. Monstrous shadows rolled across the page and he realised he was drawing bones—skulls and femurs and jagged ribs. He put down the pencil and stared at the lamp, and then he let the thoughts come.

He moved the light towards the niche in the wall and talked to the smallest of the dolphins painted there. It seemed harmless and its expression looked kind.

“McKeown says my skeleton is perhaps related to those bones in there,” he said, tipping his head towards the altar room. “Is he right? I

should draw them. The bones. Draw them where they lie, because he wants to examine them further and I'd have to take them all outside for that. I haven't drawn the skeleton yet. Not properly, anyway. Koubelos photographed him, but..."

The dolphin waited, frozen into the silence of millennia.

"I suppose he could be related. Distant ancestor to murdered children. Ha!" Jack put his chin in his hands and sighed. "What do I know? If Charis and Symphorian are right, maybe he was one of them. Perhaps he was dug up and reburied. Only it's not the sort of thing you want to ask in polite company, is it?"

He put out a hand and touched his fingers to the painted plaster. "I don't know any longer what is fantasy and what is real. A fine empiricist I make. Professor Dörpfeld would despair of me. You know that once, at Athens, I found some coins. I tried to record them properly, without damaging them, but he said I should do as everyone else did and use diluted sulphuric acid and a wire brush. 'We don't need any more examples of Antigonid or Ptolemaic coins. Just clean them up enough that they're visible, note it down and get on with it.'"

"But I didn't," Jack continued softly. "I was convinced I'd found something special and so I would arrive at the site earlier than everyone else and I'd smooth away the years of rust and encrustation. It took hours, days, even. Dörpfeld told me I was wasting my time. But I believed I was right, that this was the way to be a good archaeologist. If I gave the artefacts some patience and love and respect, I would get my reward."

He paused. The dolphin encouraged him. "They were all Antigonid coins, clipped silver staters. Worthless to many, and certainly to Dörpfeld. And yet, when I saw those ancient faces gleam from the muck, I felt something. And now I have this. The dream is small, but it is mine, so why am I counting the cost so soon?"

The dolphin smiled, but did not answer.

* * *

Revenant

Later, when the wick burned down low, Jack took off his watch and set it by the guttering lamplight. Time crawled so slowly, the hours weighted with his confusion. The darkness deepened. He went outside once and looked up at the sky, hoping to see the stars, but the night was overcast. He sat beneath the dolphins with his back to the wall and listened to the faint tick of his watch.

It was past midnight when Belas came. Jack had been drowsing when a noise outside made him start. His feet caught against the lamp and it turned over, the flame snuffed out before he could right it. Jack snatched back his hand when his fingers encountered hot metal, and then he went still as footsteps scraped nearby.

The darkness was absolute. Around him, the air was alive. He scarcely dared breathe for fear of disrupting the eddying currents. He felt if he reached out, he could touch it, then turn it and hold it against him.

Jack listened. Surely that was the whisper of cloth on stone? Cautiously he ventured from the wall, his fingers brushing over the dusty floor to clear his way. He encountered the box of matches that rattled when he touched it and he stowed it carefully in his pocket.

To cover the movement, he said, "I thought you would not come."

"A revenant cannot walk on a Saturday. Did your new friends not tell you?" Belas's voice was too smooth.

"I had not thought you to be so considerate of Orthodox ritual."

Belas snorted. "I have no need to be. But I like ritual. It gives one's life a purpose when all else is meaningless."

"Life!" Jack exclaimed. "You do not have life."

"Yes, I do." The darkness moved and grew warmer. "To have life is to have a function. I have more life in me than many of those villagers have ever had. What is their existence? Miserable and petty. They plough their fields or spin wool and gouge vicious lies out of gossip. Is that life?"

"It is to them, and they find it precious."

Belas came close. "No. They have no idea of what is precious. They do not know what life is really like, what anything is really like. How can

they? You can only appreciate something in the moment before it leaves you.”

“That’s not true.” Jack shuffled back into the wall. “I know it isn’t true.”

“Really?” Belas’s voice became almost teasing. “And what has been precious to you, my Yianni?”

Jack’s mind went blank and he groped for a reply. He meant to say “my mother”, but what actually came out was “My father.”

“What did your father say, the last time you saw him?” Belas’s voice carried after him, no matter how far he slid along the wall. “You remember. You’ve never forgotten.”

Jack shook his head in denial, and when his voice emerged it was as frail as the dried flowers that had stood in the vase in the hallway on the day his father had left them. He remembered how he had stared at the flowers, dozens of dead scarlet roses, pathetic monument to the real live ones that scratched at him in the garden.

“He told me to be a good boy. To do well in school. And I thought, if I did what he said, he would come back.”

“And was that not precious to you?” Belas asked softly.

Jack could barely speak. “He never came back. I learned to hate him.”

“He betrayed you. Took something precious from you. Stole part of your life.” Belas reached out and touched him, a slow, tentative caress. His voice dropped to a whisper. “I will never betray you.”

“You already have. You promised me the world when I can have no part in it.”

“I do not have the world to give you,” Belas said. “But if you wanted it, my world would be yours.”

Jack laughed, a bitter sound. “Isn’t that what you’re doing anyway? Bringing me to your world? To death?”

There was a silence so deep Jack wondered if Belas had abandoned him, but then there was a soft sigh and Belas said, "That's a dramatic thing to say."

"I have consumption. It's a dramatic illness," Jack said flatly. "You would appreciate it, I'm sure. Dying in welters of blood. Choking on the stuff until—"

He heard the flutter of cloth and then Belas was beside him, hands closed tight around his face. Jack turned his head in rejection and felt the whispered tickle of Belas's hair across his cheek.

"You will not die. Not from this thing. You do not have it!"

"Can you not taste it on me? Can't you taste death? My lungs are rotting." Jack wrenched free of Belas's grasp, ashamed at his tears of self-pity.

"The British doctor told you this. He is a fool," Belas said. "He lies to you."

Jack shook his head. "No. I have it. I know I do. Isn't that why you chose me? Because I'd be dead soon enough anyway?"

"Is that really why you thought I chose you?"

Jack shrugged. "I don't know. What other reasons could there be? Perhaps because you knew I could do justice to the site..."

"As if I care what you do with Akrotiri! No, Yianni, I wanted you because I thought our arrangement would be agreeably uncomplicated. And also..."

"Also?"

Belas sighed. "I was grateful. You set me free. It was only polite to repay you in some way. I was pleased when you agreed to the rest of it."

"I did not know then that part of the agreement was my death," Jack said.

Belas caressed his back and stroked across the tight line of his shoulders. "And now you believe that you're dying, don't you feel that life is more precious?"

"No," Jack said, and shuddered at the touch. "But I want it to be."

Belas moved away. “Another thing I have learned is that if you cannot have something, it becomes precious to you. A jewel, a lover, even life itself. Sometimes, in the very act of striving for something impossible or forbidden, the act becomes worthwhile. Makes us worthwhile. Do you understand?”

“I think so.” Jack turned as if he could see through the darkness. Belas’s tone intrigued him, and as he flattened himself against the wall again, Jack felt in his pocket for the box of matches he’d picked up from the floor earlier.

“Then know you are doubly precious to me,” Belas continued. “I cannot have you and I could never keep you. Such a foolish paradox you are, such a sweet distraction. It would be kinder to kill you than to let you suffer your delusions.”

“I don’t believe I suffer,” Jack said. “I just feel used.”

A soft chuckle. “That is the nature of business. I give you something, you give me something in return. We both use one another, and we both stand to gain from it.”

“Most business deals do not involve this level of intimacy.”

Belas sounded amused when he said, “I can think of a few.”

“At least a whore sees her clients,” Jack said.

“Oh, you’re still angry about that? But know this, Yianni—emotion has no place in business.”

Jack raised his hands wearily. “What about greed? Or envy? These are surely the founding principles of business.”

“I have found myself a pedant! Very well, I will allow you that. For myself, I find emotion is something I can very much do without... and I thought you were of like mind. Was I wrong?”

“It would depend on what kind of emotion you mean,” Jack said, his voice deadening with each word. “Passion is good. For one’s work, I mean.”

“Ha! It can also blind a man and lead him to falsehood.” Belas sounded smug. “Tell me honestly, if you were to find something here—

one tiny little object—that destroyed your theories, the ones you had been so meticulous in formulating, would you or would you not get rid of it?”

Jack thought for a moment. “I would not lie. I would rethink my argument.”

Belas chuckled. “You cannot argue this away. This is fundamental evidence that your method of excavation is at fault.”

“Then I would admit I was wrong and start again.”

“Even though the funds are running low?” Belas purred. “Even though the British School watches like a hawk, waiting to wrest the permit from you? Even though your university demands results?”

He paused. “Would you tell the truth, Yiannakki, or would you twist it just a little? Nobody would know. It wouldn’t be the first time an archaeologist tampered with the truth.”

Jack turned his head. “I would like to think that I would still be honest.”

“Thinking and doing are two very different things.” Belas settled beside him. “Instance our own example. You think you want more from our arrangement. Perhaps you would not like it so much if I were to agree.”

“I just—”

“Want more. I know. You become greedy.” Belas moved, slid nearer. “Why?”

“It’s not greed,” Jack said. “It just seems ridiculous, to be so... close to you and yet never feel you. I can hear you, but never see you. You touch me, but I can never hold you.”

Belas was silent for a long moment and then, his voice soft with wonderment, he said, “You want me as your lover.”

“Yes. No!” Jack shook his head to rid himself of a flutter of panic. “I don’t know. Only—it has to be more than this.”

“You cannot see me. That does not change.”

Jack hesitated and then nodded.

“You cannot see me, but you can have the rest of me,” Belas whispered. “It will do you no good, though. I have never been a thoughtful lover.”

“I have thoughts enough for us both.”

“You will need them.”

In silence they stood up together, as if to ratify the agreement formally, and for the first time Jack was aware of Belas beside him. Not just a brief caress, but true physicality, the creature that earlier he had wanted to carve from the air and embrace. With this in mind and with no other thought, he turned blindly to Belas and demanded, “Kiss me.”

“What?” Belas sounded faintly shocked.

Jack took a step closer, bringing their bodies together. “You heard. Kiss me.”

Belas hesitated, and so Jack lifted his hands and touched him. First his shoulders and then his face, tracing contours in an attempt to map the features beneath his fingertips. Belas’s skin was cool and taut with tension. His hair slid, soft and thick, through Jack’s fingers. Jack found that he could not stop stroking him, as if petting an animal, as if caressing a cat.

And then Belas kissed him. Slowly, as if such a thing was new to him, as if he had gone a thousand years without it. At first it was purely animal, a nudge, a seeking after warmth, and then awareness took over and the kiss grew hard and deep, no longer mere kindling but something fiercer.

Jack let Belas’s arms go around him and allowed himself to sink into the embrace. Against his better judgement, he responded to it all too eagerly. He knew the exact moment before Belas broke the kiss. Knew it and mourned it, because it had become precious in so short a time.

In the darkness they breathed each other in, and Jack whispered, “I thought you said you could feel no emotion.”

Belas put his hands on Jack’s chest. “I lied. Can you really trust the word of a dead man?”

“Can you trust the word of the living?”

Before Belas could guess what he was doing, Jack pulled a match from the box and struck it against the plaster. It sparked, threw sulphur between them, and then the match flared into light and they stared at one another.

Even in the glimmer of the match-light Belas was unmistakable. Jack knew him instantly. “You are Kanenas.” It was an accusation without heat. “And yet you said you were not. I suppose Belas is not your real name, either.”

“It is not, and I never denied that I was Kanenas,” Belas said. “As for my name, men have called me Trouble for many years. It is as good a name as any other. You do not always use your given name, so why should I?”

Jack dropped the match, and the light went out.

“You broke the rules,” Belas said quietly.

“I know.”

“For that alone, I should leave you.”

Jack gathered his courage and said, “Go, then. Go.”

The challenge fell, as empty as the threat that had provoked it. Jack sensed Belas’s reluctance and knew he should not push further, but now he had to do it. Warped though it was, their agreement had become the sole purposeful thing in his life, greater even than Akrotiri’s promise, and certainly greater than the shrine. It was not about treasure or fame, it was about the two of them, this tiny symbiotic relationship that, if broken, could bring his whole world crashing down.

“Go,” he said again, louder this time.

Belas fidgeted, the tiny sounds amplified into the stillness of the shrine.

“No.”

And then Belas moved. He shoved Jack against the wall and tore at the collar of his shirt, forcing Jack’s head back with the heel of his hand.

Jack let it happen. Belas's fingers splayed across his face. They were still cold, but now they shook with anger. He felt Belas's fingertips across his cheekbones, over his eyes. Panic fluttered in his belly, and then he gasped into the palm that gagged him when Belas kissed his throat.

He was vulnerable and he welcomed it. He didn't want to escape this. If Belas killed him as punishment, what did it matter? Better to die this way than to slowly choke on his own tattered lungs.

Now he felt teeth and the dull scratch of enamel slick over his skin. Belas's tongue lashed across the hollow of his throat, hard and fast, in an obscene imitation of his heartbeat. It made him swallow anxiously, made his breath steeper. Jack felt sick, his mouth going dry the more he swallowed, but beneath the queasiness lay an arousal that fed on his fear.

Belas forced his chin up even further. Jack felt his back arch away from the wall as the crown of his head grazed the fresco. His throat was completely exposed, the skin taut, the muscles tense. He could feel the wild beat of his pulse, and thought that he had never been so aware of his own mortality, of how slender and fragile were the bones in his neck.

His breath staccatoed into sharp, desperate gasps. Belas opened his mouth wide over Jack's neck, wide enough for Jack to feel the indentations of his teeth on either side of his throat. He wished he could close his eyes, but panic kept them wide, as if he could see his own death in the darkness. Belas could tear open his throat if he wanted. Jack wondered if it would hurt or if death would be swift.

He felt Belas's teeth sink into his flesh, felt his skin dent and bruise, and he held his breath, his heart racing faster and his head spinning with adrenaline.

Belas let go.

"I cannot give you up so easily."

Jack collapsed against the wall in relief, his hands going to his throat to feel the bruised, wet flesh. His legs were shaking. "That was easy?"

"I don't want you dead. You are infinitely more precious to me alive."

From somewhere, Jack found the strength to laugh, and to keep it in check. “Just as you said. In the moment before you lose something...”

“Do not try for wit in this situation, Yianni.” Belas turned away into the darkness. At his word, the lamp on the floor burst into flame. It burned brighter than before, lighting even the corners of the room.

Jack stared at him wordlessly.

“Any *vrykolakas* can do that,” Belas said from the other side of the lustral basin. “It’s not a hard trick to master and it’s one of the more effective ways of scaring the peasants.”

“I’m impressed.” Jack looked at him properly for the first time. Kanenas he remembered only vaguely, his image washed out by the harsh sun. Belas had softer features, he thought, although he wore the same simple clothes. This time he was barefoot, the legs of the trousers rolled up to mid-shin to reveal the long snake of a tattoo winding tight around his left ankle. The rough linen shirt was half open, its clean lines disordered. Above, Belas’s face was cast into shadow, but the copper and gold of his hair caught the light.

Jack wished he would come closer so he could see his eyes. It was unnerving to look at him like this, a creature of shadow with a mask of darkness. Kanenas had been bright and open, a being of air and light. Somewhere between those two points, he thought, lay the real Belas.

He recollected himself when Belas asked, “Do you always stare so wantonly?”

Jack lowered his eyes and smiled. “If the view is worthy of my attention.”

“You, too, look different by daylight.”

Belas sounded pleased. It made Jack bold enough to say, “Lovers are different in the lamplight, or so I have heard.”

“Yes. They become somebody else. Somebody better than their daylight selves. A creature reborn each night, just for their lover,” Belas said, coming towards him. “With their lover, they can be...”

“Free?”

Belas paused and tilted his head so at last Jack could see his eyes, as green as a cat's, pale and ringed with darkness. "That was not what I was going to say. Have you ever felt free with a lover, Yiannakki?"

Jack thought and puzzled at it. "No. How strange. I never thought of it before, but no. Never."

"Society expects and so we must deliver. In every way that can be defined." Belas's voice swelled with anger and then he sighed, calm again. He faced Jack with a twisted smile. "Only the lover you are forbidden to take is the one who can bring you freedom. With such a lover, you can explore the boundaries and learn what is and what is not."

Jack leaned against the wall behind him. "And I?"

"You were the forbidden one," Belas said softly, reaching out for him, "but now you have invited me in."

Jack went willingly into the embrace. Entwined, they slid to the floor. Belas sank down on top of him astride Jack's thighs, their bodies tight to one another. In the intimate lamplight of the shrine, Belas seemed untouchable and mysterious.

But Jack touched him, brave enough to slide gentle fingers across his face, saying, "You do look like a cat."

Belas smiled and rubbed his cheek against Jack's hand, just as Skitos did. "I can become any animal on this island."

"A dolphin?" Jack asked, gesturing upwards to the fresco.

Belas shook his head. "Only land creatures. I cannot cross salt water of my own volition."

"But if somebody else willed it..."

"That has happened in the past," Belas admitted. "It is difficult, though. It requires more effort and I have to be drugged to submission with a surfeit of blood."

Jack stirred beneath him. "Is it so very painful for you to cross the sea?"

For a moment Belas stared at him nonplussed, and then he laughed. “You should be horrified at how much blood I need, not pity me the pain I might feel!”

“I know men who drink to stop their memories or to render themselves insensible before they travel by boat. Surely it is the same thing.”

Belas leaned close, his eyes gleaming. “But I am a murderer.”

Jack met his challenge without flinching. “Not by choice. This role has been forced upon you. I do not believe you are a vengeful man.”

Belas turned his head abruptly. “I am not a man at all, Yianni. I am a *vrykolakas*. A half-man. The people here call me a devil.”

“They call me an *exotiko*,” Jack said, “so that makes us both liminal. I do not care. I have always been so. Maybe I am less of a man than you because of this. At least you fight the distinction, whereas I merely accept it.”

“No,” said Belas. “No.”

He leaned forward and kissed Jack as gently as the first time. There was a question in it, one Jack answered willingly. Belas increased the pressure of the kiss, demanding more, and it was matched, offered openly. It was different this time, not an embrace in anger or from need, but one born from desire.

Belas touched him, stroked him with his hands moving lower to unbutton and undress and caress. Jack squirmed and turned his head, embarrassed by how badly he wanted Belas and half-afraid of the knowledge that Belas wanted him, too.

“Ah. Don’t look away,” Belas scolded. “You wanted to see me, yes? So this is your punishment. You must look at me.”

Jack laughed, and then Belas caught his head with his free hand, gripping a handful of his hair to bring his reluctant gaze forward.

“Look at me.”

Jack looked. His breath was shallow, whether from the slow strokes of Belas's hand or from the expression in his eyes, he did not know. His lips parted to invite a kiss, but Belas smiled and shook his head.

"Not yet. You cannot concentrate on a kiss with your eyes open."

Belas slid his thumb up and over Jack's erection, and then lifted his hand and anointed his lips with the same clear, viscid liquid that smeared his belly. Belas rubbed his thumb over his lower lip and into Jack's mouth.

Jack whimpered. The taste repelled him as much as it excited him. Belas unbuttoned Jack's shirt and slid a finger across his chest. "Look." Belas touched him again, harder this time, his fingernails suddenly sharp. The skin was scored white beneath his touch, and Jack took a breath as, in its wake, there came the brilliant red of blood, a thin line of it that welled and shone.

Belas touched it, drew along the cut with his forefinger and then painting the blood onto Jack's lips. This time, Jack tasted it willingly, copper mixed with musk, a silky texture that lay on his tongue.

"Yianni," purred Belas, his hand dropping down again. He smiled into Jack's eyes as he stroked him, setting a slow, strong rhythm that echoed through every taut line of Jack's body. He leaned forward, altered the angle and pressure of his touch, and licked at Jack's lips. The blood was drying. He gave it life again and Jack sighed and lifted his head for a harder kiss.

"Look at me," Belas whispered, just as Jack's eyes closed.

He struggled to obey and flinched from Belas's expression as if the sun now shone after midnight, bright and fierce in the heavens of the shrine. There was nowhere else to look. Belas filled his vision, and with that image seared to his dazzled eyes there came a dry, scorching lust that momentarily overwhelmed all else.

Jack forgot to breathe, caught and pinned under that gaze. For a crazed moment, he wondered if a *vrykolakas* had the power of a basilisk, but he knew he was not stone. He was too much willing flesh and eager

blood. There was nothing else, nothing that mattered save for their gaze locked tight.

He wanted to close his eyes. He wanted to hide and deny what he felt, but he could not. The punishment was apt indeed.

The lamp snuffed out when Belas finally kissed him again and claimed back the blood and the taste of sex he'd daubed upon him. Jack cried out in the darkness, suddenly free, suddenly aware.

It was only later, as they sprawled together in warmth, when he was conscious of Belas's weight in his arms and could feel the gentle, sweet-painful nuzzle at the wound to his chest, that Jack realised he had not coughed blood since Belas had come to him.

Chapter Ten

As he walked into Fira, Jack thought the central square looked different. It puzzled him as he scanned the dusty pavements thronging with people gossiping or bartering for goods, and then he forgot about it when he spotted Koubelos.

His foreman sat on one of the long blocks of marble dumped at the side of the square by an eparch two generations ago. The stone was to have been used in the construction of a magnificent church, but on receiving the bill, the eparch declared the marble was faulty and he would not pay. The quarrymen refused to receive it back, and so the blocks had been abandoned to become a type of civic bench, claimed by none and used by everyone.

Koubelos sat there now, his hands in his lap and his head bowed. Jack took a tentative step towards him, unwilling to intrude upon his solitude, and then he remembered what McKeown had said and so moved forward quickly.

He came to a halt in front of the foreman and offered, "Good day."

Koubelos barely raised his eyes. "May God grant it so."

"How is Despoina?" Jack asked.

This at least brought more than a flicker of reaction. Koubelos lifted his head and stared up at him. His eyes looked hard and swollen, as if he had wept too many tears. The silent gaze was so heartbreaking that Jack glanced away. As he did so, he realised what was different about the square.

"The children," Jack said, sitting down beside him. "Where are the children?"

Koubelos's voice sounded husky with pain. "They are dying."

"All of them?"

"Not yet. But many of them are. Despoina was only the first. Now my son has it, and so too do the children of our neighbours and friends."

Jack had no idea what to say. He felt a fluttering cold in the pit of his stomach and he choked on the words as he asked, "But Despoina—she lives?"

"Barely." Koubelos sighed, a huge sound. "She lies as if dead. All of them do. They just dropped where they stood, as if an invisible hand had crushed them. My wife saw our Nikos with his friends. They were standing talking. And then—then he just fell down. His friends ran away, but by the evening they had all taken to their beds with the exact same thing. The others..." and Koubelos shrugged, looking around the square as if for the first time. "The others are being kept indoors, out of evil's way."

"McKeown told me Despoina lies with her eyes open, but she does not see and makes no sound," Jack said softly.

"Yes. Your friend the doctor. He has done his best for us, but..." Koubelos shook his head. "Medicine cannot always answer our prayers. This is not an affliction of the body to be cured by potions and pills. It is a plague that has been brought upon us."

"Plague?"

"As they had at Zephyria in my grandfather's time. All the inhabitants died, and it began by taking the children," Koubelos said.

"That was different," Jack protested. He had heard of the strange disease that decimated the once prosperous capital of the island of Melos, the volcanic sister of Santorini, and after he'd visited the crumbling, ruinous ghost town, he drew his own conclusions as to the nature of the malady. "That was a true pestilence—cholera—caused by bad water and poor sanitation. This is—this is..."

Koubelos looked at him. "What, Mr. Jack? What is it?"

Jack lifted his hands helplessly. "I don't know."

“Our neighbour says it is the Nereids who have come for the children,” Koubelos continued, as if Jack had not spoken. “My wife believes there is a different cause.”

“She thinks it is my fault,” Jack said. “McKeown told me that, also.”

For a silent moment, both men avoided looking at one another. Koubelos stared at the ground, and Jack followed the path of a beetle as it wandered across the pavement towards a pile of horse dung. The townsfolk glanced over in their direction, but none came to interrupt.

Jack realised there were fewer women around, just those who were old or widowed. He supposed the rest must be at home with their children. The idea that any of these people could imagine he was to blame for the ill-health of their children made him feel sick with a guilt not his to bear.

Koubelos seemed to read his mind, for he stirred and said, “I do not think it is your fault. How could I think such a thing? We worked together. I know you are not an *exotiko*. Our neighbour is wrong when she says you are a Nereid.”

Despite himself, Jack managed a smile. “I thought Nereids were female.”

“They are,” Koubelos said, “but they are always seeking lovers who will give them male offspring, and if they cannot find a mate, they will steal boy babies from human homes. You are tall and fair. You could be a Nereid’s son, if the idea were not so foolish.”

“And yet you think it is right to trust the old methods to save your children.”

“What other choice do I have?” Koubelos asked with a shrug. “My wife has already tried placing Despoina on the altar of St. Nicholas’ church overnight, but nothing happened. All we can do is wait and pray.”

“There must be a doctor on Syros,” Jack said. “Or better yet, McKeown might know of a specialist in Athens. A doctor versed in children’s illnesses. I will pay for him to come here.”

Koubelos gave a thin smile. “Offer to pay and you will take on the mantle of guilt in the minds of the townsfolk.”

Jack stood. "From what you say, most of them have already condemned me. Let them find me guilty, if only I can help your children."

"You are a good man," Koubelos said, looking up at Jack. "You have just been misled. We should never have opened that grave. It is as the priest predicted. Misfortune befalls those who disturb a revenant's tomb."

"Father Gregory told you it belonged to a revenant?" Jack asked, sharper than he'd intended. "When did he say this?"

Koubelos waved a hand. "No, not Father Gregory. Another priest, long since dead, from Oia. Father Makarias was his name. A famous exorcist back when the Church was not so strict on its dealings with superstition. I saw him when I was a boy and he already a very old man. He spoke of *tympanioi* and *vrykolakades*, of how he had closed the graves of several such revenants, and he would tell of one *vrykolakas* that troubled the island for centuries, but nobody knew where his grave lay, and so he could not be destroyed."

"And you believe him?"

"I do now." Koubelos twisted his hands and then said, almost apologetically, "It does not matter if the grave we opened belonged to the same revenant spoken of by Father Makarias. I have tried very hard, to be modern in my thinking, to put aside the gossip of the women and the superstition, but things have happened recently that cannot be explained. Ever since you opened the grave, there has been a presence around the town and at the site. Almost I would say it follows you about like a dog follows its master."

Jack stared across the square, unable to meet Koubelos's gaze. Instead he looked at the horizon, towards Emporio, which at that time of day lay hidden in the shadow of Mount Profitis Ilias.

His silence made Koubelos pause, and then the foreman said softly, "You know, don't you. You know you are haunted."

Jack grimaced and turned his head, his gaze still swerving from Koubelos. "The demarch's wife in Emporio said I was haunted. That a *vrykolakas* is to blame for my illness."

Koubelos hastily made the sign of the cross. "Charis Kragades is a wise woman. If she says such things, you must believe her. She is never wrong." He hesitated and then said, "I heard you have the wasting disease."

Jack finally looked at Koubelos, and upon his face saw neither rancour nor curiosity, but a serene empathy.

"It is true," he said, his throat thick with the words. "I have consumption. And I am glad this is not the disease visited upon your children. I would spare them this."

Koubelos nodded. "A *vrykolakas* takes the blood of his victims by divers means. This way is cruellest."

Jack felt the tickle in his throat and despaired. He had not coughed blood since just after midnight, but now it came back to him. He tasted the blood in his mouth even before he coughed, and the fit was so severe he bent double with it.

Koubelos stood and steadied Jack, heedless of the stares and sudden chatter of the passers-by. He watched dispassionately as Jack coughed up one and then two mouthfuls of bloodied saliva, the second so bright it looked like fresh paint. Together they sat and Jack clung to Koubelos's hand for support as he coughed again and again until tears of effort rolled down his face.

"Koubelos," Jack rasped, shaken by another cough, "I do not want Despoina or any of your children to die."

"Neither do I, but we are helpless in the face of death."

Jack waved a hand irritably and drew Koubelos nearer. "If you will not let me send to Athens, you must take whatever precautions your wife and neighbour deem fit." When his foreman tried to protest, he hissed, "Listen to me! That shrine in the rock, the one with the lustral basin. There was another room, one you did not go inside."

Koubelos nodded. "I remember. You told me to fetch the doctor."

Jack hesitated. "Forgive me. I did not want you to see what lay inside. There are skeletons in there, the bodies of children. They were sacrificed

and left unburied. Perhaps it is they who demand vengeance, not the man we uncovered from his grave.”

Koubelos went pale. “Children? They killed children?”

“To stop the volcano,” Jack said. “They must have been desperate.”

An expression of disgust crossed Koubelos’s face. He turned his head and spat in the dust. “I hope their murderer was destroyed by the mountain.”

Jack put a hand to his throat. He felt as if he’d been strangled. His breath wheezed, crackling his voice. “I hope so, too. But we will never know, so the best we can do is to bury those children with the proper rites.”

Now Koubelos stood and eyed Jack with disbelief. “You are willing to do this? When you refused to give credence to anything Father Gregory said about the skeleton?”

Jack wiped a smear of blood from his lips and looked up. “I am willing to do anything to save your children. They are as innocent in this as were those poor infants slaughtered four thousand years ago. If I am haunted, then the haunting should be on me alone.”

Koubelos dropped to his knees and clutched at Jack’s hands, bowing his head over them. “May the saints protect you, Mr. Jack. What you suggested, we will bring about. The town will mourn those children as if they had been our own.”

* * *

Jack bid farewell to Koubelos as McKeown came over. The doctor looked tired, and when he took off his hat to fan the perspiration from his face, Jack could see that his expression had a forced joviality.

“I’ve just been down to Emporio to enquire after your health,” McKeown said.

Jack smiled. “As you see.”

McKeown glanced at the piles of dust kicked over the bloodied saliva and sat down next to him. “Hmm. Yes, but what about that gash across your chest?”

Jack put a hand to his body, surprised. He’d forgotten the wound that Belas had opened, but now he could feel his shirt encrusted with dried blood. When he looked down, he saw a series of rusty blossoms. He wiped his hand against his thigh and said, “It is nothing. Just a minor injury. I scraped myself against some rocks on the site.”

McKeown nodded, seemingly satisfied by the lie. “Just remember to clean it, lad. You don’t want an infection in it. Not with what’s going around at the moment.”

Jack pulled the lapels of his jacket closer across his chest. “You mean the children’s sickness?”

“Not just the children.” McKeown fiddled with the ends of the straw that escaped the weave of the hat’s brim. “An old man died in Emporio in the early hours. When I arrived this morning to see you, Father Gregory was waiting. He asked me to take a look at the corpse.

“You know what he’s like,” McKeown continued after a pause. “Sticks his oar in everywhere and always has something to say. Typical priest. But this was the first time I’ve ever seen him really unsettled. He told me you ran out of church yesterday after you’d vomited blood in the sanctuary, and that the demarch believed you to be under the curse of a *vrykolakas*. And then he said he’d heard of the sickness of Despoina Lemos and the other children, and that this was also the work of the *vrykolakas*...”

“They do believe it,” Jack said. “I told Koubelos to bury the bones from the shrine. It might help to give the townsfolk a focus. Perhaps it might help their own children. But still... what of the old man?”

“You’re soft, lad. But it’s your excavation and I think you’re doing the right thing. I’m not a superstitious man, but there was something about that shrine with all those bones scattered about. Just horrible.”

McKeown squinted at his hat and turned it around in his hands. "As for the old man... a funny thing, this. I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it for myself. The corpse was completely drained of blood."

Jack forced himself to swallow. "How is that possible?"

"It's not," McKeown said grimly. "The only way to do it is by hanging the body for several days and letting the blood drain off. They do it in the Middle East with butchered animals. I've never seen it done with a human being, though. In any case, the old man had been hale and hearty in the evening. It would be impossible to drain a corpse in so short a time."

"Little wonder that Father Gregory was afraid," Jack commented, his hand going to his chest again to flatten protectively over the gash.

McKeown laughed without humour. "That wasn't the thing that scared him. But anyway, I didn't come over here to talk about mindless superstition and all that bloody claptrap."

Jack raised an eyebrow. "You came to ask after my health."

"Yes, that too." McKeown got to his feet and looked around the square. "Actually, I came to invite you to a small do we're having tonight at Eutimia's. It's du Lac's birthday. You know Jean-Marie, don't you? Obnoxious little bugger, but I suppose one can be pleasant to him since it's his fortieth."

Jack hid a smile. "I know him a little. I didn't know it was his birthday."

"Neither did anybody else," McKeown said. "Eutimia did, of course, but then she seems to know bloody everything. Anyway, you're very welcome to join the festivities. Seven o'clock sharp, out on the terrace."

"Is that wise? What with the town almost in mourning for their children, might it not be seen as a little insensitive?"

McKeown shrugged. "Damned if I know, lad. I'm just the messenger. It's up to you if you come or stay away. Would be nice to see you there, though." He jammed his hat on his head and adjusted the brim. "Tell you what. If you decide to come, I'll give you a letter of introduction for Arthur Evans. I take it you still want to go to Crete and speak to him?"

Jack wrinkled his nose. "I'm burying the bodies, remember."

"Yes. But the evidence still exists. Or will you just ignore it?"

"I can't ignore it," Jack said, remembering his conversation with Belas. "But neither can I ignore the needs of the people here. I've made my decision."

McKeown snorted. "God help you if ever this gets out. I wouldn't like to be in your shoes when the university calls you to task for this."

"Then someone less squeamish than I can obtain the necessary permits and exhume the bodies once more," Jack said. "I will hide nothing in my report. And I will tell Mr. Evans what I have done, too."

"He won't judge you any harsher than the rest of us," McKeown said. He touched his fingers to the brim of his hat. "I'll be off. See you tonight, lad."

The doctor was a few feet away when Jack remembered something he'd said and so blurted out, "What was it that scared Father Gregory so badly if not the old man's loss of blood?"

McKeown turned around, his face mottled by the shadow of his hat. He lowered his voice, but did not come any closer.

"It was the look on the old man's face," he said. "Absolute terror. He was literally scared to death."

* * *

Jack left the town square a while later and walked, deep in thought, back to Kera Maria's. She must have been watching for him, for she ran onto the steps at his approach, wringing her hands and exclaiming at his condition.

"They said you were lost forever," she cried, herding him into the kitchen despite his protests. "Even though the English doctor came here to say you were at Emporio, people talked. They said you had discovered the bones of a monster in that trench. A fearsome monster, like a Minotaur."

"Not a monster," Jack said patiently, "but the bones of children."

Kera Maria crossed herself and then clutched at his jacket fearfully, so he was obliged to tell her, with some amendments and ellipses, what had happened to him since he'd left her house.

She interrupted only to express her opinion of Charis. "She thinks she is very fine, Yianni, and they say she has a Nereid's blood. A very guileful woman. You have done well to escape her snares." Then she was silent again until the completion of the tale.

"My poor Yiannakki," she sighed, "how hard life is for you! But in all honesty, I cannot believe you have the wasting disease. There were no signs of it before now. It is not an illness that comes on suddenly. It creeps and creeps like a sea-mist."

She shook her head vigorously as if her denial would banish the consumption. "You must go to Crete on the next steamer and see this other doctor. He will tell you, I am sure. You do not have the wasting disease."

Jack smiled. "I would like to believe you, but..."

"But nothing! And as for now, I will make you an infusion to stop the cough." Kera Maria turned abruptly and busied herself with taking various ingredients from cupboards and piling them on the kitchen table. Her voice was high and shrill as she continued, "It will need to cool before you can drink it, so first I say you should get some rest. Again you come home covered in dust and also blood, and this is not good, Yianni. You should spend more time here, living quietly and safely."

Touched by her concern, Jack said, "I will be quite all right."

Kera Maria sniffed fiercely. "I heard you were in the square, so I put the copper on the fire to boil water. I knew you would be full of dust. Go clean yourself and later I will wash those clothes."

Chastened, Jack slunk out of the kitchen and across the courtyard to his rooms. His bedroom door was still locked, but Kera Maria had ventured into the small bathroom and filled the tub with hot water. Jack dipped in his hand to test the temperature and then began to undress. His shirt came off with some difficulty as the fabric stuck to the cut

across his chest, and he discovered a host of other scrapes and bruises that he attributed to crawling about in the shrine.

When he dropped his shoes to the floor, they raised a cloud of dust that made him cough. He made a half-hearted attempt to reach the sink and was surprised when he saw no blood. He raised his eyebrows at his reflection, and then continued undressing, dropping his clothes into an untidy pile and shoving them across the room with one foot.

He climbed into the bath and made to sit back, only to encounter warm, wet flesh already sprawled there. Jack yelped in shock and started forward, splashing water over the side of the tub. His protests were stifled when he was pulled back against the body behind him and embraced.

Jack stared at the arms wrapped around him and raised his hands to curl about the tattooed wrists. It was strange to feel Belas's naked body curved behind him, strange and disturbing. He was not sure he liked the sensation, and so his tone was accusatory when he asked, "What are you doing?"

Belas nuzzled at his neck. "You wanted intimacy. Is this not what lovers do?"

Jack gripped the sides of the tub and edged forward out of Belas's grasp. "I have not the slightest idea. It seems rather odd to want to share one's bath water with someone else."

"We've shared more intimate fluids," Belas reminded him, amused. "However, if my presence here disturbs you so much, I shall go."

He shifted in the water and Jack turned his head to stare at him, curious as to how he looked naked. Then, aware that his interest was unbecoming, Jack fixed his gaze resolutely at the side of the bath instead.

"You don't have to leave," he said. "I can learn to share most things."

Belas chuckled and slid back into the tub. "Then share an embrace! It is not half as dangerous as you suspect."

Jack allowed himself to be held, and gradually he relaxed. It still felt strange. The layer of water between them made him more aware of his

body than ever before, and this in turn made him shy. He wished he could blame the heat of the water for the blush that touched his face. Instead, he forced calm into his voice and said curiously, "Who are you?"

"You know what I am."

"That is not what I asked."

Belas sounded surprised. "True. My apologies. I have become so used to people asking me what I am, I fear I've lost sight of the more personal questions. Why did I never meet your like before?"

"Because I am unique."

"Ah, and you are, but history repeats itself and so do personalities. Had you not realised that yet?"

"I can honestly say I have never considered such a ludicrous idea," Jack said, amused by such a thought.

"It's true. But still, there was once a man who thought like you, unafraid and dare I say fascinated with me? Intelligent and enquiring and with such enthusiasm for his work..." Belas ticked off each of the points with a caress.

Jack laughed. "You're making me jealous."

"Don't be. He was from Asia Minor and for all that Hippocrates rates their water and air the sweetest in the world, he tasted not one half as sweet as you."

Belas paused to sink his teeth just deep enough into Jack's neck to draw a bead of blood, and then he licked at it before he resumed his tale.

"He did not stay here long. A month or so, and then he was away to the mainland. He was collecting tales of myth and superstition for a book."

Jack squirmed to escape another ticklish caress. "How very appropriate."

Belas let him go. "I thought so. It was a pleasure to disabuse him of his ideas."

"What was his name?"

"Pausanias."

“What!” Jack struggled to turn around, splashing water in all directions and entangling himself with Belas until he managed to stare up at him in astonishment. “But Pausanias lived in the second century. How can you—are you... You knew Pausanias!”

Belas lay back in the warm water and smiled. “Only you could be more impressed that I knew Pausanias than by the fact I’ve lived for so many years.”

Jack narrowed his eyes. “How many years, exactly?”

Belas gazed at the ceiling and made some calculations. “Four thousand, three hundred, and sixty-seven.”

Jack stared at him.

“I might be a few years younger than that,” Belas said. “After that amount of time, birthdays cease to be so important.”

Still Jack stared. Finally he asked, “Don’t you ever wish you could die?”

“Yes,” Belas said, and lifted a hand to touch Jack’s face. “But not now.”

Jack brushed away the caress. He climbed out of the bath and wrapped himself in a towel, and then came back to crouch beside the tub. “You can’t pretend you care for me. Not so soon.”

“I do not pretend anything. After four millennia, I have nothing to lose.” Belas’s voice was hard, but his gesture, as he reached out and stroked a wet line down the side of Jack’s face, felt gentle. When Jack made no response, he continued, “If it makes it easier for you to bear the taint of my affection, then know it is not given lightly, and is earned by very few.”

“The rest you kill,” Jack said without thinking. The words hung between them for a moment, and then he lifted his gaze, ashamed. “I’m sorry.”

Belas sank down in the bath until the hair at his nape grew dark and wet. When next he spoke, his breath disturbed the surface of the water and created ripples. “Only twice have I been freed from the grave. Once in

error during the Hellenistic period and now again by you. All other times, I have been raised for a purpose—to cause havoc and wreak revenge on behalf of the living.”

He paused and watched the water calm itself before him. “The revenant who is called must obey the one who freed him. We have no choice in this matter. We are like puppets with no free will.”

Jack shifted position and leaned his arms on the side of the tub. “You are like a djinni in a bottle.”

“But without the three wishes,” said Belas. “And with far less power.”

“You can terrify and you can kill,” Jack said pointedly. “What other powers do you need?”

Belas smiled. “What, indeed? The answer, Yianni, is that every revenant who walks the earth desires the same power—the ability to exact a personal revenge or to fulfil a certain obligation.”

Jack put his chin on his arm. “And you told me from the first that I did not feature in your desire. Your need for revenge does not touch me, but what of the old man in Emporio, found drained of blood. Is he the one you seek vengeance upon?”

“No.” Belas tilted his head and slid even further into the water until it lapped at the sides of his face. His hair drifted, a halo of silvered bubbles caught amongst the copper and blond and then he sat up abruptly and slicked back his hair.

“No,” he said again, aware of Jack’s gentle scrutiny, “although he was a descendant of the last man to raise me and I have waited a long time to revenge myself on that family.”

“Since the seventeenth century,” Jack said, remembering the gold coin found in the grave. “That’s surely the blink of an eye for one who has lived over four thousand years.”

Belas showed his teeth. “Ah, but since then I have been unable to move from my grave and believe me, Yianni, in such circumstances it is only thoughts of revenge that keep a man warm.”

“But you did not need to kill him,” Jack said stubbornly. “You did it for sport. He is not the man who raised you or imprisoned you, just a descendant of that man.”

“The sins of the fathers,” Belas murmured. “And I did not do it for sport. It had become necessary to take blood from elsewhere.”

Jack lifted his head and looked at Belas in horror. “Because of me? I was the only one to feed you before, so what has changed? Do I not give you enough? Here!” He unfolded his arms and thrust one out towards Belas. “Take as much as you need. It does not matter to me.”

Belas closed a hand around Jack’s wrist and stroked the pad of his thumb over the flesh that guarded his pulse. “You wanted more. You wanted to be my lover. And you were right in what you said last night.”

He paused, his mouth twisting into a wry smile. “I am not a vengeful man. I have been driven to many acts of violence and cruelty, but they do not touch me the way your acceptance did. I cannot harm you, and so I will need to feed from others to save you.”

“You cannot save me!” Jack said. “What is the good in saving a dead man? I gave myself to you because I am dying. You cannot deny me this purpose now.”

“You only think you are dying. I will not help you along that path.”

“Then instead I have the death of the old man on my conscience.”

“I have told you, he deserved to die.” Belas sat up straight and stroked Jack’s arm, moving up from the wrist to the inner elbow. “There are things you can never know or understand, Yianni. Things I would protect you from if we are to continue like this.”

Jack tried to pull away. “I want you to take sustenance from me alone.”

“I cannot do that.” Belas tightened his grip. “I need to kill. There are far too many ancient wrongs to right and they cannot go unpunished.”

Jack mewled in sudden, shocked protest as Belas sliced open a long, deep gash along his inner forearm. He tried to free himself, but Belas still

held tight, and so he watched the slow run of blood ooze from the wound to drip down into the bathwater, where it spread and blossomed.

“My grievances are like this,” Belas said, painting his finger through the blood as if oblivious to Jack’s gasped complaint. “When fresh, it gives pain. It looks obscene and feels sharp. But then...” and he tugged hard, forcing Jack to rise and lean over the tub until his injured arm was submerged beneath the water. “Then it can be buried. It becomes clean.”

Jack watched as the blood washed away from the wound in drifting tendrils. Before the ripples calmed, he could see the cut was clean and deep. The heart of it showed gory scarlet, but it no longer bled.

“Resentment can be buried and forgotten,” Belas said. “So too can hatred. But when vengeance has been sworn, the wound will never heal.”

He lifted Jack’s arm from the water and bent it upwards. Jack bit back a cry as the sudden movement made the injury throb with heat and blood spurted afresh. It ran down his arm, mingling with the water, dark red trails gathering at his elbow to drip into the bath and to splash the sides of the tub.

“It hurts, doesn’t it?” Belas asked huskily, his eyes very bright as he looked at Jack’s agonised expression. “It hurts, and that is the only reason you know you’re still alive. Now imagine such pain for four millennia, and then tell me to forget it.”

Jack tore away and stumbled back from the bath, clutching his arm. Blood spattered across the towel around his waist and smeared over his body. His forearm felt numb with pain and his eyes stung with tears as he retreated across the room. All he could see was Belas’s hungry, avid expression. It frightened him far more than the pain, and so he fled into the corridor and to the safety of his bedroom.

* * *

The blood continued to flow, dripping onto the rugs on the floor and staining the quilt on the bed. Jack sat and stared at his arm, cold with panic. He’d wrapped a clean shirt around it, but no matter how tightly he

twisted the cloth, the blood still bloomed through. Fear churned within him and he felt desperately lonely. Kera Maria would help, he was sure of it. He could invent a story as to how he had cut himself so badly, and she could fetch McKeown.

Jack got to his feet and staggered into the wall. It felt chilly on his bare skin and he leaned against it, shivering with shock. He could smell whitewash and timbers. He turned his head away from the tickle of dust in his nose, anxious lest the dust got into his throat and made him cough.

“Let me take care of it,” Belas said from the doorway.

Jack hugged his arm to his chest. “It hurts.”

“I know.” Belas crossed the threshold and came towards him, his expression one of tenderness. “It was meant to be a demonstration, not a punishment. I can stop the pain for you. Just trust me, Yianni.”

“Trust you? I don’t think I can.” Jack shouldered himself away from the wall and stood upright, swaying a little. “I wish I could, truly I do. But the old man of Emporio, these other deaths you spoke of... I can’t condone that.”

Belas watched him backing away and held out his hands for understanding. “You know what I am. You know what I need to survive in this form.”

“Yes! But you could take it from me, and only from me.” Jack leaned against the wardrobe and pressed himself flat to the wooden doors. At his feet was the tea chest, and he glanced down at it. The lid was still ajar and even from where he stood, Jack could see that the skeleton was no longer inside. He jerked his gaze back to Belas, suddenly terrified.

Belas knew. “All this time and you’ve never really believed it, have you? You didn’t believe that I was the corpse you dug out of the ground. What did you think I was, some greedy, perverse little peasant? Not I, Yiannakki. Oh no, not I.”

Jack shook his head. “I don’t know what I thought. I—I...”

“Finally, you come back to empiricism,” Belas said, taking another step towards him. “You know I am real, that I live. Your senses have not

lied to you. But seeing is believing, is it not? And this is the first time you have really seen me, seen what I spring from and to what I shall return if I am denied sustenance.”

Jack gripped his shirt tight around his arm and hissed as the wound throbbed. His hand was sticky with blood and it seemed that each fresh surge weakened him further. He felt cold and shivered despite the comforting warmth of the wood behind him. He searched for something to say, anything that would help sway Belas to sympathy.

“You said that those who raise a revenant can control them,” he said desperately. “That the revenant must meet all the commands of the one who called it forth. Therefore, as I raised you, I command you to stop these killings and to take only my blood.”

Belas laughed, but kindly. “You did not raise me, Yianni. It was accidental. Therefore, I cannot be controlled by anybody. My actions are entirely self-motivated, and as I told you before, the sole purpose of a revenant is in exacting revenge.”

“You cannot be so cruel,” Jack whispered. “These people you will kill, what harm have they done you? So say their forefathers committed some crime against you. What is done is done. Why can you not leave it to rest and forgo your vengeance? For if you murder these poor people, what is to stop them from becoming revenants and seeking you out?”

Belas smirked. “The Orthodox Church,” he said. He closed the door into the bedroom and took Jack’s bathrobe from its hook. “Don’t you see? With very few exceptions, everybody who dies on this island is buried on consecrated ground with a proper funeral to speed them on their way. This ensures that all but the most restless souls remain firmly within their graves. And if by chance any should wish to wander...”

Jack flinched away from him as Belas came closer and draped the bathrobe around his shoulders. Even though his head was turned, he still listened as Belas continued. “If they wander, they will be found and laid to rest by the priest. The Church is afraid of revenants. They think we disprove the power of the Resurrection through free will, although it is not free will that makes us seek revenge, but the natural order of things.

It is a justice that has no recourse to the law courts. That is why no victim of mine has ever yet sought me out. They knew they had to pay for the sins of their fathers.”

Belas paused in his speech and touched his hand to Jack’s cheek. “You’re so cold,” he said softly. His hand slid down over Jack’s neck to rest over his collarbones. “You’ve lost too much blood. Please let me help you.”

Jack pulled the bathrobe closer around him, jostling away Belas’s proprietary hands and saying waspishly, “I thought you didn’t want my blood.”

“Your stubbornness will be the death of you.”

Jack turned his head. “Tell me why you seek vengeance so much that four thousand years have not blunted your desire.”

Belas let go and moved away.

“It is not just to punish those who raised you for their own purposes, is it?” Jack said, his voice stronger at Belas’s uncertain reaction. “How did you die? Were you murdered, and thus you seek your killer still?”

Belas stopped beside the bedside table and picked up the reddish-black sherd Jack had chosen a few days ago. He held it up as if admiring it, and then he said, “I committed suicide.”

Jack stared at him. “Why?”

“Suicides are the most liminal of every society. They are denied proper burial. People whisper about them, fear them, perhaps even envy them. But most importantly, suicides are the restless dead, haunted during life and haunted ever after. We have nothing to lose, no place in Heaven to regain. The suicide is always vengeful.”

He tossed the sherd into the air and caught it again, closing his fist around it. “I killed myself knowing what I would become. It was the only way I could ensure my revenge would be complete and absolute.”

“And is it?”

“Not yet.” Belas stared at his fist. “I cannot cross salt water and so I cannot kill the man who murdered my children.”

Jack fought off a wave of dizziness and said, “Your children... Oh, dear God. The children in the shrine, the sacrifice to the volcano...”

Belas nodded slightly as if his thoughts were elsewhere. “It was the only burial I could give to my woman and my children. I wish you had not found it. You were meant to abandon the site and dig at Akrotiri instead, but I underestimated your tenacity.”

“I didn’t know,” Jack protested.

“And would you have left it alone, had I told you to do so? I think not. Your curiosity is one of the things I find so attractive about you, and I would not ask you to be otherwise.”

Jack was almost afraid to ask, but he persisted. “Is that why the village children are sick, because I disturbed the burial of your children?”

Belas snorted. “Yes. But it is not entirely my doing. Natural justice, as I said. An eye for an eye, and so it will continue until I have my revenge.”

“Why did they do it?”

Jack watched as Belas looked at the sherd in his hand. A smear of dark sandstone had scribbled across his palm. When he spoke, his voice was devoid of any intonation, but the more he said, the faster the words came, until it was difficult for Jack to understand the story he was being told.

“You saw for yourself the sickness in my bones. It passed to my children, too, but in them it was more marked. In those times it was not a defect, not something to be reviled, but was a sign the infant was favoured by the gods. Those of us who were special in some way were branded to show our status.”

Belas indicated the blue and red tattoos snaking across his body. “That all of my family were thus touched was seen to be a great gift to the town, but the god-given must one day be returned whence they came upon the demands of the heavens.

“We were prosperous. We lacked nothing. The mountain would rumble and shake and sometimes houses would collapse, but this was nothing unusual. We would appease the mountain god with blood spilled

from a chicken or goat, and all would be well again. Until one day, the shepherds came down from the mountain and said cracks had appeared, jagged splitting cracks from the summit to halfway down the slope. And we went to see for ourselves, and smoke rose from the cracks with a dreadful hissing sound and a stench like death itself.

“No animal would go near the mountain. The birds would not fly over it. For days the ground shook and more cracks appeared until the earth opened and showed us the heart of the volcano. The high priest decided more was needed to appease the mountain god than a chicken or goat.

“He took my eldest son first. My woman wept and hid the little ones against her skirts. I watched it all. I had to know how he died. The high priest slit his throat, just one easy cut, and then he carved the flesh from the bones.”

He lifted his head to look at Jack and his expression was terrible in its agony. “It takes a skilled huntsman half an hour to butcher an animal carcass. For the untrained to do the same to a human corpse... it takes much longer.”

Jack shook his head in horror, his injured arm forgotten.

“When the flesh was stripped off and my son was no longer my son, the priest cooked him. In this.” He held out the sherd. “I cannot tell you what it smelled like or how he tasted. I know, but I cannot say it.”

Belas dropped the sherd to the floor and trod on it, crushing it to dust. His eyes shone with tears but his voice remained level as he said, “And when we had all eaten my child, when I could not bear the thought of what had been done any longer, I vomited up his flesh upon the altar. The high priest struck me and said I had committed a sacrilegious act. The air outside the shrine was thick with yellow, stinking death sent by the mountain god, the priest said, as a sign of his anger.

“With his hands stained with blood up to his elbows, he took my second child, my only daughter. She did not go willingly and he gave her no opium to dull the pain. She died knowing what was being done to her, knowing that her father was a coward.”

Jack interrupted. “You were no coward.”

“He took them all,” Belas continued, ignoring him. “He took them and I did not stop him because I was so afraid of the mountain. My woman was not scared. Nothing could be more painful, she said, than seeing her children torn from her and murdered so obscenely. She snatched up the cooking-pot and hurled it at the priest, screaming at him.”

Belas smiled almost fondly at the memory. “He killed her, too, of course. It was forbidden to touch a priest in anger.

“He saved my youngest till last, a babe only a season old. He smashed the little one’s skull open upon the altar and his head exploded like an over-ripe peach. I cannot remember what happened after that, but I know I must have fought with the priest, because suddenly I had the knife and the acolytes were helping him from the ground. He cursed me where I stood, cursed me amidst the blood and flesh of my family, and so it came to me then what I had to do.

“I cursed him and then myself and called upon the gods to grant me no peace in death until I had avenged my family. And then I took the knife and stabbed myself, opened up the veins I had seen him opening on my children’s bodies... and I bled to death beside them.”

Jack took a soft, shuddering breath. “My God. Belas—I... I wish—but what then? You were not buried where you lay. And what of the high priest?”

Belas shrugged. “His acolytes removed my corpse from the shrine and on his orders they started to cut the flesh from the bones. He thought that, by devouring me, he could also consume my spirit and my curse. But by then it was too late—the mountain was shaking itself apart. They abandoned my corpse and ran to save their own miserable lives. The priest escaped ahead of them and fled across the water. It took another week before the mountain erupted and blew away half of the island, and by that time I had moved what was left of my physical body to somewhere safe, the very same cist grave where you found me. I knew the priest would come back one day. I knew I would be able to have my revenge.”

“But you have never managed it,” Jack said, feeling the injustice of it all.

“No. Not yet. He stayed on Crete and I could not follow him. His family returned here, but I have never been free to harm them—until now. And there is one thing more...”

Belas fixed Jack with his gaze. “When I cursed him, I begged that he might not die, that he may live as a revenant in perpetual life until I found him again.”

He smiled. “I do not even know if that is possible. To live forever or to live each life with the memory of all those that went before. This is what I asked. Perhaps my plea was granted, perhaps not. And now I shall find out, because you have set me free.”

Jack lifted his arm and pulled away the cloth from the wound. “I hope you find him,” he whispered and offered the open injury to Belas. “I want you to be at peace.”

Belas fell upon the gift of fresh blood with a muffled groan of need.

Chapter Eleven

The day began differently to any other morning Jack had spent on the island or indeed in his entire life. Woken by the cold slap of the wind against the roof, he came to his senses to realise he was not alone. Asleep beside him lay Belas, with his copper-streaked hair tumbled into his eyes and his skin warm, alive.

Instinctively, Jack recoiled as far away as possible. He crushed against the wall, feeling the whitewash cold on his back, and stared at him. There was not much room in the narrow bed, and it was uncomfortable to lie against the wall, so after a moment Jack had advanced back across the mattress. Self-conscious, he lay as rigid as a corpse, his breath shallow in case he woke Belas.

Questions crowded his mind, but one returned insistently—why did he have Belas in his bed?

There was an obvious answer. Jack felt his blush as he slid his hands over his body beneath the sheets, blindly testing each new bruise and cut to see if he remembered its origin. The scratch to his chest was still there, tender and raised but healing well. The deep gash in his arm had scabbed over, the skin puckered at the edges to suggest he would wear that scar for life.

Jack brushed over a clutch of bruises he knew he'd gained from his work in the shrine, and then he stopped, suddenly afraid, when he encountered more bruises in the hollow of his hips. The pattern of soft pain was recognisable, and as Jack matched each bruise to a fingertip, sensation overwhelmed him.

He remembered his voice, greedy in its demands and shocked into gasps by harsh reality. The scent of Eutimia's roses and the distant drift

of wood smoke, the crush of the rose petals against his face and the darkness of the shadows. He remembered the feel of Belas behind him, inside him, hurting him, loving him. And he remembered the taste of his own blood.

Long, raking scratches ran down his thighs. Jack rested his hands over them and fought back the desire his memories roused. He tried to recall what had happened at the party before Belas arrived, and slowly, each moment emerging into view as if it were imaged on a lanternslide, it began to return to him.

* * *

He arrived late to the party. Kera Maria had furnished him with a gift for du Lac, although Jack wasn't entirely sure the Frenchman needed a pot of Greek honey and a slab of damp feta wrapped in muslin. Du Lac welcomed both Jack and his gifts with a display of bonhomie that made Jack realise the Frenchman was very drunk. This was confirmed when du Lac talked for fully ten minutes about the fascination he had for the glaze applied to the pot containing the honey with as much seriousness as he discussed red-figure amphorae.

Jack finally made his excuses and slipped away. Eutimia stood guard at the door to the hotel, her black gaze sweeping the terraces with military precision. As soon as she spotted any guest who might be in need of assistance, she would snap her fingers and shout an order at one of the waiters she'd brought in especially for the celebration. She did not delegate any of her staff to Jack, but instead came towards him herself when she saw he was alone.

"Mr. Hunter," she began. "I am surprised you are here."

Jack smiled politely. "McKeown invited me." He paused, looking down at her stiffly held posture and unbending expression. "I'm sorry if we frightened you the other day. With the femur, I mean. It was—"

"I know what it was," Eutimia interrupted. "And I know what has happened because of it. You brought a human bone to my hotel, a corpse

to my breakfast table! Even if I could forgive such wilful desecration, there was worse still. The bone you brought here belonged to a *vrykolakas!*”

“I didn’t know that, then,” Jack protested.

Eutimia almost shook with intensity as she leaned closer to him, standing on tiptoe to thrust her face towards his. “There were signs that, had you not been so arrogant and glory-seeking, you would have heeded for the good of this town and all its inhabitants! Koubelos Lemos told you, did he not? He warned you that you were tampering with one of the restless dead, but oh, you knew so much better than he! And so, too, you were above the laws of the Church when again and again you rejected the help of Father Gregory!”

Jack looked away, embarrassed by her words and a little alarmed by the vehemence with which they were delivered. “I’m sorry,” he said again.

“I hear too what they say in Emporio, that the *vrykolakas* has ensnared you. Let it take his soul! I said to them. You were cursed from the moment you came to Santorini. The cursed *exotiko*. Who would think such demons would want to take their own?”

Eutimia emphasised her speech by stabbing her forefinger at Jack’s chest. He took a step backwards with a hiss of pain as she jabbed the wound Belas had given him. She did not notice, seeing only that he had given ground to her, and so she continued. “And now I hear about the bones of children left unburied! Little wonder it is that our children are sickening and dying when everybody knows it is the living dead who bring with them pestilence and decay. Where walks the revenant and his servants, so shall there be sickness and rot.”

Jack glanced around, anxious that none of the other guests should hear them. The party flowed on, seemingly oblivious, and so he said, “I have asked Koubelos to arrange a proper burial for the children. I am sure, once this takes place, the children of Fira will be well again.”

“How do you know?” Eutimia demanded, her eyes glittering with furious, unshed tears. “Did *he* tell you that, and you believe him? What of those who are already dead? How will you make amends for them?”

Jack raised his hands helplessly. "I don't know."

"You should leave here. Leave here and never come back. Nobody wants you here and nobody will miss you when you're gone. So go!" Eutimia finished on a sob as tears began to spill onto her cheeks, and she whirled away from him into the bright interior of her hotel.

Troubled by the exchange, Jack stood for a moment beside the wall that divided the upper and middle terrace. From there he could see how the party was similarly divided, with the French gathered around du Lac and the table loaded with birthday gifts while the English hovered rather uncertainly at the periphery, talking amongst themselves and occasionally responding to French embraces with hearty guffaws and back-slapping. Bridging the gap between the two nationalities were the Greeks, both the staff and the few locals who'd attended.

And then there was him. He'd always known he was regarded as eccentric, but for the first time since he'd arrived, he felt himself to be truly an outsider. The realisation was a slow surfacing of awareness, its sting all the more deadly for it.

Jack decided to leave. Eutimia had been right, he thought. None of the crowd gathered for the party would miss him if he went. He was about to turn tail and flee when McKeown loomed out of the shadows on the lower terrace.

"There you are. About bloody time. I've been watching out for you, lad." He came close, unsteady on his feet. "D'you know what? Some blithering idiot's just given du Lac a piece of cheese. Cheese, I tell you! What is the world coming to when a man gets given cheese on his birthday?"

Jack was glad it was dark. "The French like cheese."

"True." McKeown appeared to give this some serious thought. "Not feta, though. Anyway, I'm glad you're here. How's the hurt?"

This time, Jack automatically touched his left arm, and then, when McKeown focused his gaze with a sharpness that belied his inebriated state, Jack quickly put his hand to his chest instead. The wound there

genuinely did hurt, bruised by Eutimia's prodding finger, and when Jack rubbed it, a film of blood came off onto his hand.

McKeown grabbed his hand and turned back the cuffs of his shirt. He squinted at the livid gash that ran from wrist to elbow, and then touched the skin around it. After a moment's inspection, he grunted and let go.

"You can't tell me you did that in your bloody shrine," he said gruffly.

"No. I didn't." Jack pulled down his sleeve and stroked out the cloth, each gesture meticulous.

McKeown watched him. "It's not my business, but..."

"It's not your business," Jack said and smiled. "Let's leave it at that, yes?"

"If you change your mind... Well, anyway." McKeown clapped his hands and rubbed them together. "This is a party. We should be enjoying ourselves. God knows the Frogs are, and so we may as well drink as much as we can while birthday boy is footing the bill."

"I don't drink," Jack reminded him, but McKeown summoned a waiter to bring two glasses of raki.

"Here," he said, thrusting one into Jack's hand. "Drink up. It's bloody good for getting over everything. Makes you forget."

"I don't need to forget anything."

"You're a bad liar." McKeown drank his raki in three long gulps and then signalled for another. "Bring the whole bottle," he called. He turned back to Jack and wagged a finger knowingly. "I saw you and Eutimia having a little confab and I can probably guess the gist of it."

Jack lifted the glass and inhaled the sharp scent of the raki. It brought tears to his eyes, and so he blinked them away, trying to push the drink back on McKeown. "It's not anything I haven't heard before. I was surprised at how..."

"Angry she is?" McKeown finished for him and raised an eyebrow when Jack stared. "She might be the biggest gossip in all of Hellas, but she does have a heart somewhere beneath that spiteful exterior."

“The children,” Jack said dully. “I did not think of that. She is surely related to one of the children who lies sick.”

McKeown shook his head and took the raki bottle from the waiter. He slopped out a measure into his glass, and then looked at Jack’s, tutting in disgust. “You should drink it, lad. Bloody teetotallers, it’s not natural. And that’s my opinion as a medical man.” He took a sip of raki and hissed in satisfaction. “But anyway, Eutimia only has one relative on the island, or she did have. That old man in Emporio I told you about this morning. He was her uncle or second cousin or something similar. Apparently she hadn’t spoken to him in years. Disapproved of his lifestyle, I suppose. He was fond of the moonshine.”

Jack listened, his unease growing. “You are sure?” he asked. “Eutimia is the blood-relative of this man and not connected by marriage?”

“You know what these islanders are like. All of them are related, inter-married to the point of inbreeding,” McKeown said, peering into his glass. “For God’s sake, man! Just drink the damned thing. It’s not going to poison you.”

Jack raised the glass to his lips and took a small sip. It burned, just as had the ouzo he’d drunk at Kera Maria’s on Tuesday, the day he’d found the grave. The taste was less acrid than ouzo, but still he did not like it. When McKeown gave his attention to the bottle, Jack tipped most of the contents of his glass over the wall.

“Ah, good,” McKeown said approvingly. “Have some more,” and he filled Jack’s glass again. “Bloody good stuff, this. Wonder where du Lac’s been hiding it? By the way,” and he fumbled in his jacket pocket, “here’s that letter I promised you.”

Jack took the envelope. Grubby and dog-eared, the direction was written in royal blue ink, in small capital letters: *Arthur Evans, Esq., Iraklion, Crete.*

“Thank you. I’m not certain yet that I will go, but...”

McKeown shrugged. “Go for your own peace of mind. You should see my colleague Dr. Delendas, anyway. Even if you don’t do anything more

than tour Knossos with him and Evans, it will be a change from all this damned nonsense. No walking corpses there. At least, I hope not.”

Jack smiled wanly and tucked the letter away.

A wailing sound burst from the terrace below them and they turned to see a group of Greek musicians seated in a rough semi-circle at the end of the terrace. There was a screech and a whistle, and then the Greeks began the opening bars of a tune. The Frenchmen had pushed back the tables and piled the chairs against the wall and were now encouraging du Lac to dance.

Jack winced at the noise. If there was one aspect of Greek culture he could do without, it was folk music. There was an old man in the village of Messaria who composed and memorised epic songs of local events and who had been known to sing one song for upwards of four hours. While he appreciated that this might have been the way Homer’s poems had been transmitted, Jack couldn’t bear the flat, monotonous delivery and the minor chording that could accompany the songs.

McKeown bobbed his head in time with the music. “Heard that Eutimia had to bring these lads in from Oia. None of the Firans wanted to make merry and risk the wrath of the Nereids or revenants or any other exotika while the littlies are sick.”

“I don’t think the Nereids would mind so much,” Jack said. “This isn’t music, it’s just raw noise.”

McKeown guffawed and elbowed Jack, slopping raki onto the ground. “It’s just a bit of fun. You can’t have a bloody party without a spot of dancing, can you? Shame there’s only those ugly beggars to dance with, though.”

Du Lac stumbled into the centre of the terrace and called his friends to join him as the uneven tune scraped its way into a rhythm suitable for the syrτος, a dance Jack knew could last interminably. Two of the Greeks joined in, one taking charge and leading the dance as a line of swaying figures began to take shape, staggering back and forth to the music. When the line was long enough, it would form into a circle of hopping, kicking mayhem that would stop only when the last man had fallen.

The line began to wend onto the lower terrace to collect more guests, and then headed for the upper level. Jack put down his glass and made as if to bolt, but McKeown seized his arm. "Come on, lad!"

Jack grimaced as one of the Frenchmen linked his arm across his shoulders and dragged him into the dance. He forced his feet to move. As the line shuffled back onto the middle terrace, he realised McKeown was standing where he'd left him, laughing uproariously. When he tried to wriggle free, his neighbour took a tighter grip. Jack was resigned to enduring a few more turns of the dance when the line broke into three groups. Vaguely he recognised this was a new dance, one similar to an aggressive strip-the-willow, and so he imitated the action of the Greek dancer and turned to face his partner.

Belas smiled back at him.

Jack was so surprised that for a moment he did not move, causing the dance to slow temporarily. Then, feeling even more ridiculous than before, he blundered through an approximation of the steps until he faced Belas again.

"You've come for Eutimia," he said.

Belas raised his eyebrows and shifted sideways to allow the next pair of dancers to fall back into line. "My, my, Yianni. How suspicious you've become! Perhaps I came here to see you, to enjoy the pleasure of this lovely entertainment."

"Please," Jack said, and lowered his voice as those closest turned to listen to their conversation. "Don't kill her, please."

"I wonder at your concern for those who care nothing for you. The woman enjoys making her neighbours miserable and she is dishonest with those who stay here as her guests. Surely you know of *xenia*, Yianni—Greek guest-friendship, an unbreakable bond of honour between host and guest. She has flouted those rules. She deserves punishment for this quite aside from what her forefather did to me."

The line twisted, the partners separating to double back and begin the dance anew. Jack shoved at the Frenchman ahead of him, impatient

to face Belas again. As soon as they were back in their places, he whispered, “You do not have to be the agent of punishment!”

Belas glinted at him. “Oh, but I am. You will not change my mind.”

“You have had enough blood for today.”

“From you, yes. You make me stronger and I thank you for that. But the taste of you is addictive. I will not bow to it. Better that I adulterate your blood with that which is inferior.”

Jack shook his head. His mind seemed addled, filled with the screeching music and the weaving dance. It was their turn to lead down the centre of the line again and he tried to jerk away when Belas seized him, one arm around his waist.

Belas gave him an amused look. “Shall I be the man, then, and lead?”

“You cannot enter Eutimia’s hotel uninvited. I shall tell her to ignore your call,” Jack hissed, forcing a change in step so that he led instead of Belas.

“Ah.” Belas smiled patiently and yielded to the new rhythm. “Even if she listened to you, it would do her no good. I have no need of an invitation, Yianni—you brought me here yourself. You even sat me on the breakfast table. How much more of an invitation do I need?”

Jack left him abruptly, walking away from the dance and ignoring the irritated cries from the line. He hurried along the top terrace and did not stop until he stood in the shadow of the hotel, in the wild tangle of ground that formed Eutimia’s garden. There he put his head in his hands, torn as to his next action.

The scent of the roses came to him slowly. The air felt heavy with cloud. When he looked up at the view over the caldera, he could no longer see Thirasia. Even the volcano’s mouth at Nea Kameni was barely visible, shrouded instead with sea fog. It seemed surreal to stand amidst a garden that still retained the warmth of the day and watch fog banks forming in the caldera, but he knew within a few hours the fog would creep in and hug the land, draining its heat.

He shivered and then Belas's arms twined around him, his body pressed close, and Belas whispered in his ear, "Tonight, the fog will obliterate everything. It is dangerous. I do not want it to take your soul."

"It is just cloud," Jack said. "Water droplets. It is nothing supernatural."

"I did not say that it was." Belas nuzzled at the nape of his neck and Jack noticed how cold it had become, how warm Belas's breath felt against his skin. "The fog brings silence. It muffles all sound."

Jack despaired. "Why must you kill her? Is it not enough that you killed the male descendant? She is the last of her line. She cannot harm you."

"I thought you understood why I do this." Belas let him go and circled around in the darkness until he faced Jack. "Must we be always at odds with one another?"

"I'm leaving," Jack said into the silence that followed, and it wasn't until the words were out of his mouth that he realised he hadn't intended for them to be spoken at all. He could not swallow them back, and so he added, "Tomorrow. I'm going to Crete."

Belas made no reply.

It seemed too bald a statement to leave it at that, so Jack tried to justify it. "I have a letter of introduction to Arthur Evans. I have always wanted to meet him and this seems to be the ideal opportunity, especially if, as you say, there is much to be discovered at Akrotiri. I might need Evans's advice and it has been a long time since I was last in Crete."

He tailed off, aware that he was speaking too fast with too much guilt.

Belas asked, "Why are you afraid of me?"

"I'm not." The denial was out too quickly to be the truth, and then Jack lifted his hands in a helpless gesture. "I'm afraid of your rage, of an anger that can last for four millennia without ceasing. I understand you must kill in order to survive, but I cannot condone it when you kill for revenge."

He gazed at Belas, almost pleading. "I cannot even begin to imagine what you have suffered, but I do not think vengeance will repair the damage done."

"Vengeance is my reason for being. Without it, I would have no life."

Jack tried to smile. "I know. But forgive me. I thought I could change that."

Belas stared at him in wonder. "Oh, my poor fool."

He embraced Jack and said, "What was it that Eutimia said to you, earlier? 'Nobody wants you here, and nobody will miss you when you're gone.' How true that is. Kanenas wants you. Kanenas will miss you when you leave."

"Will you?" Jack asked, and it was a hesitant, anxious question.

"You have no idea how much."

He learned. There in the garden, amongst the rustling plants and the scent of crushed roses, he learned the meaning of possession. It terrified him. It inspired him. For the first time, he knew mania, the wild, ecstatic frenzy that tripped between life and death, glorying in both states and heedless of any consequence.

It hurt, at first, a pain so unfamiliar and sharp he bit down on his tongue. His blood tasted sweet. Belas remained motionless behind him, his breathing deep and even, almost comforting, waiting for him to ask for more. The fog rolled over them in cold tatters, reducing the world to ghosts. The only reality remained with the two of them, crouched in the damp earth of the garden and joined as one.

Jack felt the scratch of thorns, the shape of a pebble beneath his palm. Belas murmured to him, at first in words recognisable, shaped from lust and adoration, and then the language took a different form. Jack grasped after the words, desperate to know their meaning. That this was a tongue more ancient than Doric was a wonder that passed him by without remark.

They collapsed into the dirt, Belas's hands still gripped around his hips as Jack moved deeper into the furrow they'd created. The cold feel of the earth against his skin and amongst his clothes was a silken

tenderness, while above him Belas raged like the mountain-god. Jack raised his head to cry out into the stifling fog, but Belas clamped a hand over his mouth and held him frozen in silence.

A shadow blundered into the garden, cursing at the weather and the plants that conspired to trip him up. It was McKeown, his accent broadening in proportion to the amount he'd had to drink. He stood for a moment and called Jack's name.

"Quiet," Belas whispered, his lips brushing Jack's ear so he wriggled instinctively. "Quiet," he said again and began to kiss Jack's neck, licking at the jugular.

Jack felt his breath, hot and panicked, against Belas's palm. The fear of discovery had stole away their pleasure and he knew Belas was angry. Belas moved, brought back the rhythm that had ensnared them, and Jack lost himself in surrender.

McKeown stepped forward.

Jack felt Belas gently push his head down into the furrowed earth and knew he did not want him to witness this meeting. He heard Belas croon something soft and soothing in his ear, but still he struggled to look up.

The fog lifted and McKeown made a sound of revulsion. "Good God!"

Belas lifted his head from Jack's neck and hissed, a primal, visceral sound that made the doctor start back in horror. And then the hiss of warning became a sound of hatred, and McKeown ran.

* * *

Jack listened to the wind rattling a loose slate on the roof. He wondered if the day was as grey as it sounded and rolled over to try to peep through the knotholes in the shutters. At his movement, Belas opened his eyes. His gaze was intense when he asked, "Do you remember?"

Jack stilled. "Yes."

"Would you like to forget?"

“No.” Jack traced the blue and red tattoo snaking around Belas’s left forearm in a gesture still too tentative to be a caress. “What happened to McKeown?”

Belas touched him and murmured, “Then you do not quite remember everything.”

“I remember the party, and—McKeown was there, in the garden.” Jack wriggled at the distraction. “And afterwards, it rained. I’ve never seen rain like that before in Greece. We came back here, and we... did something.” He frowned, the memory stuck.

Belas gestured towards the bedroom floor by the wardrobe. “The tea chest,” he said. “We moved your tea chest.”

“My tea chest, your bones,” Jack corrected slowly. “Why did we do that? You would be safe enough here. Nobody knows.”

“Because you are leaving today, and in your absence there may come people who do not respect your privacy. People who want to destroy me.”

“Eutimia,” Jack said, sitting up suddenly, remembering. “You were going to kill her. You said—”

Belas curled an arm around his waist and pulled him back down. “She still lives. How could I kill her when I have been with you all this time? Such hunger should not be wasted in solitary sport.”

Jack laughed, embarrassed. He remembered how greedy he had been, how greedy he was still as his body responded with eagerness to Belas’s caress. “I don’t have to go today,” he said. “The weather was so bad last night, I imagine that the steamer has been held in port at Ios. It will come tomorrow.”

“It comes today,” Belas said. “You will be on it when it leaves.”

Jack stared. “But...”

Belas kissed him, long and slow. The embrace became more passionate, only to be interrupted when Kera Maria unleashed a barrage of blows against the door.

“Yianni! Get up and open this door or I shall break it down!” she shrieked.

Jack squirmed away from Belas in panic and landed on the floor. For a second he sat there, startled, and then he grabbed at his clothes. They lay crumpled on the rug, still wet and muddy from the night before, and the feel of the damp cotton against his body made him shiver.

“Go,” he hissed to Belas, who lay curled amongst the blankets, quite unconcerned. “Please, go!”

Belas yawned and put his hands behind his head. “I would be very interested to see how your landlady breaks down the door.”

Jack wrestled with the buttons on his trousers. “I like her. Please, Belas. She’s been good to me, she never judged me...”

“And you think she will do so now, because you have a lover?”

“A male lover, yes!” Jack gave up on the buttons and dragged a clean shirt from the wardrobe. “One moment,” he called to Kera Maria, who resumed hammering on the door with full force.

He ran to the window and opened the shutters with one hand, fastening his shirt with the other. “You can get out this way.”

Belas grinned. “I suppose you want me to turn into a bat and fly away?”

“No!” Jack went to the bed and put his hands on Belas’s shoulders. “I don’t want you to leave, but her opinion is important. Her friendship means a lot to me. I don’t want to disappoint her.”

Belas pulled him down for a swift kiss. “So I will stay.”

“And humiliate me!”

“No. To make you understand.”

Jack gave him a final, beseeching look, and then hurried to the door and unlocked it. He stepped back into the centre of the room, attempting to brush his hair with his fingers, and then he waited in silence as the handle dipped downwards and the door swung open.

Kera Maria stood on the threshold, her face pale with anger and fright. Her kerchief was askew, the knot untidy beneath her chin. Her hair was slate-grey, streaked with white. Jack could not recall having

seen her hair before and it shocked him as if it were an outwards sign of grief.

“Yianni,” she said as she advanced slowly into the room, “such things I have heard. Eleni Tsapanides brought me the news herself and she could scarcely repeat it for the horrors she had to tell. Oh, Yianni! What have you done? What evil have you brought upon yourself? You were such a good boy.”

Jack crossed his arms. “I do not know what they say about me, but surely it is only the work of idle gossips with little truth behind it.”

“I pray it is so,” Kera Maria said, nodding vigorously, and then she turned her head as a movement from the bed caught her attention. She stared and her mouth dropped open. “Yianni,” she said again, and this time her voice was feeble.

Belas sat up on the mattress and gave her a slow, satisfied smile.

“It is true, then,” she said, still staring. “You have taken a man as your lover against all the writs of Heaven and all of God’s commandments. A man! Such a strange, heathen practice is this! It is wrong, Yianni, wrong!”

“I did not look for it,” Jack said.

Kera Maria faced him and her eyes were heavy with regret. “I cannot allow you to stay here. Not while you sin with this man. You must go away and if, on your return, you promise to give him up, perhaps something can be arranged.”

“And on his return, you will have a nice village girl waiting to be wedded and bedded with him,” Belas said as he kicked off the blankets. “What makes you think he will do your bidding, woman? And what makes you believe I will give him up?”

He rose from the bed.

Kera Maria fluttered uncomfortably as she tried to look anywhere but at his naked body. She shrieked a little and raised a hand to shield her eyes.

Belas laughed. "Look at me, Maria. Do you fear that if you look at me, you will desire me? Be brave. Look and see what manner of creature I am."

Kera Maria lowered her hand and took a careful, cautious look at him from his ankles as far as his knees. She stared at the tattoo wrapped around his left leg, and then at the rest of him, utterly impersonal as she looked upon each of the markings in turn.

For a moment it seemed as if she had no understanding of what she saw, but then she gasped and clutched at her chest, staggering backwards against the doorframe. "Dear God," she whispered, her eyes bulging and her kerchief slipping further as she shook her head again and again.

Jack moved towards her, concerned, but she shrieked when he came close. "No! How could you, Yianni? To bring it here, when you said otherwise! A *vrykolakas*! The cursed *vrykolakas*! How can you let him touch you? He's a murderer, a monster..."

"No more a monster than your husband," Belas said softly. "But you knew about that, didn't you, Maria?"

Kera Maria went silent and huddled against the doorframe, her eyes wide.

"Belas?" Jack asked, reaching out to touch him, but Belas pushed him aside and began to advance upon Kera Maria with a pace as slow and steady as a heartbeat.

"Konaires spent years looking for my grave," Belas said, his tone matter-of-fact even though his fists bunched by his sides. "There was a priest in Oia who spoke of great rewards if anyone ever found the resting-place of the oldest, most wicked revenant to walk this island. He even had an ancient figurine said to wear the same tattoos as I did, so they would know me when they unearthed me."

"I saw it," Kera Maria whispered. "I saw the figurine. That snake upon your leg, the markings on your arms and chest... it is you. Cursed, despised *vrykolakas*!"

Belas smiled. “Your husband found me, you know. Entirely by accident, for God had not given him the wit or cunning to find me any other way. He stood on the earth above me and do you know what he did?”

Jack put his hand on Belas’s shoulder. It was as if he touched a block of marble, so cold and unyielding was the flesh beneath his, but he persisted, stroking a pattern over the shoulder and down Belas’s back and hoped that it would be enough distraction.

Belas did not even notice him. He slunk closer to Kera Maria, and then paused an arm’s length away from her. “Konaires jammed his pickaxe in the earth. I heard it, I felt it. You cannot imagine what it is like to lie rotting in your grave, dead and yet alive. The earth around you becomes your skin as the mortal flesh sloughs off. The strike of a pick is like the stab of a knife. But that was not all he did.”

Jack realised what had happened and what it meant for Kera Maria. He protested, “You cannot blame her for what her husband did. She is not blood!”

Belas threw him off, his rage directed wholly at the woman cowering on the threshold. “He decided to relieve himself on my grave. He pissed all over me.” Belas’s eyes were luminous with hate. “The desecration of the dead is a mortal sin, Maria.”

“He did not know you were buried there,” she retorted, but without fire. “He would surely not have done so, otherwise. He obeyed the Church laws, even for those buried outside of holy ground.”

Belas laughed. “Your husband and his friends all listened to that fool Makarias, the so-called vampire-killer of Santorini. He thought prevention was better than the cure. How many graves did Konaires open for Makarias to stab some innocent mouldering corpse through the heart or to bind it fast with chains?”

“My husband was a good man, a pious man!”

“Your husband rots in Hell, Maria, tormented by the screams and accusations of those he defiled after death. He robbed them of true peace

and the chance of the Resurrection. He made them into the very creatures Makarias sought to destroy.”

With a shriek of denial, Kera Maria ran into the hallway. Jack started after her as he heard the crash of the table falling, and then she was back, one of her husband’s pistols pointed waveringly at Belas’s chest.

“Foul, vile creature!” she cried, “I curse you a thousand times!” and before Jack could stop her, she fired the gun.

The tinder was old, but it still caught. There was a sputter, a flash of sparks and then a puff of smoke from both ends of the pistol and a sound that sank into the walls on impact.

There was a long silence, and then Jack asked, “Are you all right?” although he was unsure which of the two he was addressing. He waved a hand to clear the fug of smoke and saw Kera Maria collapsed on the floor. She still clutched the pistol, but her eyes were closed and she was praying through clenched teeth. Her hands were black with soot but she appeared to be unharmed. Jack knelt down beside her and tried to take the gun, but she clung to it tightly as if it were a talisman.

“You cannot kill me,” Belas said, his voice light and inconsequential, and when Jack looked around the room, he had disappeared.

“I am so sorry,” Jack said, turning back to Kera Maria. “Truly, I did not know what he was when I brought him here.”

She tried to smile. “That is why he chose you.”

“He did not choose me. I found him,” Jack said.

“It was Fate, Yianni. He called and you answered. May God forgive you, for you were an innocent in this until you took him to your bed. Now you are as guilty as he and must share in his sins.”

Jack took her hands in his, wrapping his fingers around hers as she held onto the gun. “Will you curse me, too, when the only crime I have committed is one of affection and of human need?”

Kera Maria shook her head. “A *vrykolakas* is not human, but a mirror of our own desires, twisted back upon ourselves. Your heart is black, Yianni. No matter how good, how kind, how considerate you are,

your heart lusts for the unspeakable. I do not curse you, my child, you have cursed yourself. If you take the devil as your lover, your only joy is misery.”

“You would thus condemn me, for loving a man?”

“Not a man, Yianni.” She freed her hands from his and began to get to her feet, slowly and with difficulty. When he tried to help her, she shrugged him off. At last she stood upright and said, “He is a monster, not a man. He may feel like a man when he touches you, but only a monster would slay another human being in so foul a way as to gut them and hang them from the ceiling as if they were game-fowl.”

Jack felt his flesh crawl. “Eutimia?”

“No.” Kera Maria gave him a sad, patient look. “Your friend, McKeown.”

Chapter Twelve

A few days after he landed in Crete, Jack sought an appointment with Dr. Gabriel Delendas. He arrived early for the meeting and then regretted doing so. Idle waiting gave him time to think, and he did not want to consider the outcome of this meeting. He had not coughed blood since he'd arrived on Crete, and although it had been only a matter of days, Jack felt cheered by his apparent return to health. But even such good fortune disturbed him. His thoughts led back to the idea that Belas caused the tuberculosis, and that Belas wanted him to die a blood-weltered death, despite any protestations to the contrary.

Jack waited in the courtyard, which had seemed preferable to sitting inside in the fetid warmth, but the house was situated on the wrong side of the city to take advantage of the sea breeze. Beyond the courtyard the great limestone wall of Iraklion's defences loomed above, and the midday sun reflected from the white blocks in a dazzling, relentless throb of heat.

The garden was neglected and untidy. Terracotta pithoi stood knee-high from the ground, each filled with flowers turned grey and brittle as they gasped for water. An effort had been made to paint the bench that sat by the back door, but its position in full sunlight had faded the colour to a drabber shade than even the dust.

Jack felt uncomfortable. In Fira, every speck of dirt was swept away by the time the sun rose, and in the weeks leading up to Easter, the cobbles of the streets were whitewashed to form crazy meanders of grey and white. Even though he understood that Dr. Delendas had commitments more important than taking care of his garden, Jack could not help but make unfavourable comparisons. With some surprise, he realised he was homesick for Santorini.

The door banged and Jack looked up as the housekeeper stepped out into the courtyard. Her gaze moved around the garden in a proprietary manner and she twitched the length of her skirts just slightly above her ankles to avoid dragging the hemline through the dust. When she saw him beneath the date palms, she nodded and said, "You will come in now, please."

Jack followed her inside. The house was unpleasantly warm, its windows tightly shuttered. The marble floors were covered in a variety of carpets and rugs, sometimes placed one on top of the other. Thick woollen tapestries hung on the walls, jostling a succession of family portraits. The dim light made the air in the hallway and anterooms seem reluctant to circulate. While not exactly claustrophobic, the house felt stifling.

He resisted the urge to flee back into the garden and instead examined a painting that showed a dark, attractive man standing amongst a series of ruins stylised and Egyptian. Jack wondered if the expression of boredom was generated by posing for the portrait or if it was a comment on the gentleman's nature. He took a step nearer to see the date and signature inscribed at the bottom of the canvas.

"That is Pedro Delendas," the housekeeper told him. "The great-grandfather of Dr. Delendas. A very clever man or so they say."

"He was in Egypt?" Jack asked, indicating the background of the painting.

She shrugged. "The Delendas family has always liked old things. That is why Dr. Delendas is friends with the Englishman, Evans."

The way she said it suggested she did not entirely approve of either the friendship or the "old things" that supported it, and so Jack gave her a vague smile and moved on. They went along a second hallway where the walls were painted ochre and red with a winding trellis of blue flowers as a dado. The housekeeper knocked at a door.

"Dr. Delendas," she said, and admitted Jack into the room beyond. The contrast between this and every other room he'd seen in the house rendered him temporarily speechless. The shutters were fastened open

and the sash windows yawned wide to let in what little breeze moved outside. A narrow cotton runner carpeted the dull stone floor. The walls were painted in *eau de nil* and hung with engravings of sites in Naxos and Santorini.

Jack glanced away to complete his cataloguing of the contents of the room: a leather couch covered with a white sheet, a wicker basket, a free-standing wash basin with a pottery ewer beside it, a bookshelf with a number of heavy volumes lying at odd angles within it, and a small desk covered with a disproportionately large amount of paper. Behind the desk, one arm crossed over the pages as if he suspected they would escape otherwise, was McKeown's colleague, Gabriel Delendas.

Dr. Delendas looked up briefly from the paper he was signing, and then he paused, startled. For a moment he stared at Jack and frowned as if he were trying to place a memory. Then he gave up and returned to the paper, scribbling on the foot of the page before he dropped it into a filing tray already overflowing with case-notes.

"Do I know you?" Gabriel asked as he capped his pen and set it down.

Jack shook his head. "Not really. Anthony McKeown sent me, but—"

"I know he did. Mr. Evans gave me his letter. No, I'm certain we've met before." Gabriel seemed genuinely puzzled, and continued to stare.

Jack fiddled with the cuffs of his shirt. People had stared at him far less since he'd arrived in Iraklion and he had almost forgotten what it was like. Gabriel's attention reminded him of the night in the shrine when Belas had scolded him for staring so wantonly. That Dr. Delendas was doing it now disturbed him, even though he could feel no intent other than simple curiosity.

"You don't look like your great-grandfather," Jack said to break the silence.

Gabriel gave him a startled glance and then recovered himself. "I'm sorry. It was insufferably rude of me to stare at you, but..." He smiled and waved Jack to sit down. "But you are right. I resemble him not at all."

“He was an archaeologist, I take it.”

“Every few generations, my family produces a tyrant. My great-grandfather was one such. My father and grandfather were so much in terror of Pedro that for years they crept rather than strode around this house. It was not, as you can imagine, a happy time.”

“I’m sure my great-grandfather was just the same,” Jack said, carefully.

Gabriel sat back in his chair and steeped his fingers. “Maybe. But as I said, it is well known that we produce a monster every hundred years or so. It has been this way since my family first came here. Doubtless if I were to investigate the history of my ancestors more closely, I would find stories of tyrannical men right back to the building of the Alhambra.”

Jack smiled. He’d noticed certain groups amongst the islanders whose colouring had been distinctly western European, a result of selective intermarriage between the old elite under Venetian rule. Gabriel looked Spanish, with straight, glossy black hair, dark eyes, and a warm cast to his skin.

“But you did not come here to talk about my family,” Gabriel said. “Forgive me. I would have been in Iraklion to greet you when you arrived had you but cabled ahead with your intentions. I serve as a locum at Thrapsano when things are quiet on the site, but I could have foregone a few days in the mountains.”

“Mr. Evans has been most kind and has kept me entertained. As it was, my plans were not entirely fixed,” Jack said quickly. “I did not expect to arrive until next week, but then certain events occurred...”

“Yes.” Gabriel’s demeanour changed, and went from friendly disinterest to a veiled wariness. “How well did you know McKeown?”

“Scarcely at all, but he was so helpful and generous with my research.” Jack paused, aware that he was speaking too quickly. “He was very amenable. Everyone liked him.”

“Very outspoken,” Gabriel added.

“Yes, but he was never malicious.”

Gabriel began to flick at random through the papers on his desk. “A strange way to die, don’t you think?”

Jack went very still. “I didn’t see, I only heard...”

“McKeown wrote me a note and enclosed it with the letter to Mr. Evans. Did you know that?” Gabriel asked, still apparently absorbed in his task.

“No,” Jack said slowly and with a soft, panicked flutter rising in his belly. “He said you would be able to help me regarding a medical condition, but that is hardly important now. I feel much better. In fact, the only thing I wanted to ask you was regarding the cut-marks on human skeletal remains from last season.”

“He told me this and more.” Gabriel glanced up. “He wrote that he had seen several skeletons with cut-marks, but that you intended to rebury them. He said you had in your possession the bones of an adult male that also displayed cut-marks along with a curious anomaly in the structure of the bone itself.”

“Lesions,” Jack said, numb with tension. “There were lesions. At first I thought malaria, but it was anaemia.”

“You seem very sure whereas McKeown did not,” Gabriel said, his eyebrows raised. “Perhaps I should check to make certain. You would not want your research results to be ruined by such a small error, surely?”

Jack lifted his chin. “I did not bring a sample with me.”

“That is strange, is it not? Your evidence disappears back into the ground whence it came. I do not know of any other archaeologist who would rebury a cache of skeletons that had so many cut-marks. Indeed, there are many who would pay to be in your position. The sensational aspect of human sacrifice alone would at least ensure your notoriety in academia,” Gabriel said. “If you have nothing for Mr. Evans and nothing for me, why then did you come to Crete?”

Jack sat up straight, almost quivering with affront. “I am not a fantasist, if that is what you are suggesting.”

“Not at all,” Gabriel said, leaning forward across the desk. “McKeown’s judgements may have been suspect in some areas of his life,

but never in a medical capacity. I believe him when he said he had examined the skeletons you excavated, and in the absence of concrete evidence, I must also believe his findings. But it is only the word of a dead man, now, and yet here you are, with neither tibia nor femur to substantiate your claim.”

There was a pause heavy with implication and accusation, and then Jack said, his voice husky, “I—I needed to get away. To think.”

Gabriel smiled pleasantly. “But what are you thinking about? Forgive me, but it is not just I who finds it strange that McKeown died in the exact same way as did a Greek gentleman from Emporio.”

“He told me about that,” Jack said.

“He told me, too. And then I heard the reports of his death and I wondered.” Gabriel reached into the pile of papers and drew out the letter. He held it up and waited with interest for Jack’s reaction.

Jack stood up and took a few rapid paces back and forth before he went to stand behind the chair. He curled his hands over the chair-back and gripped it tight. “McKeown said he’d never seen anything like it before. It sounded horrifying. And later he told me the old man had been Eutimia’s cousin and I was afraid for her. I never expected it would be he who was next.”

Gabriel stared at him. “You know who did this?”

Jack shrank behind the chair guiltily. “No,” he said, but he could not meet Gabriel’s gaze.

“I think,” Gabriel said gently, “we should leave such matters to the authorities and turn instead to your health rather than persist in this talk of dead men.”

“Authorities?” Jack repeated, sinking down onto the edge of the chair. He felt bewildered and foolish, only now realising the consequences of McKeown’s death.

Gabriel gave him a sympathetic look. “The British vice-consul is sending someone to investigate. You could not expect the murder of a British citizen, particularly an ex-officer on General Gordon’s staff, to go unrecognised and ignored.”

“I didn’t do it!” Jack said quickly, feeling the blood drain from his face.

Gabriel got up from his desk, concerned. “I did not say that you did,” he said and touched Jack’s shoulder soothingly.

Jack flinched away from the gesture and rose from the chair again, too agitated to sit still. He fled to the opposite side of the room and leaned against the wall, feeling the plaster cold beneath his damp palms. For a moment he struggled with the words and then, having some vague idea that a confidence spoken to a doctor was as confidential as a confession to a priest, he whispered, “I did not do it, but I could have prevented it. I did not know—I wish...”

Gabriel reached out and patted the chair. “Please, come and sit down. You are making yourself ill and I do not want that. I am supposed to cure people, not make them sick. We will not speak of it again for the moment.”

He indicated the chair again and eventually Jack came back. Gabriel nodded his approval and said, his tone brisk, “McKeown suggested you had tuberculosis, but you seem perfectly healthy to me.”

“I told you, I feel perfectly well.”

“Appearances can be deceptive, as can feelings.”

Jack smiled wanly. “His examination was more an observation.”

“Then I shall attempt to be more thorough.”

Gabriel perched on the side of his desk and sought out a notebook. He asked questions, recording the answers in an elegant, looping script. He frowned over some of the responses and then put aside the notebook to measure Jack’s pulse and blood pressure.

Jack swayed back in the chair when Gabriel came near him, suddenly skittish at the thought of being touched. He saw Gabriel’s surprise at his reticence and then his alarm when Jack rolled up his sleeve to expose the long, deep cut running from elbow to wrist.

At Gabriel's indrawn hiss of breath Jack looked up, but the doctor merely continued with his examination. Eventually Gabriel asked, his tone casual, "You have seen the site at Kephala?"

"Yes. It's very fine," said Jack, aware that it sounded feeble. Knossos was more than fine. It was a revelation. "Evans wants me to see the most recent discovery of the Royal Tomb. Perhaps I shall go tomorrow."

"I will go there this afternoon," Gabriel said. "You are welcome to join me. Mackenzie—have you met him? He sent word that one of the workers dropped a rock onto his foot. They suspect it may be broken, but the foolish devil refuses to rest and instead continues to work."

"The workers are well paid, I suppose," Jack said with a hint of envy.

"Yes, but it is not just the money that motivates them," Gabriel said. "It is pride, too, pride and honour. These are things many men work for, including Mr. Evans, and so, I think, do you."

Jack smiled slightly. "I'm not sure of that any more. I believed I searched for the truth, but all I have found is a muddle of conflicting ideas too difficult to make sense of." He paused, gloomy, and looked sidelong at Gabriel. "What is it you work for, if not pride or honour?"

Gabriel wrote something on his notepad and then tucked the pen behind one ear. "I am a doctor, and a doctor works only for the good of his patients, for the preservation of life and for the furtherance of medical science. Anything else is secondary."

"I know some doctors who would disagree."

"As do I, but those are my feelings." Gabriel shrugged and then indicated that Jack should lie on the couch. "You think I am very patronising. It is easy for me to say this because my family is rich while the workers at Kephala are poor. Yet we are all Cretans, we share the same spirit and we all suffered. I hope you will never know the horror of hostile occupation. The Turks were not kind to us towards the end."

Jack shifted restlessly on the cotton sheet. He had trusted McKeown, but Dr. Delendas made him feel uneasy and threatened in some indefinable way. Perhaps it was because he felt trapped lying on the couch and with Gabriel so close beside him or perhaps it was because

McKeown had been old and brash and open in his preferences, while Gabriel was younger, an unknown quantity, dark and serious and attractive.

The last thought startled Jack so much he almost choked on the cough that tickled his throat. He tried to swallow it, but the cough persisted and soon came the blood. It was not as painful as the recognition that he was attracted to Gabriel, a realisation he buried with shame before he could even think of Belas.

He coughed again, harder this time, and the purge was a deeper red. It soaked through the cloth Gabriel gave him and coated his fingers. Jack looked at the stained fabric and moaned in horror at the viscous gobbets he'd expelled.

Gabriel took it away from him and set it down carefully in the washbasin before handing him a fresh cloth. "How long exactly has this been happening?"

Jack's mind wandered away from the question as Gabriel deftly unbuttoned his shirt and set his hand against Jack's chest. "Since last Friday," he said, recalling himself with an effort.

Gabriel stroked a gentle finger over the gash across Jack's chest. "You have done nothing unusual during this time?"

Jack nearly laughed. How could he even begin to tell Dr. Delendas what had happened to him? It would sound like the ravings of a lunatic. Instead he said, "I had sunstroke. I fell asleep in the afternoon sun and that made me a little ill."

"Strange, your skin is not burned," Gabriel said with a frown.

"That's what McKeown said. Perhaps I am allergic to the sun and it makes me pale and sick."

"It's possible." Gabriel brushed aside the halves of Jack's shirt and moved his hand lower.

Jack tensed, his breathing becoming shallow as Gabriel explored further. The doctor pushed down the waistband of Jack's trousers, and stared at the livid wounds running from just beside his navel down between his thighs.

“How far do these extend?” Gabriel asked.

Jack’s answer was strangled with shame. “Nearly to my knees.”

Gabriel retreated to his chair. He sat there for a moment and then asked, “Who did this to you?”

* * *

The journey from Iraklion to Knossos was not far, along rough, uneven roads best traversed on donkey-back. Jack curled up onto the wooden saddle and took one of the medical bags Dr. Delendas handed him, and then let his animal wander after Gabriel’s donkey. The sound of hooves striking the cobbles disturbed the peace of the afternoon, amplified by the high walls of the Venetian quarter. As they passed through the long, dark tunnel of the Kainoriou Gate, the sound became subterranean. Jack shivered in the sudden chill and had to turn in his seat to look back at the shrinking daylight.

They crossed the bridge from the city and proceeded along a dirt track until they reached the first of the cemeteries. Jack took tighter hold of the reins as they passed the stark, glittering white marble tombstones covered in the loop and flow of Arabic script. Tall pillars and narrow markers topped with turbans leaned at odd angles. Some of the gravestones were defaced, cracked or worn away. The grass grew tall here, and poppies and cornflowers hung suspended in the green.

Jack wondered if there were revenants in Moslem belief and if so, did they rise from their tombs and seek out the Christian burials further up the hill to continue the struggle after death as they had in life. He did not like this thought and so pressed his heels into the donkey’s flanks and caught up with Gabriel.

“You must think I’m a lunatic,” he said.

Gabriel looked at him briefly. “Not at all,” he said. “There are many stories about vampires in the islands, here and on the mainland also. My own family has a vampire story and if you were to ask any of the workers at the Kephala, they would tell you similar tales. Where there is

superstition, there will be vampires. You are a scholar, a man of science. You know better than many that these beliefs are passed down from the pagan religion.”

“I would like to hear your story,” Jack said.

“I’m sure you would, but not today. Perhaps some other time.”

Jack corrected the ambling gait of his donkey as it veered towards a clump of nettles growing in the wasteland between the Moslem and Christian cemeteries. “You don’t believe me,” he said, surprised at his sense of disappointment. He had unburdened himself to Dr. Delendas in the hope of making sense of what had been happening to him, but with each word of his account of Belas he had seen the incredulity, the flicker of fear and finally the blatant curiosity.

If Gabriel heard the low note, he gave no sign of it. “That is not the issue. The important thing is that you believe it and in believing it, you give it power.”

“It’s true!” Jack insisted. “Why else would I have these cuts all over my body, if it were not true?”

“You would be surprised at what people do to themselves, sometimes without even knowing what it is that they do,” Gabriel said.

The trail led into an incline and the donkeys slowed their pace. The bells around their necks gave measured, muffled clangs almost inaudible over the hiss of the wind through the grass. Below the ridge to their left was the Katsambas River, brown with silt and flecked with foam as the snows began to melt from Mount Juktas and the foothills of Ida and Dikte.

“I’m not insane,” said Jack, more to reassure himself than to challenge Gabriel.

“I know. But you are confused, and I can help you with that, at least.”

“Yes. Confused,” Jack echoed dully.

Gabriel smiled kindly at him. “I think it will be good for you to do some work. Just simple manual labour on the site with the workers. I

will speak to Mr. Evans about it. You need not worry about leading a team. At first I think it would be better for you to understand what it is you love about your job. That means you should start from the beginning, as it was when you were an undergraduate.”

Jack nodded. “Perhaps that would be for the best.”

“It would also give me a better chance to observe your state of health,” Gabriel continued. “For all that you are producing blood from your lungs, you display not one other symptom in keeping with pulmonary tuberculosis. However, there are always variations to every sickness, so I would like to keep watch over you.”

“Then I am to be an experiment.”

“No,” said Gabriel, gently. “A discovery, such as Mr. Evans’s here at Knossos. An experiment tests a hypothesis and limits growth because of this. A discovery lives for itself and only after observation can we determine what it is we have found.”

Jack turned away to stare at the landscape. It rolled down towards the sea, its uniformity broken only by a spur of land flattened at the top, and where collapsed blocks of masonry tumbled down its southward flank.

“That is the Fortetsa,” Gabriel said. “From there the Turks bombarded our city for twenty years. Iraklion only fell to the Ottomans because of trickery, a betrayal by one of our own people.”

Jack lifted a hand to shade his eyes from the glare of the sun, but instead of examining the cannon emplacement, his attention was caught by the half-circle of an ancient theatre nestled at the foot of the ridge. “I wonder if Mr. Evans would allow me to explore the theatre.”

“Most likely he would prefer you to work at the Kephala. He said last year was to be his final season, but there is still so much to be found. I think he will be here for a long time to come.”

* * *

Late that afternoon, Jack took his place in a trench cut through a mound at Isopata, close to where the Royal Tomb had been discovered earlier in the season. Evans's second was introduced as Duncan Mackenzie, a tall, dour-faced Scot with a heavy moustache and a stentorian voice that carried clean across the site. He showed Jack the mausoleum with a bad grace, clearly irritated by his presence. The tomb, lined with fine-cut ashlar masonry, was rectangular rather than beehive.

"Egyptian influence," Mackenzie explained dryly. "These people looked to the south, not the north. Evans has convinced the world this is the resting-place of Idomeneus."

"People need heroes," Jack said, uncomfortable with Mackenzie's cynicism.

"Aye, they do. But heroes need an audience, and who knows where that will end." Mackenzie clambered down into the trench and dismissed one of the workers, appropriating the man's trowel and shovel. He handed them to Jack. "Dr. Delendas says you should work here for a few weeks. You can't be any worse than some of the layabouts we employ."

"My record of excavation is very good," Jack said stiffly.

Mackenzie grinned. "Aye, I bet. Heard you trained with Dörpfeld. He's a sensible fellow for an architect, although he annoyed Arthur a few seasons ago by suggesting his bathroom of Ariadne was, in fact, a fish-tank."

"And is it?" Jack asked as he took the tools and examined the face of the trench in front of him.

"Who knows?" Mackenzie shrugged expansively. "I'm employed to record the stratigraphy and the finds, not to leap to conclusions. I leave that entirely to Arthur. He feeds his audience, see, and they feed him in return."

Jack took the gentle hint and bent to his task, helping the workers clear an area some five feet across full of tumbled stone and broken pottery. Mackenzie sat on a rock nearby and smoked in silence. When he had finished his cigarette, he took out his daybook and began to record the few finds that had already come out of the trench.

It was hot, with little to break the monotony of the dig. The workers hit bedrock to the north end of the trench and Jack paused in his work to follow the line of the earth as it shifted and changed colour towards the south. He abandoned his tools for a moment and called for the water-bucket and when it arrived, he surprised everybody by hurling the contents of the bucket onto the ground.

“I hope you’re going to make the trip to the well to fill that up again,” Mackenzie said as he stood to look into the trench.

“Of course.” Jack scrambled up to stand beside him and then stared down at the wet ground. The water had soaked into the earth within seconds. Thrown into relief from the uniform orange-red colour were revealed darker shades that formed distinct patterns.

“There,” said Jack, pleased. He jumped back into the trench, splattering red mud up his trouser legs and he pointed with the tip of his trowel to the leading edge of a dark feature in the soil. “Can you see it? I think these stones are part of a collapsed wall and this area here is a floor. Beaten earth, I would guess, although the colour would suggest clay a little further down, perhaps as packing to raise this to the same level as the bedrock.”

Mackenzie stared at him and then he smiled slowly. “You’re one of Dörpfeld’s, right enough.”

“Who is?” demanded a voice and Jack looked up to see Arthur Evans peering into the trench with Gabriel at his side. Even in an elevated position, Evans still looked short and slight, although he made up for his lack of stature by wearing an enormous solar topee. The helmet cast a shadow across his face so Jack could not see his expression, but Evans’s voice was perfectly friendly as he said, “Ah, it’s you. Did I hear right? You know Dörpfeld?”

Jack knelt down and used the trowel to score a line through the earth at the limits of the feature. “I worked with him in Athens.”

“Charming man,” Evans said. “Utterly without humour, of course, but that’s the Germans for you.”

Mackenzie coughed on his next cigarette.

"I always found him amusing in his own way," Jack said. "His eulogy on Schliemann was instructive."

Evans frowned. "It was?"

"Yes. 'Rest in peace. You have done enough,'" Jack quoted. "An interesting summary of Schliemann's life, don't you think?"

"The man was incorrigible," Evans said. "Until he secured Dörpfeld, his excavations were utterly without reason or rationale."

"You are not so different. The way you treat skeletal material is quite shocking," Gabriel said lightly. He accepted a cigarette from Mackenzie and bent his head to the match the Scotsman held out. "Your first season, for example. There was no need to throw those skeletons into the spoil heap."

"Bah." Evans waved a hand in dismissal. "It was necessary to stop any trouble between the workers. Moslems exhuming Christian burials, that's desecration. And those graves were definitely late Christian—east-west alignment, the hands across the pelvic region, no grave-goods... Better to hide the evidence in the spoil heap than run the risk of insurrection."

Jack sat back on his heels and blinked the sweat from his eyes. "Pardon me, but you disinterred human remains and did not rebury them correctly?"

"They're dead," said Mackenzie, his expression hard at the note of reproach in Jack's tone, "and the dead do not care."

Gabriel leaned over and flicked ash into the trench. "Our friend here fears the wrath of revenants."

Jack shot him an agonised, embarrassed look.

"Superstition," Mackenzie scoffed. "I would expect better from a man who'd studied with Dörpfeld."

"No, no, leave him be," Evans said. He smiled down at Jack and said, "When I first discovered the fresco of the cup-bearer, I feared looters might rob me of it or that they would destroy it in their search for antiquities. So I employed a native lad to guard the painting and he told

me the very next day he had had visions or waking dreams. He said the painting was holy, that the saint who inhabited it was angry at being disturbed. He heard noises all night, strange cries and footsteps, but there was nobody in sight. The boy was terrified. *Fandázi*, he said to me, a ghost. A phantom.”

Evans paused. “We are in the midst of discovering a civilisation so powerful and mysterious, it is little wonder spirits are drawn to it. Perhaps even the spirit of King Minos himself.”

A short silence followed this speech and then Mackenzie snorted. “Spirits, indeed. What rubbish.”

“Of course, the only spirits that hold any interest for you are those found at the bottom of a glass,” Evans said, smiling to take the sting from his words, but Mackenzie scowled. “Personally, I would like it very much if I could make contact with a spirit who lived here all those years ago. What questions I would ask it!”

“And what if it asked questions of you?” Gabriel said. “What if it made a bargain with you, like the gods of old. Your greatest desire in return for your soul?”

Jack bowed his head and returned to his task. His hands shook as he ran the trowel around the sides of a stone to loosen it from the earth. He did not want to hear the rest of this conversation, but it continued above him regardless.

“I already have my heart’s desire,” Evans said.

Gabriel pressed him. “You would not ask for more?”

The earth gave beneath the stone and Jack pulled it free, and then passed it to the workman beside him. He delved into the depression left behind, loosening a sherd from the packed soil and cleaning it off with his fingers.

“Can any man answer that question truly?” Evans replied. “I would like to think I would be content with what I have already. But what about you, doctor? If a daimon appeared from one of our pithoi and offered you your greatest wish, would you turn it down?”

Jack got to his feet and carried the sherd across to the side of the trench, intending to hand it up to Mackenzie. He caught Gabriel's steady gaze and his steps faltered.

"As a doctor, I should wish for the whole world to be healed and well," Gabriel said, his gaze on Jack as he watched him clamber out of the trench. "But the granting of such a wish would make me obsolete and I do not relish a life without purpose. So I would have to wish for something else. Perhaps something a little darker, more forbidden, as I think any man would do, if given the chance."

Evans grunted in acknowledgement. "What about you, Mackenzie? What would you wish for?"

"Me? I wish the stratigraphy of this damned site wasn't so difficult," the Scotsman said, raising a laugh.

"Perhaps this will help," Jack said hurriedly and he tossed the sherd towards Mackenzie. The pottery fragment turned in the air, and then there was something else with it, something that glinted blood red in the afternoon sun and that fell to earth with a thud as Mackenzie caught the sherd.

"What's this?" Evans bent down and picked up the second object, holding it aloft. "Good God! Did you find this down there?"

Jack stared at the object, feeling a faintness pull at his senses, for there in Evans's hand was the seal-stone Belas had given him. "No," he said, distantly, "no. That is something I had meant to show you another time."

Mackenzie put down the sherd and joined Evans, taking the red agate stone away from him. "The locals call these *galopetres*, milk-stones," he said. "The women believe them to be some sort of fertility charm. They're hellishly difficult to purchase. Where did you find this?"

It was pointless to fabricate. "On Santorini," he said and he felt the air around him move, as if a cool breeze had blown through, but the grasses did not bow before it and Jack felt only the prickle of heat upon his skin.

“It’s Minoan,” Mackenzie said. “See the bull, the altar with the wreaths upon it, and the horns of consecration. Unmistakeable.”

“You bought it or you excavated it?” Evans asked, his tone sharp with excitement as he seized it back from Mackenzie.

“It—it was given to me,” Jack began and then he saw Gabriel shake his head slowly. He corrected himself. “I found it. At a place called Akrotiri.”

Evans did not notice the slip. “Akrotiri, eh? Well, well. I wonder.” He looked up, closing his fingers around the seal-stone, and for the first time, Jack noticed how deep and penetrating a blue were his eyes. Behind the smile there was acquisitiveness, but again the tone was friendly when Evans said, “I think, my friend, that you and I need to have a little discussion.”

Chapter Thirteen

March gave way to April and the weather changed. The heat became lush rather than harsh, tempered by the early morning rain and the rising of the west wind. On the site, the workmen shrugged off their winter coats and laboured in their shirtsleeves, their picks breaking the earth easily in the brief period between the frost and the barren height of summer. An air of expectation hung about the Kephala as the Easter feast drew nearer, and Evans and Mackenzie made plans for the temporary closure of the site.

Jack spent two weeks in the trenches alongside the workers, examining the Kamares ware excavated from the Palace site and piecing together suspected joins across each pass. So meticulous was he that Mackenzie at last relented and gave him a small team of workers of his own.

“Evans believes there’s a road to the west of the theatre. It might lead somewhere,” the Scotsman told him. “Whatever it is, go and find it.”

Jack uncovered the remains of a Graeco-Roman habitation and brought back glazed pottery and tesserae and fragments of blue-beaded jewellery to show Evans. That same day, Mackenzie had gone with him to walk through the grass, startling a skylark into flight as they passed the misshapen lumps of buried archaeology.

“There’s the road,” Jack said, pointing to the darker cut of green. “We have only begun to touch a small part of the site.”

Mackenzie clambered up onto a hillock and surveyed the area and then looked down at Jack, marooned in the wildflowers covering the collapse of two civilisations.

“Aye, it’s big,” he said shortly. “It has to go. We’ll draft some more men in after Easter. You’ll have it cleared in a month or so.”

Jack was not quick enough to hide his reaction. “Is that not over-hasty? Dörpfeld said...”

“You’re not working for Dörpfeld now,” Mackenzie said. “You have to understand this is Arthur’s dig. He owns it. He can do whatever he pleases with it. We are contracted to find Bronze Age material, not Hellenistic or Greek or even Archaic. If you want to spend your time excavating later artefacts, you have a few weeks’ grace. After Easter, I’m hiring more men and all this will go.”

Jack shook his head. “I thought Evans wasn’t like Schliemann.”

“We’re all the same.” Mackenzie picked his way down the hillock until he stood beside him. Together they looked across the site. It was a jumble of exposed stone and earthed masonry, broken pottery and the whisk-snap of lizards’ tails.

Mackenzie waited until the skylark finished its burbling call before he said, “Don’t judge him so harshly. He has been waiting for this all his life. He sees anything after the Mycenaean period as unimportant, but assuredly he will take the greatest care with anything preceding that time. So much care even Dörpfeld would be envious.”

“We will lose so much,” Jack protested.

Mackenzie shrugged. “It is necessary. To achieve a dream, one must make sacrifices. If that’s arrogant, so be it. Record what you can, take what you must. History may thank you for it, even if Arthur will not.”

He turned to go, but Jack stopped him. “You, who defer so much to Mr. Evans and yet are a better archaeologist than he... if this is his dream, what have you been waiting for?”

Mackenzie clapped his shoulder. “A chance,” he said.

* * *

Dr. Delendas came every afternoon to the Kephala unless business kept him in town. Evans remarked upon it one day, joking that the

workers would soon be the healthiest in all of the Aegean. Gabriel smiled at the comment, but his gaze was fastened to the gleam of sun-bleached blond hair so distinctive amongst the Cretans.

“The exercise is good for me,” he said vaguely.

Evans gave a sniff that might or might not have been disapproval. “The exercise is good for your donkey, not for you.”

Gabriel looked directly at Evans. “I will be discreet.”

Evans held up his hands and called out after him as he walked away, “I think it ill-advised.”

Gabriel turned, still smiling, and gestured around the site. “How many people told you this was ill-advised? And yet you did it.”

Evans shook his head. “It is not the same.”

Gabriel stepped over a line of shattered roof tiles and a long section of Roman pipe, greeting the workers as he went. He paused to answer a question from one of the women who washed the finds and by the time he moved on, Jack had disappeared.

He went closer to the excavation, peering into test trenches and looking behind blocks of stone until one of the workmen pointed towards the semi-ruined walls of a house just off the ancient road. Gabriel brushed through the grass to reach a tumbledown section of wall and there he leaned, his chin on his hands, as he looked into the heart of the house.

It had been a fine building. Even to the untrained eye, the floor space seemed large and well appointed with the stumpy bases of pillars ranged to the front of the house. Niches were set into the wall and Gabriel assumed they had once held statues or lamps. Laid out across the floor was a mosaic damaged by an earthquake that had thrown up one corner of the design and faded by exposure to the elements. Weeds forced their way between the tesserae and one part of the mosaic was missing altogether. Gabriel acknowledged that finer pieces of antiquity were often robbed out to be sold on to private collectors. His family had done it for centuries, but it still sat uneasily with him.

Jack lay flat on what remained of the mosaic, one leg bent so his foot kicked idly back and forth as he worked. On the ground in front of him was a sketchbook, and he had a small paint box open beside him with a dozen blocks of watercolour inside. A pencil rolled to and fro across the tesserae, and a jar of faintly cloudy water held two paintbrushes. Jack held another in his hand, colouring the elegant leap of the mosaic dolphin he'd drawn upon the sketchpad.

Gabriel admired both the painting and the man and then he started to withdraw silently to wait for Jack elsewhere.

"You're watching me," Jack said, without looking up.

Gabriel laughed and climbed through the gap in the wall, brushing the dust from his jacket sleeves. "I prefer to say I am observing you, as I said I would. How do you feel today?"

Jack set the brush into the water jar and rolled onto his side. "All right," he said. "There's been no blood, if that's what you mean."

"The dust does not irritate you? And the heat of the sun causes no problems?"

"Not so far." Jack seemed to realise that lounging on a sunny stretch of mosaic was not perhaps the behaviour of a civilised man, and so he sat up hurriedly and crossed his legs. "Forgive me. I have spent too long on my own excavations, I've forgotten what propriety demands."

"You need not apologise to me," Gabriel assured him, dusting off one of the column drums before he perched upon it. "But speaking of your previous excavations, I have a letter for you. From Santorini."

Jack looked at him warily. "How come you have it?"

Gabriel held out the letter, which was grubby and written on cheap paper. "I passed by your rooms this morning and your landlady told me you'd already gone. The packet steamer came last night and this was delivered today. I thought I would bring it with me since your landlady also said you often spend the night up here in the taverna."

"Yes. Since Mr. Evans decided to clear this whole area after Easter, I am trying to conserve and record as much as possible. Time is against me, so it is easier for me to stay late and begin early."

Jack took the letter and examined the direction for a moment before he opened it.

“As your doctor, I would advise caution,” Gabriel said mildly. “You should not do too much. I encouraged you in this to make you healthy, not sick.”

“But if I do not do it, nobody will,” Jack muttered, his attention fixed on the contents of the letter.

Gabriel stepped closer to read it surreptitiously over his shoulder. It said,

Mr. Jack,

I hope you are Well & that the English look after you. Here is a note for you about the Site. I did not know what to do when you left, so for a week I continued to dig. Andreas & some of the men from Emporio helped me. Then Father Gregory told us to leave the Site alone until your return. This I was sad about, as we found many fine things, such as an alabaster Jar with Egyptian writing on it. Also many other Vases. Alexis found a Necklace of beads, but it fell into pieces. He took it away for his Wife to mend.

Also to say that I did as you instructed. Father Gregory came with me into the Shrine. We saw the Bones of the Children. O Mr. Jack, why did you not speak earlier of this Evil! Father Gregory wept for a long Time. I had to gather the Bones myself, as none other dared to enter. We took the Bones to the Church & there the Women laid them out. Everybody was there—Kera Maria, Eutimia, Charis Kragades, my own Wife, & many others. There was much Wailing & Lamenting. Five Children we found in that Evil place, & a taller Skeleton, too, that I think was of a Woman, perhaps the Mother of the little ones.

After the Bodies were laid out, Father Gregory conducted a Mass for their Souls, so they could pass into Heaven. He said even though they were born in heathen Times, God would welcome them into His Kingdom. Then we gathered in the Churchyard & carried out the Bodies, & placed

them in the Earth, & buried them properly & according to Orthodox Law. We grieved for these Children as if they were our own, & the Woman too.

Mr. Jack, I am so happy to tell you that my Despoina has awoken. It happened the night after the Funeral. She opened her eyes & looked at me & called me Papa. She is still feeble as a spring lamb, but God be praised she is alive & knows her Parents. My Nikos is also growing strong & healthy once more, & so too are the other Children who suffered this Plague.

Mr. Jack, you have helped us to work a Miracle. Please come back.

With good Wishes,

Your Friend,

Koubelos Lemos.

Jack finished the letter and sat in silence, staring at the broken mosaic. He seemed relieved by the news it brought, and so Gabriel asked, "Who sent you the letter?"

Jack looked up at him and blushed a little. "It's from a friend."

Gabriel noted his embarrassment. "Your lover?"

"No!" Jack got to his feet and folded the letter into his pocket. "Not that it is any business of yours, but it is from my foreman. He writes to tell me news of my excavation."

"He does not mention this Belas of yours?"

"No. Not at all." Jack gave him a single, wounded look and then collected up his paints, brushes, and sketchpad.

"And Belas does not write to you himself," Gabriel continued.

The water jar slipped through his fingers and smashed across the mosaic. Jack yelped and grabbed the sketchbook as it fell, and then cursed as pale blue paint smudged across his shirtfront.

Gabriel felt a moment of guilt. The copy of the pretty little dolphin had been ruined. He watched as Jack tore the page from the sketchpad and ripped the painting into pieces before he scattered them onto the tesserae, where the shards of glass shone as brightly as the spilt water.

“No,” Jack said bitterly as he retrieved his paintbrushes, “he does not write to me. Not anymore. Not since I left him. I pray every day for his forgiveness and hope he will forget me, and yet every day I wait for word from him and curse him for his silence.”

Gabriel went towards him, only to come to a halt when Jack shoved the sketchpad and painting materials at him. Surprised, Gabriel took hold of them. He juggled them clumsily, distracted from their conversation, and before he could try to resume it, Jack vaulted over the collapsed wall and hurried away.

* * *

Jack watched as Arthur Evans turned the page of the daybook and read through Mackenzie’s entry of the day before. Evans’s own notebook was open on the table before him, although he recorded in it only those items that caught his fancy or which suggested links across passes, trenches or indeed whole civilisations. Jack’s seal-stone was there, a careful drawing in black ink of both the stone and its impression, and now Evans compared it to the impressions Mackenzie had made from other stones.

Jack sat cross-legged on a threadbare Turkish carpet, puzzling over the inscribed tablets uncovered two seasons previously. The tassels on the carpet were stained as if dipped in blood. The floor was coated with fine reddish dust washed in by the draught as the Sirocco blew over, and when the thatch leaked, the rainwater mixed with the dust to produce a viscous mud.

The whole house vibrated with the roar of the wind. Outside, the Kairatos was in full flood. The dank smell of mildew worsened at this time and the lanterns gave off a guttering light in the humid half-darkness.

Jack traced a gentle finger over a line of pictograms from one of the clay tablets and wondered what they represented. A circle with an “x”

through it—was it a loaf, the sun, a day, a wheel? And then there was the other script, quasi-alphabetical and far more numerous at Knossos, and yet equally as incomprehensible. Evans had dubbed the two scripts Linear A and Linear B and posited that both were Mycenaean and therefore the earliest known record of the proto-Greek language.

“It looks a little like Hittite,” Jack had said when he first saw the tablets. Evans had sniffed and informed him that, to his mind, there was no possible connection between any Mesopotamian language and Linear B. When Jack had attempted to argue his point, Evans had become quite irritated and had said, “Unquestionably, it represents the writing of the indigenous Cretan stock. If you knew how to make sense of it, perhaps you could debate the issue. But until then...”

Not for the first time, Jack wondered if Belas could read the jagged upright symbols that composed Linear B. He remembered the inscription on the stone not far from the quarry at Akrotiri. Above the ancient Greek, there had been a mass of illegible scratching. What if it been Mycenaean? And what if Belas could help him unlock the secrets of the language?

He chewed the end of his pencil and stared down at his copy of the symbols. Belas had dismissed him. Even though Koubelos had indicated the Firans would welcome him back, Jack wanted Belas to ask for his return. A letter would be all it took. A letter in the same hand as the notes that had led him into this strange, darkling relationship.

Jack remembered the odd composition of some Belas’s letters, how he had at first assumed them to be the work of somebody barely literate or written in a demotic form. How foolish he had been!

“Baneful signs,” he murmured, dropping his notes to the floor.

Evans glanced up. “Are you now Bellerophon that you talk of baneful signs?”

“I wonder.” Jack closed his eyes as he listened to the creak of the roof timbers. “Bellerophon did not know what he carried when he went to the King of Lycia. I wonder if the same is true of me, if I carry within me my own death-sentence.”

Evans watched him for a moment. “We all have to die.”

“Yes. But some of us do it with more honour than others.”

“You’re very maudlin today,” Evans said. “This damned Sirocco! Makes me wish I’d gone back to Iraklion. In fact, that’s what we’ll do when we’re finished here. We’ll go to Gabriel’s house. At least the roof doesn’t leak there.”

Jack glanced around the room as if noticing it for the first time. “As long as it doesn’t collapse and damage the artefacts.”

“That’s the problem. It already has.” Evans scowled at the rotting thatch. “The sooner I can build a proper residence, the better. God only knows how the Turks lived here with the place in such a state. That stream is malarial, you know. Swarming with mosquitoes.”

Jack shuddered. “At least the wind drives them away.”

“For the moment.” Evans tapped the daybook. “Come and see this.”

Jack went to look, leaning over Evans to examine the similarity between his seal-stone and the image of a long-skirted female figure holding a palm in front of a charging bull.

“Your seal-stone must have come from Knossos at some point,” Evans said. “It would make sense, would it not? Minos created the first great thalassocracy—Herodotus tells us so. And a sea-going empire needs a base within the islands.”

“Santorini would be a good choice,” Jack agreed. “There have been pirates in the central Aegean for millennia. Perhaps Minos was the one to start it all.”

Evans snorted. “Rubbish! Minos was a peaceful man and his civilisation one of trade and prosperity, not war-mongering. See here.” He tapped the drawing in the daybook. “This was a society based on worship of the Mother Goddess, a matrilineal or matriarchal society...”

Jack moved around to perch on the other side of the table. “And how would you explain child-sacrifice within a matriarchal society? It is suggestive of male dominance, just as it is within the ancient Near Eastern societies.”

“Rubbish.” Evans folded his arms and stuck out his chin. “A single child burial is not sufficient evidence for you to claim rites of sacrifice.”

Jack smiled. “There are cut-marks on the bones and they follow the same pattern of butchery as on the skeletons I found.”

“Skeletons, may I remind you, that you had reburied for superstitious reasons.” Evans bristled at him and raised an eyebrow. “Which leaves us rather at an impasse. Cannibalism is such a distasteful topic.”

Jack gave him a sharp look, but Evans seemed unaware of the pun. “Then until any more such burials are uncovered, we shall speak no more about it.”

Evans nodded. “Jolly good. I doubt we will find anything like that again. An anomaly, you know.”

There was a pause between them, filled by the drip of water from the thatch. Jack blinked as the lanterns flickered low in the damp breath of the Sirocco. He remembered the night in the shrine when Belas had asked him if he would lie or destroy evidence if it did not fit with his hypothesis and he, fool to the end, had replied he would not.

He picked up Evans’s notebook and flicked through it, stopping at each of the sketches of the frescoes. One of the earliest discoveries had been dubbed The Prince of the Lilies, or, as Evans was wont to romanticise, “The Priest-King of Knossos.” The fresco was being restored to its original splendour and Jack had seen it on his first tour of the site. The Priest-King was magnificent, with tawny skin, dark eyes, and glossy black hair, clutching a lily and crowned with an enormous, elaborate headdress with trailing feathers.

Evans noticed what held Jack’s gaze. “As I said, a matriarchal society but presided over by male religious dignitaries.”

Jack chuckled and turned the notebook back to its original page. “I was thinking your Priest-King looked a little like Dr. Delendas.”

“Ah.” Evans sat back in his chair, silent for a moment. “I trust Gabriel is pleased with your health. To my eyes, at least, you have gained some colour since you arrived. You seem positively indefatigable as far as the Graeco-Roman ruins are concerned.”

Jack wrinkled his nose. "I have a deadline with that. I cannot afford to remain idle. As for the rest, I thought the Sirocco would affect my lungs, but fortunately I have suffered no ill-effects from the dust."

"Good." Evans steepled his fingers and stared down at the daybook. "Your work here is appreciated. You're a good man."

He paused again as if debating with himself, and then without raising his head, he said, "You are not the only one who can claim baneful signs. Or, if we are to keep our Homeric metaphors, the Delendas family is akin to the House of Atreus."

"And you speak to me of cannibalism!" Jack said, only half in jest.

Evans smiled vaguely. "Gabriel has told you about the so-called family curse, has he not?"

Jack slid into the chair opposite Evans. "He said he had a vampire story."

"Yes. A *fandázi*, as the locals would say, but nevertheless a strong belief and one that has haunted Gabriel's family for generations."

Evans drew a hand across the page open before him and continued. "You will have noticed very few of the workers will remain on the Kephala after sundown. Some of the youngsters will stay to guard the frescoes, but they are nervy with it. They tell me that Gabriel walks through the palace beneath the moon and no matter how brightly it shines, he casts no shadow."

Jack gripped the table and stared, astonished, at Evans.

"Superstition, of course," Evans said with a smile. "The people here know of his family's reputation. You've seen his house, I trust? The Delendas family came to Crete in the sixteenth century when the Venetians held the island. The first of them married a local girl and founded a dynasty. They traded in sugar or some such thing. Fabulously wealthy, they were. They either bought or were given some land at Oia."

"On Santorini?" Jack interrupted.

Evans nodded. "I think some of the family live there still. There was a cousin on the distaff side that Gabriel was very proud of, a priest. Manolis or Markus or..."

"Makarias," Jack whispered.

"That's the one! The Vampire-Killer of Santorini, they called him. Gabriel's family is nothing if not colourful." Evans peered at him. "Do you feel all right? Is it the dust?"

"I'm perfectly fine." Jack was finding it difficult to breathe as the room closed in around him. "Please, continue your story. It's fascinating."

Evans harrumphed. "You look sick. Gabriel said you didn't like the idea of revenants, but I didn't think it would take you like this."

"Who would like the idea of ancient corpses coming back to life?" Jack asked, trying to laugh around the words.

"Apparently, some of them don't die." Evans leaned forward. "They say the curse of the Delendas family is that the eldest son is a revenant, the inheritor of a long line of memories from time immemorial."

Jack felt the room tilt. "*Fandázi*," he said.

"Maybe." Evans shrugged. "All I know is that when I complained about the lack of burials and tombs, Gabriel knew exactly where to find them. I like to think of it as happy coincidence rather than *fandázi*, but you never know."

"To live forever or to live each life with the memory of all those that went before." Jack said hoarsely. "He was right. It is possible."

Evans frowned. "Who? Who said that?"

Jack stared at him, unable to utter another word and then he pushed back the chair and stood up.

Evans watched him as he took a wavering step across the room and he said, "Where are you going? Are you all right? Jack! For God's sake, man, you can't go outside in this weather!"

Jack walked out into the clawing, howling demon of the wind.

Chapter Fourteen

The following day, Jack woke from a disturbed dream to hear the indistinct hum of chatter in the hallway outside Gabriel's library. It was several moments before he gathered his wits enough to sit upright and make sense of the world around him. A piece of paper stuck to his cheek and he found he had spilt a bottle of ink. A puddle of royal blue had come to an abrupt stop up against the spine of Liddell & Scott's *Lexicon of Ancient Greek*. Cautiously, he pushed the book away and sighed at the trail that smudged in its wake.

He lifted his hands above his head and stretched, and then slumped back into the chair to stare at the table in front of him. Apart from the ink puddle and the slightly crumpled pages of the notebook he'd used as a pillow, everything was in order. A finds-tray lay to his right, containing a dozen seal-stones, including the one Belas had given him. Across the back of the table ranged neat piles of books, ordered according to their publication date and their subject matter. To his left was a stack of Mackenzie's daybooks and the inky lexicon. It was in miniature what Dr. Delendas's library was in life with Jack as the only scruffy thing inhabiting both.

Jack took out his handkerchief and tried to mop up the ink before it stained the table. The furniture, the housekeeper had told him proudly, was eighteenth century and very precious. The scent of beeswax had made him sniff for several days until he became used to it.

The library was a still, dusk-filled place, its windows shrouded with ruches of muslin and shuttered with dark oak panelling. Lit intermittently by oil lamps with frosted glass shades, the room seemed mired in perpetual twilight. Somewhere in the room a clock ticked, its

mechanism alternately muffled and then loud, usually when he needed most to concentrate. Jack had searched for the clock, intending to remove it from the room, but he had not found it.

There were too many shelves closely packed with too many books. He loved libraries, but this one disturbed him. It was more oppressive than the rest of the house, the atmosphere heavier. Little wonder, then, that he so often found himself nodding off to sleep whenever he came in here to work.

Jack shoved the ink-stained handkerchief back into his pocket and casually placed the lexicon over the blue smudge remaining in the grain. With a huff of weariness, he rubbed his hands over his face and then glanced down at his notebook. Over the last few pages he'd started to examine the texts inscribed on the seal-stones. "Linear B," Evans had said. "You will find links with the earliest forms of Greek, I'm sure, if you look hard enough."

Jack was unsure if that had been a suggestion or an order. Accordingly, he divided his pages up into columns and tried to match pictograms, letters, and—based upon his own vague belief—the fourth column was for any cuneiform match he might discover. So far it had been an exercise in patience and had yielded only the most tenuous of links.

It was depressing, he thought, to have so little to show for so much work. He turned the page to smooth out the crumpled paper from the reverse side and then stopped, startled, his heart racing. On the fresh page were words written in a style so familiar and strange, his first instinct was to close the notebook and lean both hands upon its face. Only when the flush of panic had receded did he open the book again, but carefully, as if the message would jump from the page.

Ἄνδρα μοι ἔννεπε, Μούσα, πολύτροπον ὃς μάλα πολλά
πλάγχθη, ἐπεὶ Τροίης ἱερὸν πτολίεθρον ἔπερσεν·
πολλῶν δ' ἀνθρώπων ἴδεν ἄστεα καὶ νόον ἔγνω,
πολλὰ δ' ἔν γ' ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὄντα κατα θυμόν,

ἀρνύμενος ἦν τε φυχὴν καὶ νόστον ἐταίρων.

Jack recognised it immediately as the opening lines of the *Odyssey*. As an undergraduate, such had been his enthusiasm for the study of these lines and those that followed, that even after a decade he could recall them with perfect clarity. He looked at the verse anew, daring to touch the loops and curls of the script, pausing at each letter that did not quite resemble the shape of the ancient Greek.

“Baneful signs,” he muttered beneath his breath. He reached into the finds-tray to select a seal-stone inscribed with Linear B for comparison, and received the second shock of the afternoon.

Only eleven seal-stones remained in the tray.

Jack knew which one was missing, but still he checked each piece carefully, matching it to the scrap of paper pinned beneath the nest of cotton protecting each seal-stone. He even moved the tray aside and searched the surface of the table and then the contours of the rug beneath it, but the seal-stone—his seal-stone—had disappeared.

For a moment he sat there staring down at the tray and then re-reading the lines in his notebook. The room seemed even more claustrophobic than before, and so to break it, he said, “You promised I could keep the two artefacts I chose. You crushed one of them into dust and now you take this one from me. Am I not to have anything to remind me of you except for memories or will you take those, too?”

He did not expect an answer, but the lack of response hurt enough for him to prompt, very gently, “Belas?”

He waited, holding his breath until it became painful and then he sighed, feeling foolish. Jack pushed the finds-tray aside and was about to tear the page from his notebook when there was a crash from the far end of the library. A crash, the delicate musical tinkle of shattered glass and then a sudden deafening silence.

Jack stood up and went towards the back of the room. As he left the safety of the carpet, his footsteps sounded loud across the bare stone

floor. He slowed his pace, wary of alarming whatever spirit had caused the disturbance.

He moved back onto the runners criss-crossing this part of the room, and then the old church chest caught his attention. Made of beaten iron, the rust so dark it had turned black, it was banded around and across by a web of chains that met within a great padlock.

It had intrigued him when he 'd first seen it, but now what drew his gaze was the spooling glitter of silver and brass that hung caught in the rust and the chains—the mechanical innards of the clock, silenced forever.

Jack glanced up at the shelves in front of him, but could see no obvious gap from whence the clock could have fallen. He crouched down to examine the pieces, picking up the tiny cogs and rivets and making a neat pile in his palm.

It had been a carriage clock, its face now sadly broken and its hands twisted. Jack was not sure if such a thing had any worth beyond sentimental value. He wondered if Dr. Delendas would even notice that the clock had stopped ticking. For all his interest in antiquities, Gabriel had very little use for his library. Jack had not once seen him enter the room, save for when he came seeking company.

Jack placed the gathered fragments of the clock on top of the chest, and then looked more closely at the lid. It bowed at one corner, the rusty metal split by the weight of the falling clock to open a fracture-hole as wide and long as his index finger. Curious, he peered inside, but could see nothing in the gloom. The sharp smell of the rust made him sneeze. He stood up and retrieved his handkerchief, and then cursed loudly at the still-damp ink now patterning his fingers.

He turned around as the door into the library opened. Arthur Evans entered, his sharp gaze hunting around the room when he saw that Jack was not at the table.

“Talking to yourself? That’s the first sign of madness or so they say.”

“It can also be the sign of an industrious worker,” added Gabriel as he leaned against the doorframe. He smiled at Jack as if they shared a great joke. “I often think aloud when I’m alone.”

“Yes, well,” said Evans irritably, “there you are, then. Madness.”

“I wasn’t talking to myself,” Jack said. “I just cursed.”

“See, now, that’s not very industrious, is it?” Evans said, casting a triumphant glance at Gabriel before he turned back to Jack. “Good God. What have you done to your hands?”

Jack shoved his handkerchief back into his pocket. “I spilled the ink.”

Evans tutted. He wandered over towards the table to examine the contents of the finds-tray. “As long as you are never so clumsy with the artefacts... What’s this?”

Jack hurried over and grabbed the notebook from Evans’s hands. He tore out the page with the five lines of text upon it and then he dropped the book back onto the table. “It’s nothing,” he said, his smile bright even though the look Evans turned upon him was dark and suspicious.

“Hmm. As you say.” Evans made as if to pick up the notebook again, but thought better of it and moved instead to count the seal-stones. “Where is the red agate stone?”

Jack scrambled for an excuse. “I... dropped it.”

“Really.” Evans frowned at him this time. “And have you found it yet?”

Jack was aware of Gabriel watching him from the doorway, and so he smiled again and said, “I’d just started looking.”

Evans stared at him for a moment longer, and then turned away. “Yes. Well. I was going to ask if you wanted to accompany me to the port. Mackenzie’s off to Egypt today and he asked if you wanted anything horrible brought back from Saqqara. You know, bits of decomposing mummies and whatnot.”

Jack wrinkled his nose at the idea. “I hope he doesn’t bring back anything of the sort. But pass on my thanks, if you would be so kind. I think I should stay here and look for my seal-stone.”

“That seems to be the sensible thing to do,” Evans agreed. “I shall see you later. Perhaps we can discuss your findings as to the links between Doric and Linear B?” He gave a sceptical sidelong glance towards the notebook.

Jack nodded rather too enthusiastically. “It would be a pleasure.” He continued to smile until the door closed behind them and then he sat down heavily in the chair and put his head in his hands.

He had barely time enough to organise his thoughts when the door opened again and Gabriel slipped back inside.

Jack waited, curled at the table and dreading the question.

“What is it?” Gabriel asked. “In your notebook. What are you hiding?”

“It’s nothing.”

There was a pause and then he said, “It’s from Belas, yes? He wrote to you.”

“It’s impossible. I don’t know how...”

Gabriel moved away from the door and came towards the table, but slowly, as if he expected Jack to bolt. “If you would let me see the message, perhaps I can help you understand it better.”

Jack clutched the torn page into a ball and held it in both hands to protect it. “There’s nothing to understand. It’s—it’s just a quote from Homer.”

“Then there is no harm in letting me see it, is there?” Gabriel stood beside him and held out his hand patiently. “Come, now. You know I have your best interests at heart. McKeown entrusted me with your care.”

“I have not coughed blood for days,” Jack said. “You need not feel obliged to treat me because of a mutual acquaintance.”

Gabriel laughed shortly. “There is no obligation. I am a doctor and you are still very much my patient. There are other considerations we should discuss, besides your possible pulmonary tuberculosis...”

Jack stood up and faced him. “Yes. The question of my sanity.”

“I do not think you are insane,” Gabriel said, his voice careful.

“Ah, yes. I am ‘confused’, is that not right?” Jack tossed the crumpled ball of paper onto the table between them. “Read it then and you will see for yourself that Belas exists, and is not merely a figment of my imagination.”

“I would never advance such an opinion.” Gabriel sounded injured as he picked up the paper and began to smooth it out. “But let us see what we have here.”

Despite his irritation at the doctor, Jack moved closer to read the lines again. He restrained himself from making a comment when Gabriel traced a finger over the text, and was content instead to say, “You can see I did not lie. It is the beginning of the *Odyssey*.”

“So I see.” Gabriel frowned at the words, and then translated, “Tell me, Muse, of the resourceful man who, after he had sacked the sacred city of Troy, had very many wanderings...”

He looked up with the ghost of a smile. “Does he liken you to Odysseus, do you think?”

Jack shrugged, embarrassed. “Perhaps. I am not half as wily as Odysseus, and neither do I have the friendly ear of a goddess.”

“But you have Belas,” Gabriel said pointedly.

“And capricious as he is, he has not the thoroughbred cruelty of the old gods,” Jack said, avoiding Gabriel’s questioning look.

“He saw the cities of many men and learnt their minds, and suffered misfortunes upon the sea, in order to save his life and to bring back his comrades,” Gabriel continued. He tapped the paper with his fingers. “What do you think Belas is saying to you with such a message?”

“I think,” said Jack uncertainly, “he wants me to go back.”

Gabriel looked at him. “You know this text, of course. You recognised it. You have studied it.”

Jack inclined his head. “Of course.”

“Then you know the lines that immediately follow these.”

“Yes. ‘But he failed to save his comrades, despite all his efforts. It was their own sin that brought them to their doom...’”

Jack let his words trail off, disturbed by the implications. If Belas really did see him as Odysseus, who else amongst his comrades had to be sacrificed?

He lifted his gaze to meet Gabriel's dark-eyed look, remembered the gossip Evans had repeated to him, and wondered if he had the courage to take things to their logical conclusion.

"Are you certain this was not written in your book before today?" Gabriel asked, and the question jolted him back to the present.

"It was not," Jack said. "I bought the notebook here. It did not come with me from Santorini. And besides, I flicked through the pages before—before I..."

Gabriel prompted him. "Yes?"

"Before I fell asleep," Jack admitted, slightly shamefaced.

"Then it is entirely possible this is an example of automatic writing," Gabriel said. "It happens more often than you would think. One doesn't need to believe in ghosts or to be a medium for such a thing to occur. Just think. I'm sure you can recall several occasions when you were writing a report or a letter when you felt tired or emotional and later, when you re-read it, you couldn't remember having written certain paragraphs or statements."

Jack nodded. It all sounded so simple, so believable, and yet he couldn't believe it. "Belas's hand is different to mine."

"Of course it is." Dr. Delendas smiled at him encouragingly. "With automatic writing, the results are often very different from your own style. One of my cousins consistently wrote in Italian, a language unknown to him."

"Your cousin Makarias?"

"Yes." Gabriel hesitated. "You will know, then, why he wrote in Italian. The islands in the archipelago were held by the duchy of Venice for centuries. Makarias believed he was blessed by an Italian saint who helped him in his quest to purge the islands of vampires."

"What if the saint was not a saint but the very creature he was trying to destroy?" Jack said mulishly.

Gabriel plucked the paper from the table and held it between thumb and forefinger. "That is impossible. My cousin was a holy man." He turned his head and looked at Jack directly. "He would have no truck with revenants. He despised them."

He smiled, and then quite deliberately, he ripped the paper into shreds.

* * *

Mackenzie's departure diminished the group in more ways than one. Jack had grown accustomed to the Scotsman's caustic remarks and blunt humour and Evans disliked being robbed of his lieutenant, even if only for the duration of the Easter feast. With the site closed up for a number of weeks, Evans had declared the little house beneath the Kephala to be uninhabitable and announced they would move back to Iraklion.

Jack discovered too late to demur that their temporary residence was the house of Dr. Delendas, and so he sequestered himself in the library for much of the day and emerged in time for pre-prandial drinks. That evening, he was the first to enter the sitting room. He did so quickly, seating himself in a wingchair before the hearth and settling upon his knees the book he'd brought from the library. Only then did he glance around.

His opinion of the house had not altered since his first impressions. It was, he thought, a house that wore its history too heavily. The interior still contrived to depress him no matter how many lamps he lit or how many windows he flung open. In his bedchamber, he had rolled up all the carpets and removed the tapestries, making the room stark and white.

Jack wished he could do the same with the more public spaces of the house. The sitting room unnerved him the most, with the curled black horns of the Cretan mountain goat hung above both doors and tall vases holding complex arrangements of dried flowers placed in the window bays. The large oil painting of Pedro Delendas dominated the room and

remnants of his Egyptian collection were placed on every available surface.

Jack had never much cared for Egyptology, finding the glorification of the dead to be macabre at best and ghoulish at worse. He did not envy Mackenzie his sojourn at the burial pits and stunted pyramids of Saqqara. It was bad enough that he was watched by the staring painted eyes of the row of shabtis ranged along the mantelpiece. He always tried to sit with his back to them and was engaged in shuffling his chair around when Evans and Dr. Delendas came in.

“Good evening,” he said.

Evans wandered over to the sideboard and helped himself to a glass of pale sherry. “You know, Jack, it is generally the case that one moves towards the fireplace for heat, not away from it.”

Jack stifled a retort as Gabriel said, “Perhaps he does not like the Answerers. They are not to everyone’s taste. They unnerved even you, Arthur, the first time you saw them standing there.”

“Me? Bah.” Evans picked up his glass and took a gulp of sherry.

“The Answerers?” Jack wondered aloud, turning his head to watch Gabriel move across the room towards the fireplace.

“You cannot ask them questions, but they will answer for you,” Gabriel explained, his voice soft and his hands careful, almost loving, as he picked up one of the shabtis. He cradled it in the palm of his hand, stroking the head of the figurine with his forefinger. “Imagine, in the afterlife, one need never work again. Not with an army of these creatures to do your bidding. They answer in your place and undertake the daily chores so you can enjoy uninterrupted hours of leisure.”

He dropped the shabti into Jack’s lap. “A pleasant notion, is it not?”

Jack picked up the clay figurine between thumb and forefinger and set it down on his book, as far away as possible. “I would not trust these things to do the job properly.”

Gabriel laughed as he took back the shabti and replaced it on the mantelpiece. “You mean you would not delegate? Or is it perhaps you

don't wish to lose control? There are few things in this life we can control. Our work is one of them."

Evans snorted. "Not in our line of work, Gabriel. Nor even in yours." He poured a second glass of sherry for the doctor. "Come and have a drink and stop talking about bloody Egyptology. It's enough that Duncan's gone off to look at pyramids and mummies without having to listen to you wax lyrical on the subject."

"I am chastised," Gabriel said with a flourishing half-bow in Evans's direction. He seated himself in the wingchair opposite Jack and sank into its embrace until his features were almost lost in the shadows. "However, will you not permit discussion of Egyptian links with Knossos?"

"Nothing that so much hints at the civilisation, dear boy," Evans said, carrying over the second glass of sherry and holding it out. "Just for tonight, it would be pleasant to keep our focus on the topic at hand."

"Which is?" prompted Gabriel, accepting the glass.

"That next year I will have built a house—a proper house, in the style of a Minoan villa, not like that ramshackle excuse of a pasha's palace—and life will be so much more tolerable."

Gabriel smiled. "You've been saying that for the past four years."

"One must always plan ahead," Evans said with a sniff. "I secured half of the Kephala long before the turn of the century. I knew I would get it."

"But then, you were certain of what you would get," Gabriel said. "The work of Kalokairinos before you guaranteed it."

Evans sniffed again, louder this time. "He was a fantasist."

"There are some who say the same of you."

Evans took another sip of sherry and relaxed into an armchair, smiling vindictively. "They can say all they want. I have Knossos. They have nothing."

Jack had taken up his book during this exchange, opening the pages at random and bowing his head to read the text rather than be caught too openly following the conversation. He was so used to being alone he

had forgotten what it was like to be in the company of educated, literate and argumentative men.

Jack shrank from violence even when the voices were raised not in anger but in passionate debate, and he felt wholly inadequate to argue his case against Evans's ferocious temper and Gabriel's combative teasing. He had found it easier to busy himself in some *faux* academic pursuit at least until dinner was served and was just settling into a thorough reading of the book when Evans addressed him.

"What are you reading there so secretively?"

Jack looked up, startled. "There is nothing secretive about it. I am reading the *Odyssey*," and he held up the volume so that Evans could see the cover.

"I believe it is Book Nineteen wherein Odysseus enumerates the many languages of Crete," Evans said, nodding his approval. "Eteocretan, of course. That, I should think, is what we are dealing with on our clay tablets. Linear B is a form of Eteocretan, I am sure of it."

"It could be Kydonian," Gabriel said idly, stretching his legs before him.

"Poppycock! And neither is it Pelasgoi—"

Their argument was interrupted by the appearance of the housekeeper who entered the room and bent low to whisper to Gabriel. He brightened visibly and said, "Of course. Send them in!" and then, as she left the room, he said, "My friends, we have a custom played out upon this night. Arthur, you may have seen this before, but I trust it will be a novel experience for you, Jack."

Jack lowered the book, curious. "What is it?"

"Tonight is the Vigil of St. Lazarus," Gabriel said. "It is customary for the children to visit each house in their village or neighbourhood, to perform a little mystery play for our edification and for their pleasure, since they are paid for their efforts in goods not usually permitted them until after the Easter fast."

"It sounds interesting," Jack said politely.

He closed the book and waited until the housekeeper opened the door again. In trooped a group of nine children all dressed in light muslin garments, their faces scrubbed clean and their hair brushed until it shone. Their leader was a girl about eight years old, full of her own importance as she carried Lazarus into the room. The rest of the children straggled after her, some gawping around at the décor with shyness while others smiled, recognising Dr. Delendas and sure of his generosity.

Miss Lazarus paraded around the edge of the rug, tossing her dark ringlets as she held up the elaborately dressed doll. “See,” she cried, her voice over-loud for the room, “here is Lazarus! Just like Our Lord, he rises from the dead!”

Jack smiled at the theatrical delivery, but then glanced at Gabriel when the child continued, “Ask of him a question and Lazarus shall answer!”

“But will he answer me or answer for me?” Jack asked mischievously.

The little girl stopped in her tracks, obviously confused by his question, looking from Jack to Gabriel as if for guidance. She squeezed the Lazarus doll around its waist, and the delicate embroidered garments rustled, the golden thread at the hem sparkling in the lamplight.

“May I see him?” Jack asked and held out his hands.

At a nod from Gabriel, Miss Lazarus ventured closer and gave him the doll. She stood watching him, her hands clasped behind her back and one foot twisting on the rug as she waited.

With great solemnity, Jack sat the Lazarus doll on top of the *Odyssey* on his knees. It was a beautiful thing. No childish mannequin this, but carefully crafted from finest linen with a mass of silky copper-red hair shot through with gold and with a pair of emerald sequins for eyes. His costume was ornate, stiff with embroidery and weighted with beads, a curious blend of ancient Greek and traditional Cretan dress.

“I did not know that Lazarus was a redhead,” Jack remarked into the silence, holding the Lazarus’ hands in his own as he turned the doll this way and that in admiration.

“All devious men are red,” Gabriel said. “How else was he able to cheat death so easily?”

Across the room, Evans snorted with laughter. “You will make these little ones as heathen as you are, doctor, if you continue.”

“It was the power of Christ that raised Lazarus,” Jack said pointedly, seeing the children grow restless.

“Lazarus descended into Hell, just as did Odysseus,” Gabriel said. “He was a redhead, too. Cunning, they are. Devious. And they provide us with moral guidance.” He sat forward and plucked the Lazarus doll from Jack’s knees, handing it back to the little girl. “Please, continue.”

Miss Lazarus gave them both an uncertain look, but turned the doll towards her and addressed it, her voice gaining in volume as she sang, “What did you see in Hades, my Lazarus?”

The other children pressed forward and intoned their response.

“Dread sights I saw, and terrors dire;
Punishments I saw, infernal fire.
Kind neighbours, just a drop of water spare,
From off my lips and heart to cleanse
The poisonous vapours of the lower air
And seek no more to learn.”

“Good show,” said Evans as the last note faded and Miss Lazarus returned to the group, suddenly shy now her role had ended. “Interesting that you still refer to Hell as ‘Hades’, is it not?”

Gabriel gave him a bland smile. “Perhaps the Orthodox are closer to the heathen than you think.”

“I would believe anything of you,” Evans retorted. He reached into his jacket for his pocketbook and drew out a few drachmae to place in the basket carried forward by the two youngest children. “Ah, well done. Jolly good.”

The basket was already a quarter full with small gifts from other households—red-painted eggs, tiny seedcakes, a jar of honey, a posy of

flowers. Jack smiled at the children as they approached him and dug in his pockets for any coins he could add. "Thank you," he said, dropping the money into the centre of the basket and then the steady chink of metal was broken by a different sound and the youngest child dropped his side of the basket as he made a grab for the newest gift.

"Pretty!"

Jack stared in horror as the small fist closed around the red agate seal-stone. "But that's..." he began and then he stopped himself when the child looked up at him, wholly innocent of any wrongdoing. "That's yours," Jack said dully. "You keep it. May it be lucky for you."

The child beamed at him, taking up his end of the basket again. The group progressed back to the door where the housekeeper filled the basket with cakes and sweets, and then they were on their way.

"What was that you gave them?" Evans asked curiously.

Jack could not quite meet his gaze. "Nothing."

"It was generous beyond measure," Gabriel said, his face expressionless and his tone neutral. He stood. "Dinner will be served shortly. May I suggest we move into the dining room?"

Evans frowned at Jack as if he suspected what had just been given away, but Dr. Delendas indicated he should proceed before them. "A week before we can break the fast, but I think you will be pleased with the meal tonight," he said, and Evans huffed against the strictures of Orthodox Easter.

Jack took the *Odyssey* with him as they passed into the corridor, intending to return the book to the library before he sat down to dinner. Gabriel waylaid him as soon as Evans went into the dining room.

"You said you'd lost it and now you've given it away," he said, and this time his expression was almost feral. "You told me the seal-stone was a gift from Belas. That you no longer want his gifts pleases me more than I can say."

Jack shifted backwards. "Is that your professional opinion?"

“Redheads are always tricksters,” Gabriel said softly, moving close to him in the darkness, lifting a hand to touch his hair. “And the fair-haired are always prized. Touched by the gods, beloved by mortal and immortal alike...”

Jack stood against the doorframe, the book held in both hands against his chest. He was uncertain whether he felt desire or fear, or both.

“So says Homer,” Gabriel whispered, suddenly passionate. “And so say I. You cannot be insensible to the way I feel. You are too good to tangle me in foolish games. I do not look for encouragement, but give me something so I know I may yet have the hope of your affections.”

Jack forced himself to speak. “You mistake me. I have—I do not...”

The door beside them creaked on its hinges and Gabriel stepped apart from Jack as Evans peered out into the corridor. “I thought we were having dinner?”

Gabriel’s smile looked strained. “My apologies, Arthur. We were discussing a minor point of Homer’s.”

“A gloss,” Jack added hurriedly. “Dr. Delendas believes it to be Byzantine, but I think the truth of the matter is lost in the Dark Ages.”

Evans stared at them and then turned back abruptly into the dining room. “Be so good as to keep your Byzantine intrigues elsewhere, Gabriel. You are being a very bad host. I want my dinner.”

* * *

Jack sat through the first course, conscious of being the object of interest for both Evans and Dr. Delendas. The two men sat at either end of the table and casually sniped at each other on a variety of topics from historiography to fishing, but all the time their gaze rested upon Jack, seated between them along the length of the table.

As the conversation grew ever more desultory, Jack finished his soup and set down the spoon. He drew the copy of the *Odyssey* closer and then broke into their chatter, saying, “Excuse me. I think I will retire.” He

got to his feet and nodded to Evans politely, and then made his way towards the door.

Gabriel pushed back his chair and made as if to rise. "You've hardly eaten."

"I'm not hungry." It was a feeble excuse and he knew it.

"Let him go," Evans said loudly.

"Then," Gabriel said, lowering his voice as Jack passed him, "may I call upon you later? In a professional capacity, of course."

Jack gave him a sharp look. "If you care at all for my well-being, perhaps you would recommend me to one of your colleagues. After all, in declaring your affection, you have compromised your professional integrity."

Gabriel sighed silently and half-turned so Evans could not follow their words or actions. He reached out to touch Jack's arm, but hesitated and then withdrew his hand when Jack swayed backwards. "I have the highest regard for you," Gabriel said softly. "It was not my intention to offend you in any way."

Jack looked flustered. "In truth, I am not offended, merely surprised. But we should not be having this conversation."

"We should." Gabriel tilted his head so his hair fell, soft and dark as crow's wings, into his eyes. "Do not mistake me. This is no idle fancy. What I can offer you is more than ever he could."

Jack clutched the *Odyssey* tighter, hiding behind it once more. "And yet you tell me Belas does not exist."

"He does not, save for in your own head. Only trust me and I shall prove it to you." Gabriel touched Jack's sleeve. "May I see you later?"

Jack pulled himself free of the caress and did not answer. He took a firmer hold of the book and hurried out of the room, closing the door on Evans's complaints. For a moment he stood in the hallway, torn between the desire for sanctuary and the need to flee. It came to him then that he had left Santorini for the exact same reasons. The thought made him

laugh aloud and he clamped a hand over his mouth when the laughter sounded too much like a sob.

He was still holding the book and so decided to return it to the library. He picked up a lamp, wondering how he had never before noticed how dark were the corridors. The house was in silence, the tapestries and rugs deadening all sound but his breathing. Jack tucked the book beneath his arm as he approached the library and he opened the door.

The *Odyssey* tumbled to the carpet with the softest thud. Jack held onto the doorknob and stared into the library in astonishment. Every lamp within was lit, sending out a warm glow. The entire room was as bright as daylight, and for once it looked not somnolent but cheerful and welcoming. The atmosphere was different, too, sharper, as if alive and expectant.

Jack hesitated on the threshold, and then picked up the book and stepped inside, closing the door behind him. The lamp he held was redundant now and so he set it aside on the table. There was little point in wondering how or why the room was lit, when he knew he had been the last person in the library and he knew equally well that he had extinguished each of the lamps before he had left.

“Belas?” he said aloud, hearing his voice absorb into the pages of the books. “Belas, please.”

There was no reply. He crossed the room and replaced the *Odyssey* upon the shelf. As the book slid home, there was a noise at the far end of the library. Jack instinctively turned his head towards the sound and then he recognised it as the sound of a clock ticking.

“No. It can’t be...”

He walked slowly across the carpet, feeling the palms of his hands grow damp with anxiety. Before he was even halfway, the clock struck the hour. Jack stood and counted each tinny chime, reaching the fourth stroke before he forced himself to move to the iron chest where the clock still lay in pieces, just as he had left it.

And still it chimed, even though its hands were frozen and its face shattered and the workings of its body lay puddled around the chest like mechanical guts.

Jack waited until it fell silent, and then he crossed to the nearest window and dragged open the sash. He returned to the broken clock and gathered the pieces in his arms, heedless of the springs and cogs that escaped his grasp and rolled beneath the rugs, and then he flung it all from the window.

The glass smashed again as it hit the pavement outside. The brass components clattered, disturbing the whirr of the cicadas for the briefest of moments. Something rustled in the lemon trees and then was still.

Jack stood by the window, taking deep breaths of the warm night air. Faintly, there came the drowsy scent of citrus and stocks that lingered even when he closed the sash. He shook his head to clear it, and then went to examine the iron chest with its elaborate chains and padlock.

It was open. The lock hung limply, its chains draped in disarray. Jack stared at the chest, almost afraid to lift the lid. It crossed his mind that perhaps this was the resting-place of a revenant, but then he recalled the curse of the Delendas family was such that they had no need to resort to hiding their bones.

Jack knelt in front of the chest and, warily, he lifted the lid. The hinges protested, squealing so loudly he winced and stopped, sure that the housekeeper or even Gabriel would come to investigate the source of such a noise. But nobody came, and so Jack pushed open the lid to its widest extent, and then he looked inside.

At first he was disappointed. No bones, no antiquities, just several layers of oilcloth and sacking. He peeled back each layer, checking to see if anything was hidden in between, but there was nothing. This continued to the depth of nearly a foot, and then, just as the thrill of discovery was wearing thin, he uncovered a book, a folder filled with documents, and beneath that, a scattering of papers protected by more cloth.

Jack lifted out the book, his hands gentle against its cover as he recognised its age and value. He wondered why it was not on the library shelves. Gabriel had other seventeenth century books in his collection, and many that were even older. It was a shame such a book should be locked away, thought Jack and he opened it.

The pages were spotted with red foxing, the paper cold and smooth. The title was as clear as when it had been printed, an elegant Gothic capital script that read *De Quorundam Graecorum Opinationibus*.

“Certain Opinions About The Greeks,” Jack translated aloud. He recognised the name of the author if not the actual work itself. Leo Allatius had been the first Westerner to record the existence of revenants, although his tone had been more cynical and patronising than awestruck and afraid. As an undergraduate, Jack had read excerpts of Allatius’ writing but had considered them to be no more than travellers’ tales. Now, though, he turned the pages with deeper interest and soon came upon a piece of paper, folded several times to serve as a bookmark. At first he studied the text and then he carefully unfolded the paper and laid it flat upon the open page.

It crackled, yellow with age, the ink a fading golden-brown. In places, the words were obscured or completely obliterated, but within a paragraph or two, Jack was able to make sense of what he was reading.

There are those who speak in hushed tones of a certain family of Candia, by name the Delendas family, who are much envied for their wealth and power. But, so say these people, this wealth was got, not through honest labour, but from blood-money, from crimes so ancient and terrible that few who know the truth will speak it, lest the eldest son of this family hear rumour fly, for his vengeance is swift and certain.

My informant was a man of that same town, and he would speak with me only once, so that I was obliged to write these notes in haste. Where others have told me, wide-eyed, their tales of gelloudes and Nereids and the dreaded Lamia, this man was in such fear that his face was calm and his voice as steady as the death-knell. He told me of debaucheries and

murders committed by the Delendas family, that none would wed their womenfolk despite their celebrated beauty, so that husbands were acquired from the islands and mainland. Once, a female of that family was forced to marry a Turk for want of suitors, but he did not long survive the wedding-feast...

Jack came to the end of the page and turned over, but there was no more. He flicked through the remainder of the book and then put it aside and took out the folder from the chest. Paper, parchment, and vellum, a dozen different hands, a half-dozen different languages. He found more from Allatius and a long journal entry written in Spanish that he could only guess at. Beneath it were deeds and legal papers, and a clutch of letters with broken seals.

He shuffled through the documents and then returned to the chest, pushing aside the sacking and grabbing at anything he touched. Out came a scroll bound with leather, three seals affixed to it to weight it down. Jack caught his breath in a gasp of shock as he unravelled it and read the cold, superior Latin. It was a bull of excommunication against one Rafael Pedro Delendas, dated 1313 and bearing the personal seal of Pope Clement V.

Jack scanned the bull, running the tip of his finger along the close-written lines until he found the charge that had led to the excommunication. "Sorcery," he translated in a whisper. "Heresy and sorcery... The decree of excommunication is to stand in perpetuity against this family and all its descendants, never to be revoked."

He dropped the bull onto the rug and dipped into the chest one final time. It was almost empty, save for the cloth, but then Jack felt something dent his flesh. He pulled out a broken piece of pottery. He stared at it, and then turned it over. It was reddish-orange on the underside, the wheel-marks visible as distinct ridges. He could see tiny glints of mica in the fabric of the clay. The exterior was slipped and glazed, its glossy black surface scuffed and worn, and scratched into the glaze was one word.

Jack closed his fingers around the sherd and held onto it tightly for a moment before he placed it in his jacket pocket. Methodically, he began to tidy away the contents of the chest.

His head full of what he had found, too tired and confused to hope to make sense of it all, Jack took the lamp and left the library with the intention of retiring to bed. He had no idea how long he had spent reading through the papers in the chest. It had seemed to him to be hours, but as he passed the dining room, he realised with a start that the lights were still on within. The door was ajar and so he peeped inside to see Evans and Gabriel seated as before, their attitudes more relaxed.

Jack was about to move on when, quite clearly, he heard his name mentioned. Conscious that nobody ever heard anything good from eavesdropping, he nevertheless remained motionless beside the door and waited, watching.

* * *

“Mackenzie has noticed, you know,” Evans said as he lit a cheroot.

Gabriel lifted the decanter from the table and poured out a measure of brandy. He took his time, his face impassive despite Evans’s scrutiny.

“He thinks you’re making a fool of yourself.”

Gabriel took a sip from his glass and smiled with pleasure at the taste.

“He said as much to me today before he left,” Evans continued, raising his voice. “And he’s not the only one to notice, as I’m sure you’re aware.”

“I am aware of nothing of the sort,” Gabriel said mildly.

Evans scowled, his temper roused. “Damn it, Gabriel, you’re a doctor! You have standing within this community, a reputation to uphold. I understand your fascination, but it is simply not right. It wouldn’t be half so bad if he actually returned your affections, but it’s clear to everybody that it’s not the case.”

Gabriel cradled the glass between his hands. “How long did it take you to get the Kephala?”

“No,” Evans snapped, punctuating his words with a stab of the cheroot so ash tumbled onto the polished surface of the table. “You are not to make that comparison. It’s ridiculous, Gabriel, completely ridiculous.”

“You waited years to get what you wanted. I do not have that much time. Unless you offer him serious employment on the site, he will in all probability return to the islands. And that would be a great shame.”

Evans’s tone was outraged. “I am not your procurer, Dr. Delendas!”

Into the silence that followed the retort, Gabriel laughed, genuinely amused. “See beyond the merely physical, Arthur! Yes, I want him, and I will have him, for I have never yet been denied, but his condition fascinates me.”

“You keep telling me he is insane, but I do not see it,” Evans said.

Gabriel smiled, finally setting down his glass. “He is not entirely insane. There is a condition recorded throughout history as a kind of madness, although some societies looked upon it as a mark of favour from the gods. We gave it a name only thirty years ago, *dementia praecox*—although it is far from certain whether this state is a precursor to true dementia.”

“Medicine is as uncertain a science as archaeology,” Evans said. “I have not the patience to enjoy both disciplines, so I have not the slightest idea of what you’re talking about.”

Gabriel poured himself another inch of brandy. He said, “I believe he has two personalities with no clear memory of what he does when the second personality grips him.”

Evans blinked and held the cheroot away from his lips so he could stare, astonished, at Gabriel. “Do you mean to tell me that this Belas he talks about is actually...?”

“Yes,” Gabriel said, his face alight with pleasure. “It’s himself.”

“But you told me Belas murdered McKeown. Why didn’t Jack stop this other personality? Are you suggesting Jack wanted McKeown dead?”

“No, no, it does not necessarily follow. It’s complicated. But fascinating! I have no idea what the trigger might be that awakens Belas, whether it is a word or an action or even a season or a place.”

Evans stubbed out his cheroot and sat back in his chair. “Fascinating he may be, but if what you say is true, then he is a murderer.”

“Jack did not murder McKeown,” Gabriel said quietly. “Belas did.”

They sat in silence for a while until Evans exclaimed, “This is nonsense, man. They are one and the same.”

“They are not,” Gabriel said and grasped for some other way to explain. “If we were to talk in theological terms, I would describe it as more complex than possession. The Church accepts there are certain human conditions that can be improved or healed by exorcism...”

Evans held up his hands and laughed. “You, a doctor! You cannot speak to me of exorcisms.”

“I can and I will.” Gabriel rose to his feet and leaned his fists on the table. “There have been times when a patient was brought to me where I was unable to help them, but a priest could. I myself have witnessed five exorcisms. They work, Arthur. Maybe not all the time, but they can work.”

“Then perhaps you should call a priest now and have done with it.”

“No,” said Gabriel. “I want to study him. I want to learn from him.”

Evans sighed hugely. “They will hang him, you know, if they find out.”

“The vice-consul’s man has discovered nothing beyond superstition. We insular Greeks can be as silent as the grave, should we have need to be.”

Gabriel glanced at Evans, unsure for the first time. “Much depends on you, Arthur. I am sorry to presume on our friendship like this, but he is important to me. I want him, and I will have him.”

“I find it distasteful that you wish to make your patient your lover.”

“There are worse things I could do.”

“There are not many things worse than breaking a sacred oath, Gabriel.”

He shrugged. “I am already cursed. Further damnation holds no fear for me.”

“Ah, yes. Your family history.” Evans shifted in his chair, crossing his legs at the ankles and examining the shine on his shoes. “I did tell him that story, you know.”

“It is not just a story.”

“Yes, yes.” Evans flapped a hand in dismissal. “You believe it, just as much as he believes this Belas of his is a revenant that wanders around Santorini. Really, Gabriel, the two of you are well-matched.”

Gabriel ignored the sarcasm, his gaze fixed calmly upon his friend. “Will you help me?”

“He’s a good archaeologist and a gentleman. It goes against my principles to be party to anything underhand—no, you may laugh! In business it is one thing, but where moral questions arise, one cannot be too careful.”

Evans looked down the length of the table, his expression sombre. “I do not like the idea you could coerce an innocent—for if he is as sick in the mind as you say, then he is an innocent—into a relationship he might not want. It is a thought repugnant to me.”

Gabriel moved from where he stood, coming close to Evans in appeal. “I would not coerce him. I swear to you, Arthur, I swear by all I hold dear, I will not abuse my position. I am a doctor. I mean him no harm. I merely want to learn, to know...”

“To *know* him,” Evans grunted with a sudden flash of wit. “Oh, do stop grovelling, man! I can see you care for him.”

Gabriel bowed his head to hide his smile. “I did not look for it.”

“Do we ever?” wondered Evans archly. “Be that as it may, it occurs to me that Belas might resent your attentions towards Jack.”

“I hope very much that he resents them,” said Gabriel. “I want to meet Belas face-to-face.”

“And do what? He sounds like a wild beast if he can so easily slaughter a man. Would you try to reason with such a creature? Do you even think he would listen?”

Gabriel shook his head and shrugged, trying to find words. “I don’t know.”

“Hmm. Well. I think perhaps I will retire. This has been a most exhausting discussion.” Evans heaved himself out of the chair and leaned against Gabriel for a moment as they walked together towards the door.

“Do you think you can cure him?” Evans asked suddenly.

Gabriel considered the question carefully. “I don’t know that ‘cure’ is an adequate term. Perhaps I could bring him to an understanding of himself. That is probably the best that can be hoped for.”

Evans nodded. “Indeed. And what do you get from this?”

“I get the same kind of glory you seek, Arthur,” Gabriel said. “The kind that goes beyond the physical. The kind that lasts forever. He will make me famous.”

* * *

Jack had heard enough. He fled upstairs to his bedroom and, as quietly as possible, he pushed the dressing table against the door. Then he went to sit, curled up on the end of the bed, mindlessly stroking the softness of the woollen quilt beneath his hands until he felt calm again.

He felt foolish and so got up from the mattress and began to undress. As he started to unbutton his shirt, there was a gentle knock at the door.

He froze where he stood, hardly daring to breathe, and then he looked towards the door as if afraid of what he might see there.

From beyond the wooden barrier came Gabriel’s voice, calling his name.

Jack did not dare to reply, and after a few minutes, Gabriel went away.

Chapter Fifteen

It had seemed to be the perfect plan of escape. Jack, desperate to absent himself from the Delendas household after the events of the Eve of St. Lazarus, had cheerfully volunteered for duty at the Kephala when the news was first brought to Arthur Evans's attention. Manolis, the local youth who stood guard over the frescoes within the palace complex, had run down to Iraklion at first light to tell his employer of strange glowing shapes and stealthy sounds of scratching, of demonic howls and looming shadows that lurched from wall to wall, leaving no footprints that could be traced in the dusty ground at sunrise.

"*Fandázi*," Evans commented, kindly enough, when Manolis's tale was told. "That doesn't sound much like our Priest-King this time. Looters! Damn the lot of them. They'll thief anything from an honest man. Bloody grave robbers," he continued, calmly overlooking the fact he was passing judgement within a room filled almost entirely with Egyptian antiquities acquired illegally.

Jack risked a glance at Dr. Delendas and saw the hint of a smile cross his features. He looked away again before Gabriel noticed the direction of his gaze.

"What will you do, Arthur?" he asked instead. "The poor lad is terrified."

Manolis, whose grasp of English was limited, understood enough of Jack's speech to nod emphatically, clutching his hands together and rolling his eyes in a pantomime of fright.

"More than likely he's invented the whole thing so he doesn't miss out on Holy Week," Gabriel said, only half-smiling as he began to roll a cigarette.

“Oh, no. I don’t think so.” Evans frowned at his friend. “Manolis is a good lad. A good worker. He’s seen things before, you know.”

“If Mackenzie were here, he’d send the lad back with a few sharp words and a cuff round the ear.” Gabriel licked the edge of the paper and sealed the cigarette. He set it between his lips and lit it before continuing. “You’ve never had any trouble with looters. You own the land and employ most of the workers. Nobody in their right mind would risk a secure job by stealing from you.”

“Perhaps not, but there are opportunist thieves at every turn. Not everyone in this town is a Christian, after all, and not all Christians are as devout as you, doctor. And I have rivals, too! No,” said Evans, looking sternly at Manolis and speaking in Greek, “I must safeguard the site and its many treasures, no matter how supernatural they may seem to be.”

Manolis wailed and flung up his hands. “Do not make me go back to that accursed place, I beg of you!”

“Accursed? Bah. It’s not cursed, boy. Those noises were just animals. Foxes, perhaps, barking and digging and running to and fro. ‘Tis the season for beasts to seek their mates and time for them to produce offspring. The majority of warm-blooded creatures are noisy in their protestations of love. It was probably some display of affection you heard.”

“Animals do not make lights,” Manolis said stubbornly. “And it was not the sound of paws digging, but of scratching, such as the noises made by men trapped and trying to free themselves from the grave. Only, when I went in the direction of these noises, I saw nobody.”

Jack’s attention had drifted, but he recalled it sharply at the mention of *Kanenas*—Nobody. “What if Manolis is right?” he said hurriedly in English before Evans could think of a further explanation for the appearance of the lights. “What if there are looters on the site, men who are not above using superstition for their own purposes?”

He tried not to bite his tongue at that, well aware of Gabriel’s hooded expression and Evans’s cynical smile.

“What I mean is that if there really are looters at the Kephala, they will know the site is practically empty, left unguarded but for Manolis, a young man, impressionable, wary of the old tales of ghosts and revenants walking the ruins...”

Gabriel exhaled a plume of bluish-grey smoke. “You make it sound very romantic.”

“It was not intended to be.” Jack leaned forward and held Evans’s gaze. “I suggest you place a guard for the duration of Holy Week and the Easter feast. Not a local, for they will be most unwilling, as is Manolis, to miss out on the festivities.”

Evans snorted. “Such help would be hard to find.”

“Not necessarily.” Jack tilted his head and smiled.

“You? You would do it?”

“Don’t be absurd!” Gabriel exclaimed, his complaint drowning out Evans’s tentative gratitude. He swung himself out of his seat and paced across the room to the mantelpiece and its line of silent shabtis. He stared at the row of little figures and flicked ash into the empty fireplace. More reasonably this time, he said, “You will not be comfortable at the pasha’s palace. Come now, you cannot argue with me! You have seen the state of disrepair for yourself. It is hardly fit for a cattle-byre.”

“My tastes are not as nice as Arthur’s. I shall do well enough there.”

Gabriel threw the remainder of his cigarette into the dead embers and then turned to lean against the mantel. Dressed in black, he looked sombre against the grey-veined white marble of the surrounds. Jack was reminded suddenly of a carrion crow standing atop a pile of bleached sunlit bones. He shivered at the image, forcing it out of his mind as Gabriel spoke again.

“I absolutely refuse to let you go. Why, it’s not even your site! Now, if Mackenzie were here...”

“Duncan is in Egypt,” Evans interrupted, “so whether or not he would be content to do guard duty for the rest of the Easter feast is a moot point. Jack, if you are offering, I accept most gratefully. You can return

to the Kephala with Manolis, as I'm sure the lad will have left some personal belongings on the site."

"But you cannot stay there!" Gabriel insisted one final time. "The weather seems bright and fine today, but I guarantee that by tonight the wind will have changed and there will be rain. You know already how uncomfortable a place it is when the weather is foul. Better that you stay here."

Jack stood up. "Your concern is noted, but I assure you I feel much better. Never felt healthier, as a matter of fact. However, if I should start coughing blood again, I will return to Iraklion without delay. I doubt that will happen, though. I've been clear of the malady for some time now. If the Sirocco did not induce it, I am not afraid of the rain."

He ended on a cheery note, but Evans frowned at him. "I had almost forgotten your illness. Perhaps what Gabriel says is not so selfish, after all."

Jack hid his smile at the look of discomfiture on the doctor's face. "You forget, Arthur, I will not be spending too much time inside the house. How good a guard would I be if I lay asleep all night, half a mile distant from the frescoes? No, I will sleep during the siesta time and patrol the site by night. That should do the trick."

Evans nodded. "Good show. And when you are in the house, if you can't sleep, you know very well there are still several of those damn tablets that need proper recording. I can barely make sense of Duncan's scrawl. I'd be obliged if you could take a look, if you have the time."

"I shall certainly try, although I hope also to continue my work on the Graeco-Roman habitations along the road."

"Good God, man, it's only a week's worth of digging you'll do and that on your own," Evans exclaimed. "And here I was thinking that being part of a properly run excavation had tamed the eccentric in you."

"I fear not," Jack said, but he smiled. "Besides, it is my last chance before that part of the site is levelled. I would like to at least explore the area further before I bid it goodbye forever."

Evans tutted. "Such melodrama! Very well, have it your way. But send word if you spot anything Minoan, won't you?"

"Certainly I shall." Jack turned to Manolis, who had been turning his head back and forth to follow the conversation between them. In Greek he said, "I will need a moment to pack a few things. Dr. Delendas, may I borrow a donkey? And Arthur, the key to the pasha's palace..."

"Yes, yes, you'll find it inside the conical cup on my bedside table. It's a horrible rusty old thing, you'll recognise it."

"My thanks." Jack had started towards the door, Manolis trailing in his wake, when Gabriel swiftly intervened, catching hold of Jack's sleeve.

"Should I be offended? Have I been a bad host?" Gabriel asked softly in English, exaggerating his surprise for the sake of propriety and for the fact that Manolis was watching, if not understanding what he heard.

Jack paused, glanced down at the hand curled possessively about his arm and then he looked Gabriel in the eye. "No, doctor. You have been a most attentive host."

"Then your complaint is not with my hospitality."

Jack gazed at him for a moment longer and then he drew away, saying to Manolis, "We should go. Come, you can help me to pack. How cold does it get at night on the Kephala?"

Gabriel stood in the doorway and watched them retreat up the stairwell. Jack kept up a light-hearted stream of inconsequential chatter, pausing only when he heard Evans's voice, loud in the relative quiet of the house, saying, "For God's sake, let him alone."

"He does not know what he wants."

Evans snorted. "Then who are you to dare advise him?"

In the semi-darkness of the staircase, Jack whispered, "I do know what I want, doctor, and it is not you."

Beside him, Manolis looked up, wide-eyed. "Mr. Hunter?"

Jack smiled. "Nothing. It is nothing. Let us be on our way."

* * *

The day was fine when they set off from the town. Jack tipped back his straw hat to enjoy the sun's warmth upon his face. Manolis strolled alongside the donkey, alternately leading the beast by its halter or wandering off to exchange gossip with people they met along the way. He came back from one such conversation with a thin cardboard scoop of granita, which he handed to Jack with a cheeky grin.

"It's very good. My aunt made it. The best in all Iraklion!"

Jack shifted in the wooden saddle so he could hold the reins looped over one arm, and then he nibbled at the frozen dessert. It was so cold it stung his lips and tongue, but after the first shock of it he could taste the bittersweet tang of lemons, sharp and refreshing.

"It's excellent," he said truthfully when he realised Manolis was waiting for his approval. "My compliments to your aunt. How does she keep it so cold?"

Manolis walked sideways like a crab while he tried to answer the question, almost tripping over the uneven cobbles leading to the Kainoriou Gate. "She makes it in preparation for the feast next weekend. You may think it is nothing at all to make the granita, but it takes time to make the syrup. From her garden come the lemons and from Naxos, the citron. She adds also ambergris and sugar and a little water. Then she sends the men into the mountains for the snow."

Jack smiled. "And do you bring it back in a box, the way Aulus Gellius claims your ancestors did?"

"No, in a bucket," Manolis replied.

Jack laughed, delighted. "And then the snow is mixed with the syrup, but where does your aunt store this wonderful concoction so it does not melt?"

Manolis looked furtive and came closer to the donkey. "You have seen the cisterns the Turks built? They are deep and lined with tiles. It is very cold inside, even in the height of summer."

“Ingenious.” Jack finished the rest of the granita and licked his fingers. The cardboard was a soggy mass, and Manolis whisked it away and dropped it into a prickly pear bush before he could protest.

As they left the town behind and the road began to climb towards the Kephala, Manolis fell silent and scuffed through the dust, more interested in staring at the ground than at the landscape around him.

“Do you really believe a ghost walks the site?” Jack asked eventually when the youth’s reluctance to go much further was becoming too obvious to ignore.

“Yes. I have seen it many times, the saint who guards the paintings.”

Jack recollected that Evans had told him the same story when they’d first met. “The saint lives in the fresco of the cup-bearer, yes? You told Mr. Evans that the saint was angry at being disturbed. You saw lights and heard noises even then.”

Manolis nodded. “That is so. But it is not the saint this time. I am used to him. I say my prayers and sometimes I bring offerings for him, just small things, sweets or flowers. The spirit I have seen these past few days is something else. It is not nice. It is angry. It is... restless.”

Jack looked down at this. “Restless, you say? Do you think... could it be a *vrykolakas*?”

Manolis shuddered. “I do not want to think on it.” He hesitated for the duration of a few footsteps, and then he said, still keeping his gaze firmly fixed on the ground, “But it is good you come and take my place. You will be safe.”

“From *vrykolakades* or from looters?” Jack asked, amused.

“Both,” said Manolis. His expression was earnest when he glanced upwards. “By now, Mr. Evans will have sent rumours racing across town that you will be at the Kephala. Only those looters who were very determined would seek to rob the palace while you were on guard.”

Jack had heard this before. “I’m not an *exotiko*, Manolis.”

“No, but you are the beloved of a *vrykolakas*, and no sensible man would dare cross you for fear you will send your lover after them.”

This was said in such a matter-of-fact way that it was some time before Jack could comprehend what he had just heard. Even then, his first instinct was one of complete astonishment. “What did you say?”

“You are the beloved of a *vrykolakas*, and...”

“Where did you hear that? Who told you?”

Manolis’s glance wandered sideways, guiltily. “It is common enough knowledge.”

“For how long?” Jack asked more sharply than he’d intended.

“A few weeks, maybe a month.” Manolis looked miserable now. “You must understand it is a topic of great interest. Not everyone believes it, but...”

“But enough do,” Jack said, shaking his head. Things began to make sense now, tiny things he hadn’t given much thought to before, such as the gradual thinning-out of his workforce and the increasing distance of some of the locals with whom he’d once been on friendly terms. He had put it down to the excitement of the approaching Easter season, when the prolonged Lenten fast focused minds on matters religious and culinary, but now he saw that they had been drawing away from him out of caution and fear.

“Is it true?” Manolis ventured.

Jack stopped the donkey and slid from the saddle, and walked a short distance alone. He took off his hat and felt the sun crawl through his hair. At his feet lay several scraps of marble, half-buried in the earth. He scuffed at them while he wondered what to do, how to answer the question and knowing whatever response he gave would be all over the town by that evening.

“Does this *vrykolakas* have a name?” he asked finally, determined that if the reply favoured Dr. Delendas, then he would return immediately to Iraklion and confront Gabriel.

“It is called Belas,” Manolis said.

Jack was glad the boy could not see his face. “If you know that much, you will also know that Belas is a *vrykolakas* of Santorini, not of Crete,

and that *vrykolakades* cannot cross salt water, so your fears are groundless. It is not Belas who stalks the Kephala at night. It must be something else. Perhaps a pair of foxes, as Mr. Evans suggested. ”

“It is not foxes, nor any other type of animal,” Manolis insisted. “It is Belas.”

Jack raised his voice. “He cannot leave Santorini!”

“He does not need to,” Manolis said quietly.

“What do you mean?”

The youth shivered, even though the sun was at its zenith and the land around them swam with lazy heat. When Jack turned around, Manolis dipped his head nervously as if afraid to meet his gaze.

“It is true a *vrykolakas* may not cross salt water of their own free will,” Manolis said, “but in an instance such as this, when an attachment has been made, things are different.”

“How?” asked Jack, trying to keep his voice level.

Manolis hesitated. “It is difficult to discuss. My grandmothers talk for many hours on these subjects, but some are not for the ears of men and so they send me away. Then there are those tales known by all which show the power of a *vrykolakas* from far away. Did you ever hear about Nikos who lived close by the church of Agios Minas?”

Jack tried to smile in encouragement. “No. But doubtless you will tell me about him. I take it he had some dealings with a *vrykolakas*?”

“He was brother to one.”

Manolis seemed to gain confidence from the look of surprise Jack gave him, and so he entered into the telling of his story with enthusiasm. “My great-uncle knew of Nikos. It was when the Turks ruled here and this man Nikos, he had fled from the island of Kasos. His brother had died there, killed by the Turks who believed both men were spies. Nikos gave his brother a proper burial, but his brother died cursing his murderers and returned as a *vrykolakas* to urge Nikos to flee.”

Manolis rubbed the donkey’s neck as it stepped forward impatiently. “At first all went well for Nikos. He was welcomed in Iraklion and went

about his business. Then the Turks sent word to the garrison here that he was a criminal and they sent soldiers to fetch him. But they could not catch Nikos because they were set upon from all sides by an invisible force, something that held them back and allowed Nikos to escape.”

Jack stared at him. “This happened only once?”

“Five times, with each attack upon the Turks more violent than before. After that, no soldier went near Nikos ever again. Who wants to fight a dead man, a man who cannot be seen, a man impossible to touch and yet one who can lay his hands upon you all too easily?” Manolis looked up. “I would not risk the wrath of the restless dead.”

Jack felt light-headed from the sun. He fanned himself with the brim of his hat. “Blood-ties can be very powerful.”

“So, too, are the bonds of love,” Manolis said boldly. He looked embarrassed. “Your pardon, Mr. Hunter, I did not mean...”

“This is ridiculous.” Jack kicked at a lump of marble and watched it roll away along the path. “Utterly ridiculous,” he said again and tried not to think of the broken clock that still chimed in Dr. Delendas’s library or the locked chest that suddenly opened or the lines from the *Odyssey* written in Belas’s handwriting.

Manolis held onto the donkey as it snuffled impatiently. “Many things are ridiculous, but still they happen.”

“And everybody in Greece is a bloody philosopher,” Jack snapped. He jammed his hat back on his head, snatched the halter from Manolis and began to drag the donkey along the track. He did not look back until he was past the cemeteries and the Dervish academy, at the place where the lowest slopes of the Kephala rolled down to meet him. Only then did Jack turn to see Manolis straggling after him a hundred yards distant.

Jack waved at the lad and then continued onwards, leaving the track to pick his way through the waving grasses and wildflowers. The donkey shook its ears and snorted in complaint, disliking the hidden lumps and hollows marking the remnants of houses, shops, brothels, and baths.

Sherds of pottery crunched underfoot. Cicadas whirred from shattered volutes. The frantic hum of bees sounded from the shell of a

house and Jack paused to look inside, to follow the path of the insects to their nest behind the crumbling fragments of a fresco. A brown lizard basking on a wall turned its head in sharp, wary movements when Jack and the donkey passed by.

A few moments later, Manolis ran to catch up. "I did not mean to make you angry," he said by means of an apology.

"It's all right. I'm not angry," Jack said. They walked side by side for a while until the tall meadow-grass gave way to foliage cut back and yellowed beneath the sun. Spoil heaps stood just inside this periphery, the soil pale and cracked on the surface. The handle of a spade stuck out of one spoil heap at a jaunty angle.

"It's as if the place were abandoned years ago, not a week ago," Jack commented. He paused on the approach to the West Court, looking around at the landscape and the palace hidden in the folds of the mountain foothills.

"You see why the spirits come at night," Manolis said. "So lonely, so quiet."

Jack smiled. "Yes, indeed. I do not blame them. It is the perfect place."

Manolis gave him an uncertain glance and then hurried on ahead, weaving through the ruins and trenches with practised ease. Jack followed more leisurely, examining the excavated rooms around the central courtyard for signs of illegal digging. He found nothing to suggest looters had been in the area and said as much to Manolis.

The youth crouched on the levelled ground, unrolling a crumpled knapsack and gathering together the few possessions he'd left on the site. "It's not looters," he said. "You know that as well as I."

Jack perched awkwardly on the solid tumble of a wall and watched the donkey amble around the courtyard. "You said Nikos' brother protected him from their old enemies because he was in danger," Jack said. "If you are right in what you say about Belas, why does he come here? I am not in any danger."

Manolis went still, looking up with enough agitation that Jack turned to give him a quizzical glance. "Perhaps you are, but you do not yet know it," he said, recovering himself. Hurriedly he continued with his packing, shaking out a dirty shirt and folding it carefully. "Danger can take many forms. Perhaps a snake will bite you or you might fall into the river..." He paused and made the sign to ward off the evil eye. "Or perhaps somebody means to do you some mischief."

"Somebody?" Jack prompted, his attention caught by the way it had been said.

Manolis gave him a brief, cautious look. "I cannot say." He finished stuffing the last few items into the knapsack and swung the bag onto his shoulder. "Maybe Belas only sends his spirit to hasten you home."

Jack smiled. "Maybe that's true."

He kept the thought in mind as he and Manolis took the saddlebags from the donkey and piled them in the courtyard. Jack said he would take the bags down to the pasha's palace later and told Manolis to take the donkey back to Iraklion.

"Just one thing," Jack said, shading his eyes with his hand and looking at the haze of blue sky, "do you think it will rain this evening?"

Manolis turned and looked not towards the sea but up at the heights of Mount Juktas. "This is Sirocco season. If there is rain, it will come from the mountains of the south. But feel, the air is not heavy under the sun and you cannot taste the desert. Maybe in two or three days' time there will be rain, but not tonight."

Jack nodded. "Would you wait just a little longer? I need to send a message."

He searched through his bags and tore a blank page from one of the daybooks. He wrote a short note, folded it in two and handed it to Manolis. "If you would take this to the telegraph office, I would be most grateful. Here, some money to pay for it. I hope it's enough."

Manolis weighed the handful of drachmae against the single sheet of paper. "Mr. Hunter, this is too much!"

“Keep it. An Easter gift,” Jack said. “Just make sure the message gets sent.”

Manolis stuffed the money into his knapsack and then fingered the folded paper curiously. “Do you write to Belas?”

Jack was so startled by the idea that it was some time before he could stop laughing and draw breath. “No, no,” he said, still smiling and wiping his eyes, “it is not to Belas, but to my foreman at Fira, Koubelos Lemos.”

“Are you leaving us?”

Jack’s smile faded. “Yes. Yes, I think I am.”

* * *

It was early evening by the time Jack returned from installing his books and clothes in the pasha’s palace. In places, the roof showed the blue of the sky through the thatch and so he had moved the furniture and the finds into a safer position against the chimneybreast. Despite the warmth outside, the house was still fetid with damp, and splotches of mould grew on the wall. It was little wonder that Evans complained so much about the state of the place and talked about building his own villa on the other side of the excavations.

Manolis had told him the best place to sit on guard was in the central courtyard. The majority of the frescoes were ranged through the western wing of the palace complex with several others scattered throughout the royal apartments. If he rolled himself up in a blanket with his back against the southern side of the courtyard, he was within easy reach of the fresco rooms on either side. Jack took a lantern and his notebook and spent a while shuffling about on the ground until he made himself comfortable. Then he watched the setting of the sun and the creep of dusk descending from the mountains.

It became dark far quicker than he expected, and as soon as his field of vision around the site became limited, Jack found himself sitting up straight, tense for the smallest sound. Whenever he moved, he tried to do

it quietly to avoid the scrape of his boots over the pebbled dust beneath him or the brush of his jacket over the wall behind him.

He watched the darkness increase and thicken and inched closer to the warm glow given off by the lantern. It was cold, too, and although Manolis had warned him of the night-chill, Jack realised he had underestimated just how cold it would become.

He forced himself to make a patrol of the site, first around the central courtyard and then, as he got used to the uneven light given off by the lantern and was more certain of his footing, he progressed around the southern part of the palace, through the western range and then across the trenches and test-pits put in around the theatral area.

This was where the royal road began, the same road wending into the Graeco-Roman habitation that Jack wanted to explore. He stood on the paved slabs already excavated and swung his light in the direction of the habitation where almost everything still lay covered over by earth and plants. It would be foolish of him to patrol down in that direction, so he turned back and completed his circuit of the palace.

He sat back down again and tried to concentrate on reading through his notes, but soon his fingers grew numb with cold. Instead he tucked his hands underneath his arms and drew the blanket up to his chin. He felt sorry for Manolis, who'd spent longer, colder nights on the site from the start of the season. Jack moved the lantern to one side and curled around it as if it were a fire giving off heat as well as light. The gentle flicker of the flame within the warped glass panels soothed him, and soon the only sound he could hear was his own breathing.

It was not much longer before he fell asleep.

He heard no strange sounds and saw no ethereal lights, not that night nor in the nights that followed. Jack was unsure whether he was pleased or disappointed about this. He managed to remain awake for every night after the first and even when he whispered Belas's name into the darkness, even if he closed his eyes and turned the lantern low, there was no response. He did not even dream of Belas. Indeed, he did not

dream of anything at all and his sleep was restful for the first time in weeks.

At first Jack assumed it was because of the fresh air and hard work, and then it came to him that he was happy. The thought startled him so much that, for a moment, he could do nothing at all but stare out over the vast expanse of the site. Even though he knew it wasn't his—even if Evans offered him a position he wouldn't take it—it still made him giddy with happiness. For the remainder of the week, until the close of Easter Monday, the Kephala and everything on it, around it and within it, belonged to him.

Jack clambered through the palace ruins like a child, chasing lizards and his own shadow until he came to the dancing ground. “The selfsame dancing-floor that Daedalus built for Ariadne!” Evans had claimed, but Jack did not care who had built it nor for what purpose. He stood in the centre of it and put back his head, laughing up at the sky.

On the eve of the fourth day, when the afternoon sun was losing its power, Jack hiked to the top of the Fortetsa. There he sat and surveyed the valley and its two great cities that had seen the collapse and ruin of six empires between them. Beyond the bastions and koules of Iraklion's great harbour, the Cretan Sea rippled north to merge with the Aegean. Far beyond, at a distance greater than his eyes could see, without even a pillar of cloud on the horizon to mark its presence, lay the island of Santorini.

“Belas,” he said into the wind, “do you know I'm coming back? Do you even care or is that too much to ask of you now?”

Not even a cicada answered him.

Jack looked down on Iraklion and tried to imagine what it must have been like to be besieged. The city had outgrown its defences some time ago, but the walls still endured, massive limestone blocks pitted with age and dotted green with trailing ivy or outcrops of tufted grass clinging to the sloping faces as stubbornly as a spider. From his position on the spur above the city, Jack fancied he could make out certain landmarks: the main street, the cathedral of Agios Minas and the square that held

the Morosini fountain where the old men gathered to gossip at the end of the day. If he looked closely enough, Jack decided he could even see Dr. Delendas's house, tall and stately, tucked in against the walls as they zigzagged to a point on the south side of the city.

As Jack admired the terracotta-tiled dome of Agios Minas, he remembered the story about Nikos and his *vrykolakas* brother and of his own question to Manolis as to why Belas would be watching over him. Belas, he was sure of it, had been present in Gabriel's library on the day of the Vigil of St. Lazarus. But since he had come out to the Kephala, Jack had seen nothing, heard nothing, felt nothing. Belas had never been so shy around him before.

An uncomfortable explanation tickled at him and the more he tried to dismiss it, the greater it scratched until he could no longer ignore it.

Perhaps the reason why Belas had not come to him at the Kephala was because he was not in any danger there.

Was it possible?

Jack scooped up a handful of sherds and pebbles and examined them briefly under the fading light. He weighed each piece thoughtfully and then flung them, one at a time, down the Fortetsa towards the city.

* * *

Three days later, Jack peered into a shallow trench he'd opened through one of the Graeco-Roman buildings and sighed at what he saw there. He rubbed a hand across his forehead and wriggled forward on his belly to get a better view. The trench was only a few feet deep. He'd removed the topsoil with a pickaxe and shovel, widening the area until he'd noticed the gleam of turquoise-green emerging from the earth. Then he'd spent two days uncovering more and yet more of the object, finding an edge and following it with trowel and brush and fingertips until its size and purpose were revealed.

He sat back on his heels and surveyed the find gloomily. Without help, he'd never be able to extricate the bowl from the earth in one piece.

He supposed Evans wouldn't care too much about it. If it had been Late Minoan, he would have shown great interest in it, but for something that wasn't even Classical, but rather a generic Byzantine type, Jack expected no interest or help at all.

He didn't much care for Byzantine pottery himself, but this piece was spectacular in its size. Jack couldn't remember ever seeing a bowl so large before. Even in its half-buried form, it appeared to be almost four feet in diameter. A sherd broken from the rim sat in the otherwise empty finds-tray, and he picked it up for a second look.

Jack touched his fingers to the faint burnished dips and ridges of the wheel-marks on the interior of the sherd. The colour of the tin-glaze on the exterior fascinated him. It was almost teal in places, while in others it was spotted and worn away in patches to lighter and brighter greens.

While he was examining the sherd, he heard a sound from nearby, a clink, and then a scrape, as if something had been dropped from a height to roll around inside a vessel.

Jack put down the sherd and peered into the trench again. At first he thought a piece of terracotta had fallen into the Byzantine bowl and he reached into the trench to pick it up. Then he realised what it was. He yelped as if the object had jumped up and bitten him and he jerked away from the bowl with such force that the nice neat edges of his trench crumbled beneath his boots.

His cry of alarm became a grumble of annoyance at this, and so he stood up and stepped onto the floor of the trench, approaching the bowl from a different angle. From this position he could see into the curved interior of the bowl. He could see the tiny dint where the object had landed, cracking the surface of the glaze, and he could see where it now lay, a vivid dark red against the impossible turquoise blue.

Jack knelt down beside the bowl and picked up his red agate seal-stone. There was no question about it—it was his, the surface engraved with the image of a bull charging towards an altar. He had thought Belas was angry with him and had punished him by taking the seal-stone away from him on the Vigil of St. Lazarus, but now it was returned.

The gem was warm in his palm, as if another had held it only moments before. Even though Jack knew he would see nothing, he still looked up, hopeful.

“Did you find something?” asked a familiar voice, and Jack turned warily to see Gabriel Delendas standing a short distance away.

Jack stumbled to his feet, his fingers closing tight around the seal-stone as he shoved it into his pocket. “As a matter of fact, yes, I have. But what brings you out here, doctor? I can assure you I am quite well. Indeed, I have never felt better.”

“That is gratifying to know, but I did not come here to ask after your health.” Gabriel smiled and moved closer, and it was only then that Jack realised he was dressed in his Sunday best.

“Have you so lost track of time that you do not know what day it is?” he continued, his tone almost pitying as he stood on the edge of the trench and looked down on Jack.

“Easter Sunday,” Jack said. “I had forgotten.”

“Christ is risen.” Gabriel, still smiling, held out a white candle, the wick blackened and the top melted from the heat of the now-extinguished flame.

Jack took it. “Glory be to God.”

He stared at the wick for a moment and tried to imagine the scene: the churchyards full of the living, standing amongst the graves of the dead, all waiting for the moment when the chiming of the midnight hour was the signal for the priest to declare the Resurrection. He had heard the sounds of the firecrackers and bells drifting up from Iraklion, for the night had been still. What he missed was the procession of candles, each one lit from the great beeswax candle held by the priest. There was always a scramble between the parishioners to return home with their candles, each one hoping to reach their door with the flame still burning which would signal a prosperous year ahead.

“Did you manage to carry it safely home or did it go out?” Jack asked, more from politeness than from any real desire to know.

Gabriel smiled. “It went out. I fear this year will be unlucky for me.”

Jack forced a laugh. "I doubt you have ever known misfortune."

"True, I have not, but I have met with obstacles, and one in particular is proving rather difficult to overcome."

"Then I wish you well with your endeavour," Jack said, holding his gaze. "For if you are deserving of something, eventually you will get it."

Gabriel's smile dwindled, but remained gracious and gentle and all the more unnerving when he said, "Make no mistake, I will get it, whether I am deserving or not."

Jack turned away and stared at the Byzantine bowl, feeling cold despite the heat of the morning. "You said it would rain and it has not," he said, his voice high and tense.

"I am not an oracle." Gabriel walked around the edge of the trench. "But I am glad the weather held fine for you. Arthur remarked every morning that you must be terribly bored up here all on your own." He paused, head cocked to one side and his eyes unreadable. "You were on your own, weren't you?"

"I didn't see the saint in the cup-bearer fresco, if that's what you mean. Perhaps he only appears to the Orthodox."

"No looters?" Gabriel prompted.

Jack shook his head. "Not one."

Gabriel seemed to lose interest in that line of questioning. Instead, he looked at the bowl. "I see you've been busy. Have you found anything of note?"

Jack grimaced. "Nothing that would excite Arthur, I'm afraid. Oh, if I were to dig down a few more passes, perhaps I might be on more familiar territory. Minoan territory, but I doubt it. I saw enough of Athens in Dörpfeld's company to know the Greeks are masters at recycling their history."

"Not all of us."

"Yes. But then you are not entirely Greek, are you?"

Gabriel stared at Jack for a moment, and then he indicated he should climb out of the trench and join him. After a slight hesitation,

Jack set down the candle in the finds-tray and went over to join Gabriel beside the worn remains of a water tank.

The stone was smooth, shaped by the flow of water over the lip. Jack ran his hand over the curves and indentations, feigning an interest while he waited for Gabriel to speak first.

But Gabriel made him wait, testing his patience as he rolled a cigarette. When it was finished, he said, "I think we should stop sparring in this way. It does not profit either of us. We should at least be honest with one another."

"Honest!" Jack exclaimed. "Why should we be honest when so much has been obscured by falsehood before?"

Gabriel paused to light the cigarette. The strike of the match against the side of the water tank left a faint white scar on the stone.

"Are not lovers honest with one another?"

Jack caught his breath, swallowing a wave of nausea. "It has been my experience that lovers lie more easily than any others because they have more to lose and more to gain through their lies."

Gabriel gestured idly with the cigarette. "But then, your current lover is a *vrykolakas*. A murderer. What does he gain? Your blood, your life?"

"I would give it. Willingly I would give it to save him any more pain."

"Pain?" Gabriel laughed, but there was a bitter edge to it. "A revenant does not feel pain, nor remorse, nor love. All it knows is revenge. That's all it can know. It lost its humanity the day it was cursed and no human law or feeling can bind it."

"You seem to know an awful lot about it for one who does not much care for folktales," Jack said. He did not bother keeping the accusation from his tone. "Perhaps you have been listening to too much talk amongst the workers. I hear I am a favourite topic of conversation. My undead lover and I. How very romantic it all sounds!"

Gabriel looked hurt. "You still cannot be honest with me."

“Why should I be? I am not the one with secrets. You are the one with a box full of history, with piles and piles of documents and evidence that your family is cursed. That you are—you are...”

Jack ran to a halt, confused and afraid he had said too much. Gabriel stood in silence, watching him with a curious expression, half-angry, half-pleased.

“Oh, Pandora,” he said softly.

Jack took a step backwards, an admission of guilt. “I did not mean to pry.”

“Of course not.”

“Is it true?”

Gabriel was silent.

“You speak to me of honesty, yet you will not answer me this,” Jack said, feeling the return of his courage and his curiosity. He felt in his pockets for the piece of broken pottery he had taken from the iron chest in the library. His fingers brushed the seal-stone, warm and comforting, before they closed around the sherd. He brought it out and held it up.

“Do you recognise this?” Jack asked. “It is an ostrakon, an ancient ballot paper. One such as this would be cast at the general assembly of the city-state in order to send into exile one of the leading political figures. There are many hundreds of such ostraka in Athens, all bearing the names of famous men—Perikles, Themistokles, Alkibiades...”

Gabriel finished his cigarette and stubbed it out against the water tank. “I know what an ostrakon is. My grandfather collected them the way he collected shabtis and the way other men might collect stamps.”

Jack’s smile was tinged with disbelief. “This does not have a name on it.” He turned the ostrakon so Gabriel could see the word scratched into the surface of the painted clay. “It is not a name, doctor, but a description. Not quite an occupation, either, but your family seems to have flourished despite—or was it because of—what this description suggests.”

Gabriel reached out and took the ostrakon, looking at the single word that was inscribed there. *Miastoros*—the unclean, stained with crime, a walking pollution, the name the ancients gave to their restless dead.

He held the ostrakon loosely, and then dropped it to the ground where it broke into three pieces. Not content with this, Gabriel stamped upon each piece until the sherd was shattered into many fragments.

Jack watched him. “You cannot deny your history as easily as that.”

“I do not deny it,” Gabriel said as he straightened up and adjusted his coat. “But history is all it is. Superstition and folklore has its place, but not here and now.”

“Your history is what made you. Do not be so quick to dismiss it.”

Gabriel raised an eyebrow and gave Jack a sardonic look. “An archaeologist would say that. But do not think I take my history so lightly, for in truth it is a very heavy burden.”

“Then share it. Tell me of it.”

Gabriel stared at him. “I thought I had tried everything to bring you close to me. I had not thought you could be seduced by my family history.”

Jack shook his head and smiled. “Tell me.”

Gabriel leaned against the water tank, his hands in his pockets and the sweep of his hair obscuring his eyes as he began to speak.

“You will have heard, I’m sure, of the legend that the eldest son of the Delendas family is a living revenant, that we are keepers of some ancient memory and that we have been cursed for even more ancient wrongs.”

He paused to allow Jack to confirm his words, and when he did not, Gabriel shrugged lightly and continued. “The truth of the matter is this. As a child, I had nightmares. Terrible, terrible dreams about things I had no knowledge of and sometimes these dreams would come during the day when I was awake. These dreams were full of blood and death, of anger and pain and injustice. I would wake from these dreams in a terror with guilt pricking at my heart.

“My grandfather, when I told him of these dreams, would laugh at me, but indulgently, as if he approved. He told me I would become used to the visions, that it made me special for I would know secrets to which nobody else was privy. But still they scared me. Nobody else saw such things. My cousin did not share these dreams, and so one day I complained to my father that this was not a gift, but a curse.

“He laughed, just as my grandfather had done and told me it was the literal truth. When I reached my majority, he showed me the contents of the box in the library. He sat and waited while I examined every document and then he told me that, long ago, a curse was laid upon our most distant ancestor. This man was a priest and he had sacrificed an entire family in order to save a city from the wrath of the gods.”

Gabriel looked sidelong at Jack. “No comment to make? How unusual. When I was first told the tale, I remarked at the unfairness of such a situation and my father silenced me by saying it is more utilitarian to save the many than the few, and that this family was by its very nature chosen by the gods. Human sacrifice may have been rare in those halcyon days, but it was not unknown.”

“I know this,” Jack said at last. “You forget, I found the ancient bones of a woman and her children on Santorini.”

“I do not forget anything.” Gabriel began to roll himself another cigarette. “Perhaps my ancestor was the man who slew the children you found. That would be fitting, would it not?”

Jack tamped down a second wave of nausea and forced another smile to his face. “I’m sure it would.”

“My ancestor the priest fled the wrath of the gods. Apparently the sacrifice did not work and he settled here. I do not know when or how he knew he had been cursed. Legend has it he was cursed by the head of the family he had sacrificed and that this man had also cursed himself, made of himself a *vrykolakas* and had sworn revenge. However, no vengeance was enacted and so the first time the nature of the curse was mentioned was in the time of Perikles.”

Gabriel lit his cigarette, and then scuffed the toe of one shoe through the fragmentary pieces of the ostrakon. “We were cursed by then, known as vrykolakades. We were unclean, liminal. We were feared and despised and so we traded on that fear. The blood of the sacrifice was ever on our hands, so we added to it, dipped our hands in murder and extortion, on and off the battlefields.

“The stigma endured. We were ostracised in every country we settled in. Decrees were issued against us, papal bulls excommunicated us. No matter how much wealth and power we gained, we were always shunned, but oh, so politely. Carefully manoeuvred away from situations and discreetly avoided in public, except by those whose greed outweighed their fear or disgust.”

Jack interrupted. “Is that why you court Arthur so assiduously?”

Gabriel brushed his fringe from his eyes to look at Jack. “I do not have any friends who are not foreign, if that is what you mean. No Cretan will trouble himself to befriend a Delendas. So it was with my father, who had a correspondence with Schliemann, and so it was with my grandfather, who joined Maspero in Egypt.”

Jack narrowed his eyes thoughtfully. “Were all your family so fascinated with ancient history?”

“Only the eldest sons.” Gabriel gave him a wry smile. “The rest took to the Church. Perhaps they sought to overthrow the curse. You already know of my cousin Makarias. He had the notion to lift the curse by destroying the one who laid it upon us and so he became the vampire-killer of Santorini. He was convinced that the one who cursed us lived there.”

“Belas,” Jack blurted out before he could stop himself. “It’s Belas.”

Gabriel looked at him, puzzled for a moment and then he laughed. “You really believe your Belas cursed my family? No, that is not possible.”

“Because he does not exist?”

“Because if it were true, you would want to kill me,” Gabriel said as if the answer was obvious. “I am the eldest son of the Delendas family and I have no heir. The bloodline ends with me. That is what your Belas

would want, the complete annihilation of my family as recompense for the extinction of his.”

Jack stared at him, unable to utter a single word.

“No wonder you’re so wary around me,” Gabriel said. “I thought you did not care for me, but now I see it was too much care.”

Jack opened his mouth to correct him, but then fell silent. An idea—unholy, immoral, and possibly unforgivable—came to mind and although he tried to deny it, the idea took shape and became a solution. An eye for an eye, one sacrifice for another. He remained quiet, and waited.

Gabriel swore softly, realising his cigarette had burned down to the filter. “What a waste,” he muttered, taking a quick, final drag before dropping it to the ground beside the dusty pieces of the ostrakon. He did not stamp it out, but let the remainder of the cigarette glow, winking out little by little.

“I abhor waste. Wasted time, wasted words, wasted feelings.” Gabriel came closer, wrapped in the scent of the dying cigarette, his expression curious and determined. “My family has wasted centuries in dealing with the legend of the curse. Have I wasted my time with you?”

Jack wondered if this was how the priest had looked to Belas, advancing upon his children to seize and sacrifice them to the terrible, smoky god of the mountain. He forced himself not to give ground before him. Instead he flung up a hand, at first to stop Gabriel’s advance and then to touch, a shy move, tentative. He stroked the fine velvet nap of Gabriel’s jacket with his fingertips, a caress of admiration rather than seduction, but Gabriel did not discern the difference, so caught up was he in the implication of the gesture.

Gabriel’s voice was almost flirtatious when he asked, “You would not kill me, would you?”

Jack dropped his gaze and looked thoughtful. He touched the starched white linen of Gabriel’s shirt and let his hand rest on the knot of the cravat. He remembered Belas’s dislike of knots, the dislike of the revenant for those things sealed and forbidden to them.

“I would not kill you,” he said softly, tugging at the silken cloth until it unravelled between them, “but Belas would.”

He lifted his hand and touched Gabriel’s neck, closing his fingers around his throat. Beneath his fingertips he could feel the steady thrum of Gabriel’s pulse. It accelerated as he pressed down and then he saw it in Gabriel’s eyes—the thrill of excitement sparked by fear. Jack wondered if that was how he had looked to Belas those first few times and he felt shame and anger and lust.

“Breathe,” he whispered, just as Belas had said to him, and Gabriel took a deep, shaky breath.

“Is Belas here?”

“Not yet,” Jack smiled, closing his eyes momentarily as if waiting for the descent of madness. He reminded himself he was doing this for Belas. He was certainly not doing it for Gabriel’s pleasure, nor for his own. His dislike, his inner tremble of disgust at sharing himself with another was nothing compared with what Belas had endured.

He only hoped his own small sacrifice would be acceptable.

“What brings him?” Gabriel asked, his voice husky. His fear seemed to diminish as he grew accustomed to Jack’s half-teasing, half-threatening caress and now his responses were sensual. “What brings Belas?”

Jack’s fingers pressed against his jugular. “Do you so wish for death?”

Gabriel laughed, soft and muted as he came closer still, as he allowed Jack to put both hands around his throat. “At your hands, I believe it would be a pleasure.”

“Pleasure,” said Jack. “Pleasure is what brings him.”

Gabriel nearly jerked backwards out of Jack’s grasp. “Really? I had not thought—but I suppose it is obvious...” he babbled as the doctor in him emerged to observe and take notes on the situation. “The trigger is sexual, of course. How fascinating! I must—I should...”

Revenant

Jack saw his opportunity slipping away and so he moved forward, dropping one hand from Gabriel's throat to his groin, stroking silkily, persuasively.

"Belas lies within me. Take me to bed and there you will find him."

The offer hung between them, a temptation and a curse. Gabriel gazed at him, suddenly wary and then desire outweighed caution.

He took the final step into Jack's embrace.

Chapter Sixteen

When Jack went to catch the packet steamer back to Santorini, Evans insisted on accompanying him to the port. Manolis trailed in their wake, carrying Jack's scant luggage. Evans spent the entire short journey asking questions and presenting arguments, his voice becoming louder and more stentorian with each step.

"What on earth's got into you, man? I thought you would have stayed at least until Duncan got back. And what about your work on the tablets? Will you just abandon that, too?"

Jack sighed. He had not explained himself very well when he'd arrived back at the Delendas house in the early hours of the morning and announced his departure that same day, and he doubted he was able to explain himself any better now he was about to leave. Arthur Evans was, after all, a man who wanted concrete, logical answers to questions, rational results easily grasped. To such a mind, Jack had no good reason for leaving.

"I'm not abandoning anything. I have all my notebooks. We can correspond."

"Correspondence! Huh. When you could stay here and do some good."

"I have my own excavation to run. Really, I do thank you for the opportunity you've given me, Arthur, but I think it is better that I return to Santorini."

Evans looked at him sharply. "If it means so much to you, I'll hold off clearing that damnable habitation you were poking about in. Not that I'm susceptible to emotional blackmail, you understand."

“Neither am I,” Jack said with a smile.

Evans muttered and shook his head. “I still don’t understand it.”

Manolis, who had kept pace alongside them on the walk down towards the harbour, suddenly spoke up. “He goes because Belas wants him back.”

“Is that so?” Evans said, his surprise evident in his voice. “Your damn vampire snaps his fingers and you go running. I hope he knows what he’s robbing me of. Blasted thing.”

He turned to Manolis and said, “You would not be so damn foolish as to obey the whims of a *fandázi*, would you?”

The Cretan youth pondered the question, clearly giving it serious thought. “I think I would. Already I have seen the saint who lives within the fresco and I know I must appease him. So, yes, if he asked me to do something, surely I would do it. It is a wise man who listens to the words of the saints and spirits who keep watch over us.”

Evans kicked at the fallen fronds of a date palm littering the marble pavement. “That’s all very well, but I was under the impression Belas was not a particularly friendly creature.”

Manolis shrugged. “My grandfather has a dog that barks and bites all who come near it, but when I visit, it rolls on its back and wags its tail.”

“Belas protects you, eh?” Evans glanced over at Jack, who stared straight ahead at the shape of the packet steamer moored within the arms of the great harbour. “In which case, maybe it’s for the best that you’re leaving.”

Jack recalled himself and frowned at Evans. “Why do you say that?”

“No reason,” he said hurriedly. “It’s just that some men are obsessive in their pursuits.”

“You are, with Knossos,” said Jack.

Evans acknowledged this with a sharp nod. “True. But if I have hurt anybody in my obsession, at least I have also atoned for it by creating employment and by celebrating the Minoan culture, exhibiting it to the

rest of the world. Most obsessions are insular, mean little things. They're stunted and sterile. They give nothing back. Do you understand?"

Jack was struck by how sombre Evans suddenly appeared. "I think so."

"Good. Then you should go." His demeanour changed, became brisk and business-like, the way he was on site. "Do they know you're coming?"

"I cabled my foreman a week ago. Koubelos will be expecting me."

"Dörpfeld taught you well. You're so efficient," Evans remarked as they drew nearer the steamer. He turned to signal to Manolis to help Jack aboard with his bags, and then he stared in consternation. "Where's your luggage? You must have arrived with more than that."

Jack glanced at the bag of books and notes Manolis held, and then looked down at the knapsack he had brought with him from the Kephala. "I really hadn't thought it necessary. How strange! It was the last thing on my mind."

Evans gave him a kindly look. "You still have time. The steamer won't leave for another hour yet. We can return to the house together if you like and continue our discussion while you pack properly."

"Thank you." Jack clung tight to his bag and forced a smile. "But it doesn't matter. I have clothes enough in Fira. My papers are all the luggage I need."

Evans half-laughed. "You're a strange one, but for all that, I'll miss you."

"I wish you well with Knossos. And your villa." Jack held out his hand and Evans shook it.

"I'm determined it will be built next year. Come and visit."

"I shall."

As they parted, there was a tiny clink as something fell to the ground and bounced across the marble. Jack saw it as a flash of dark red, as vital as a drop of blood and then Manolis cried out and knelt to scoop it up.

“Mr. Hunter! You will not want to lose this, I think,” he said and he set it carefully in the centre of Jack’s outstretched palm.

Evans stared at the red agate seal-stone and raised his eyebrows a little, but in amusement rather than accusation. “I see you found it, then.”

“Yes. Or rather, it found me,” Jack said as honestly as he could without making himself seem even more eccentric. He tucked away the seal-stone in his jacket pocket and hoped it would stay there.

“An interesting piece,” Evans said blandly. “Do be sure to tell me if any other such objects stray your way.”

Jack was about to respond when he saw Manolis stiffen and stare towards the road that led to the town. He followed the direction of his gaze and saw Dr. Delendas strolling towards them, carrying his coat over one arm and with a boy laden with a number of bags scampering after him.

Jack simultaneously felt both disappointment and relief.

Curious as to what had drawn their attention, Evans turned around. He huffed his disapproval as Gabriel drew nearer. “Good grief. Not you, too. Will not anyone stay here with me?”

Gabriel ignored the admonition. “Do not be alarmed, Arthur. You are welcome to stay in my house for as long as you wish. I will not be absent for many days, in any case. I just want to reassure myself that my patient,” and he emphasised the word in a way that made both Jack and Evans shudder slightly, “is returned safely to Santorini. Also, it is time I visited the family holdings there. Since my cousin Makarias died, there has been no kin of the Delendas on the island, and it may be an opportune time to put the land up for sale.”

Evans raised his eyebrows, his disbelief all too apparent. “Of course. I can see how that would be your primary concern.”

Gabriel gave him a quietening look before he turned to smile at Jack. “I hope you are not offended by my hasty decision to accompany you. After all, I have your best interests at heart.”

Jack avoided his gaze, looking instead at the decks of the steamer and the smoke-blackened funnel rising above them. "The boat is large enough to carry two hundred passengers," he said. "I doubt I will notice you."

"You are too flippant," Gabriel said mildly. "We have many things to discuss." He turned to Evans. "I shall see you within a week at most. And I trust I shall not be alone when I return."

Evans grunted and looked disparaging, but said nothing more except to wish them a pleasant journey. "I won't wait for the boat to leave," he said. "Goodbyes are very tedious and I have work to do. Besides," he added sharply, "you can entertain one another, I'm sure."

While Gabriel signalled his boy to take his luggage onboard, Jack slipped away from him and started up the gangplank. The purser checked his ticket and ushered him towards the upper decks, away from the cargo being loaded into the lower levels.

He had not gone far before he heard footsteps behind him on the stairs, and when he reached the deck, Jack realised he was short of breath. Annoyed at this sudden weakness, he went to the side of the boat and took hold of the railing. It was cold beneath his hands, the white-painted iron damp with sea spray. He took several deep breaths, feeling his chest tighten rather than release and he coughed when he inhaled the dark smoke and silver-grey ash blown from the funnel.

Gabriel touched his shoulder. "I think you would be more comfortable on the other side, away from the smoke."

Jack moved aside. "Thank you for your concern, but I prefer to remain here."

"Very well." Gabriel stood beside him as close as propriety would allow and affected to examine the activity on the quayside. There were few people travelling between the islands and the mainland so close to the end of the Easter feast. Most of the passengers were farmers and tradesmen.

They watched a group of sailors coil rope. In an undertone, Gabriel said, "I knew you would run. I knew from the moment you touched me

yesterday that you would turn and run from me. Why? Was it so very bad? Did I not pleasure you the way you wanted?”

When Jack remained silent, Gabriel continued, “I have booked a cabin aboard. Perhaps if you find the voyage tedious, we could—”

Jack turned his head. “I prefer to be on deck.”

“It is a long way.”

“Half a day is nothing when a man has his thoughts to bear him company.”

Gabriel smiled and laid his hand on Jack’s arm. “My sentiments exactly. And I must admit, the thought that presses at me most for an answer is, why did Belas not come to us yesterday? You assured me he would. That is why I must ask again if I failed to give you pleasure, if that is indeed what calls him forth from you.”

“Belas chooses his time,” Jack said tightly, shaking off Gabriel’s touch and putting his hand to the centre of his chest, pressing down as if it would ease some of the pressure there. “I am not Belas’s keeper!”

“But you are.” Gabriel clutched at Jack’s sleeve as he turned away. “Yesterday I broke every oath I hold dear...”

Jack tried not to laugh in disbelief. “I can claim no credit in leading you astray. You were all too eager for it. You even told Arthur of your intentions long before yesterday. Do not pretend at a grace you never had.”

Gabriel seemed shocked and he hastened to follow Jack across the deck towards the public lounge. “What have you heard? I can assure you I have said nothing to Arthur...”

“I cannot trust your assurances,” Jack said, “can I, doctor?”

* * *

Their last meeting had been three hours ago. Gabriel had left him alone since then, and so Jack had taken up a position against the railing and spent the hours staring down at the glittering surface of the sea.

The wind had risen almost as soon as they were out of the harbour, and the pleasant sea breeze became strong enough to chafe tears from his eyes when it struck him full in the face. Jack drew his jacket tightly around him and folded his hands beneath his arms. Hunched over the railings, he turned his face to the wind and tried to breathe. Salt and ozone, the razor's edge of sunlight and, he fancied, the black ashy promise of Santorini ahead of him.

His lungs hurt and the weight of the wind so choked his throat that eventually he had to concede defeat and turn away to look back in the direction of Crete.

He was still standing like that, the wind raking at his clothes and flattening his hair, when Gabriel came to join him again.

"You miss it," he said.

Jack did not turn around. "It was not mine to miss."

Not at all disconcerted by the rebuff, Gabriel leaned on the railing and watched the steamer's wash stream past to clash with the white horses raised by the wind. Bored by the sport of nature, he lifted his gaze instead to Jack.

"You must be cold. Why not step inside if only for a moment?" he suggested.

"I have no desire to go inside. I do not wish to visit your cabin," Jack said sharply. He coughed over the final few words and silenced it by pressing the back of his fist against his mouth.

Gabriel frowned. "I think you should come inside. That cough—"

"It is nothing," Jack said, but his voice was husky. He swallowed painfully, conscious of Gabriel's attention, and struggled to draw breath.

"That's interesting. I had not expected—but it makes sense, now," Gabriel mused, his expression alight with the pleasure of sudden knowledge.

"It is my death you speak of so lightly." Jack huddled lower over the railings and tasted the familiar curdled blood and phlegm clotting the back of his throat. It had been weeks since the last attack and he had

almost forgotten what it felt like, but the taste of it was something he could not erase from his mind.

“It’s not tuberculosis. McKeown’s diagnosis was wrong.”

Jack shook his head. “It must be. It has to be! It could be nothing else.”

“It is not.”

“The salt water,” Jack gasped, his throat raw as he dragged in another breath. “It is corrosive. The Kephala is not near the sea...”

“But Iraklion is, and while you lived there you had no trouble. No, there is a much simpler explanation for your malady,” Gabriel said. He paused and Jack turned to look at him in hunted, desperate appeal. “It’s guilt.”

“Guilt?” repeated Jack. He stared at Gabriel in stunned silence and then laughed, a cracking, fractured sound that scarcely registered above the noise of the engines and the sound of the waves.

“Guilt,” Gabriel said again, and he tempered it with a smile. “It’s not your lungs. But guilt and worry can affect the stomach and make it bleed.”

Jack levered himself up from the railings. “My throat is sore and I cannot breathe. What has this to do with guilt? Perhaps,” he said, pointing a finger in accusation, “perhaps you seek to absolve your own guilt since you are so truly sorry for breaking the Hippocratic oath.”

“Nervous tension,” Gabriel stated, as self-assured as if he still stood inside his consulting-room rather than on the deck of a packet steamer. “I have seen it before, in patients who lose their grasp on reality and who cannot cope with certain events. Miners who have survived an underground collapse, for example. When they return to work, they cannot go into caves and tunnels. They cannot breathe. Some may even swoon from lack of air to the lungs, their fear is so great.”

Jack shuddered. He forced himself to take one breath and then another. The taste of his own blood was sweet and ripe on his tongue, as poisonous as the lie he told. “I have nothing to feel guilty about.”

“My poor Jack.” Gabriel gave him a pitying look. “You may think you can fool us all, but you cannot ever fool yourself.”

“I am not the fool here, doctor.”

Gabriel sighed, long-suffering. “Let us not argue. I only want to help you.”

“No,” said Jack, his anger rising as swiftly as the tide. “You want Belas. I heard you. I heard what you said to Arthur. You think me to be something I am not. You think that I—my madness—shall make you famous.”

“And you shall,” Gabriel said, without a trace of shame at his ambition, and then he added hurriedly, “And I shall save you, cure you of this illness.”

Jack dragged himself away from the railings and out of the blast of the wind. The wooden planking of the deck was damp with wind-borne spray, and tiny rainbows glistened ahead of him where the sunlight hit patches of oil. He felt dizzy, the effort of walking even such a short distance suddenly too much and he leaned against the solid wall of the pilot’s cabin.

“There is no cure.”

Gabriel had followed him and now stood before him. “You are not in a position to judge that. I am, and I know that—”

“There is no cure!” Jack shouted, clutching at his stomach as pain lanced through him and clawed at his innards. “There is no cure because there is nothing to be cured. Are you so blind? Belas is apart from me!”

Gabriel looked at him with almost clinical detachment. “You really believe that, don’t you? And you have no memory of McKeown’s murder...”

“I did not do it!” Jack cried, frustrated. “Belas did. Belas killed him.”

“But why?”

Jack pressed against the side of the cabin, shivering with reaction to the pain and scarcely able to speak. “He—he saw that we were lovers.”

“That you were one and the same,” Gabriel corrected, remorseless. He nodded as if this made sense to him and fitted into the pattern of his design. “It is anger, then, not pleasure that brings him. I must make a note of this conversation. It has been most illuminating.”

He began to walk towards the door of the cabin, but was brought to a halt when Jack called his name.

“Wait,” Jack said, his voice rasping. “Just wait until we reach Santorini. Then you will see Belas. Of that I can assure you.”

Gabriel paused and glanced back at him. “I shall bear it in mind. Thank you for the warning, but I am most anxious to meet him.”

Jack let him go, too weak to continue their argument. He had tried. For the sake of his own morality, he had tried. Twice he had warned Gabriel, but the doctor’s hubris was too great.

“It is decided, then,” Jack whispered to the wind. He put back his head and gasped for breath. Above him, the long banner of smoke from the steamer’s funnel streamed black against the blue of the heavens. It looked like a trail of death.

* * *

It was nearly dusk by the time the steamer arrived within the encircling cliffs of the Santorini caldera. Those few passengers onboard who could still be moved by the sight of the sheer rocks painted orange and red by the setting sun came up onto the decks to enjoy the spectacle.

Jack resumed his place by the railings and so watched the island loom larger as the boat began its approach from the southwest. The promontory at Cape Akrotiri curved around to meet the tiny islet of Aspronisi, with the larger bulk of Thirasia hemming in the western side of the caldera. In the centre glowered the volcano, its slumber uneasy. Faint wisps of steam rose from the muddy surface of the Kameni, and the otherwise calm waters of the caldera rippled with an outward motion from the volcanic islets.

By the time he drew his attention away from the volcano and looked towards the port of Fira, he realised Gabriel had joined him.

“It’s amazing,” Gabriel said, his surprise apparently genuine as he stared up at the intricate layers and folds of the cliffs before them, at the heavy striations in the rock caused by later seismic activity and at the whitewashed buildings now turned pink in the glow of the sunset, clinging to the very top.

“Yes,” said Jack softly, feeling a rush of affection and almost choking on the words, “yes, it’s beautiful.”

“Almost I envy Makarias,” Gabriel continued. “Perhaps I am over-hasty in wanting to sell the properties. Maybe I should keep the house at Oia and spend some time here myself.”

Jack gave him a bland look. “And perhaps you will find it not to your taste. Life is very slow here in comparison with Iraklion.”

“Sometimes that is a good thing,” Gabriel said and he smiled at Jack. “Who knows? Maybe I shall even fund an excavation, like Arthur. We could find great treasures, you and I. We could work together...”

“It is not as simple as that.” The steamer hooted, one long, weary blast that stirred those waiting on the quay to frantic life. Jack could see the old lady with her string of mules, the animals ready to carry both cargo and passengers up the tortuous, cobbled pathway to the town high above. He pointed them out to Gabriel who blanched at the idea of entrusting his person to the beasts in the fading light of the gathering dusk.

“And the others down there? Do you know them?” Gabriel asked.

Jack looked closer at the group standing beside the heavy iron rings, ready to catch the ropes thrown by the sailors. One of the men gaped up at the steamer and then took off his cap and began to wave it in the air, yelling wildly.

“Koubelos!” Jack exclaimed in delight. He swung his bag over his shoulder and made for the steps down onto the lower decks.

Gabriel followed him closely. “Your foreman?”

Jack nodded, scarcely wanting to waste his breath in reply when he was so close to going ashore and being reunited with friends.

Koubelos was nearly hoarse from yelling by the time Jack reached him. Both men were buffeted by the herd of goats that ran bleating from the boat and onto the cobbles, but they embraced regardless. Koubelos kissed him soundly and declared him to be his brother and saviour, talking so fast Jack could barely get a word in edgeways. Behind him were Andreas and Nikos, Koubelos's son, who grabbed Jack's bag before he could protest he could carry it himself.

"Come, Mr. Jack, we are all waiting for you," Koubelos said, slinging an arm around Jack's shoulders in a way that would have been disrespectful beforetimes. "Ever since we received the message telling us of your return, we have been watching for the steamer. Nikos ran to fetch me as soon as he sighted it around the cape."

Jack stared at Nikos in astonishment, looking up at the towering cliff and back down again to the youth. "You must feel better!"

Nikos grinned and loped ahead, sidestepping the goats and mules as he went. Koubelos chuckled. "He is healthier now than he ever was before the plague struck our children, and gladly now he helps his uncle in the fields. See, you have worked minor miracles, too!"

The mule-lady did not share Koubelos's exuberance. Jack was amused to see her surreptitiously make the sign against the evil eye as he passed by. Seeing her busy with the mules, he was reminded of Gabriel and so he paused to look around the narrow quay.

"What is it? Did you forget something?" Koubelos asked.

Jack shook his head. "Not quite."

He spotted Gabriel looking out of place in his expensive tailored suit amongst the straggling goats and the gossiping sailors, and so waved at him to join them. With obvious relief, Gabriel stepped around the fresh mule droppings and approached them.

"I suppose my luggage will be safe enough on these animals," he said, watching the sailors toss his bags onto the back of a mule.

“You’ll be safe enough, too,” said Koubelos, who eyed Gabriel with more curiosity than mistrust. “They are very sure-footed.”

“Nevertheless, I shall be quite happy to walk,” Jack said quickly before he could be bundled onto the back of one of the creatures. “Koubelos, may I introduce Dr. Gabriel Delendas of Iraklion? He is the cousin of Makarias of Oia.”

“A doctor?” Koubelos repeated, stretching out his hand in greeting. “That is good news. Since the Irishman died, we have had only monks and midwives to minister to our sick.”

Jack covered the tiny silence that followed the mention of McKeown, saying hurriedly, “Have many people fallen ill recently?”

Gabriel gave him a dark, thoughtful look as together the three men began the ascent to Fira. Andreas and the mule carrying the luggage followed them. The steady clip-clop of the animal’s hooves provided a familiar, pleasant backdrop to their conversation.

“Not so many, thanks be to God. The Easter season is truly one of miracles.” Koubelos beamed at Jack. “Some of the elderly suffer with the change in weather, of course, and I think there was nobody in the town who did not have a cough brought on by the wind, but there was nothing worse than that.”

“No more deaths, then,” Jack said.

“No,” said Koubelos, giving him a curious glance. “Only those of a few goats and sheep, but that is to be expected. Oh, and the French archaeologists who stay at Eutimia’s have complained of hungry mosquitoes. Perhaps the doctor here will take a look at some of the marks made by these insects. Truly, they must be of monstrous size. I saw one man’s arm bruised so badly it was as if he had been hit with a rock.”

“How dreadful,” Jack said.

“I shall certainly examine them if these mosquito bites are painful,” Gabriel added. He was panting a little with exertion from the climb. “Do we have much further to go?”

Koubelos chuckled. "We are nearly halfway. Thank God we put in this track for the mules. Before, there was nothing but rocks and a pathway only the goats could follow."

Gabriel groaned, his distress provoking more amusement. They continued in silence for a short distance, and then Koubelos began to speak again, this time addressing his remarks to Gabriel.

"You are the cousin of Father Makarias? That is good. People hereabouts remember him fondly. Kera Maria's husband was a friend of Makarias. I am sure she will enjoy speaking with you, should you have the desire to know more of your cousin's life here."

"How is Kera Maria?" Jack interrupted. "I trust that she is well."

Koubelos laughed. "Well and awaiting your return with much eagerness, Mr. Jack. For a long time she was certain your absence was due to the way she chided you."

"She did not need to worry herself on that account."

"Probably not, but she did. She missed you." Koubelos gestured towards the lights of the Europa Hotel above them and said, "Kera Eutimia, now, she was pleased you had gone, but then a sourer lemon you will not find this side of Naxos."

Jack smiled, pleased that Belas had spared her life despite the blood-enmity between them. "For all that, I hope she is well, too."

"Never better. She continues to rob the Frenchmen blind, of course, but then they are foreigners, they deserve it."

Jack laughed out loud. "And what am I, if not a foreigner?"

"An *exotiko*," Andreas put in, cheekily.

"My friend," said Koubelos and he hugged Jack again.

If he had left under the shadow of suspicion, then his return was a triumph. As word spread up the narrow zigzag path that led to the town, more and more people came out of their homes to welcome him. Jack was bewildered by the attention, but greatly touched.

"It's as if Easter Sunday came twice this year," Gabriel remarked.

Jack ignored him, instead smiling and nodding to the people who greeted him and thrust gifts into his hands—flowers, cakes, coins, even a tiny violin-shaped marble figurine that he immediately transferred to his jacket pocket for safekeeping.

“I did nothing to deserve such honour,” he said to Koubelos, overwhelmed.

Koubelos shrugged. “It was you who discovered the children of the shrine and you who ordered their proper burial. By so doing, you saved our children from the plague. If you had been as many archaeologists are and thought only of yourself and fame, you would have taken the bones away with you and our children would all have perished.”

“It was not a difficult equation to work out,” Jack said.

“Maybe not, but you were the one who gave us the answer and so we give thanks as best we can.” Koubelos drew Jack up the last few steps and into the winding maze of streets, pulling him along with a childish enthusiasm. “Quickly!”

Jack glanced back over his shoulder to see Gabriel following at a much slower pace. Then Koubelos reclaimed his attention, waving ahead at the figures gathered outside his house. Jack smiled, recognising first Koubelos’s wife and then his daughter, Despoina. As they got nearer, Koubelos called his child to him and Despoina came running to fling herself into his arms.

“See?” he said gruffly, holding up his daughter so she squealed with laughter. “She is whole and well and it is because of you that this has happened. All of us who are parents thank you a thousand times.”

Jack smiled at Despoina. “I only did what was right.”

“Then you can do what is right, now, and join us,” Koubelos said loudly, turning to include the whole street in the invitation. “We have food and drink enough for all. Come, be welcome at my hearth!”

There were ragged cheers and a sudden crush of people. Koubelos swept Jack inside his home, lit with candles and lanterns and filled with the warming scent of lamb stew and of honey-glazed pastries.

From her place beside the hearth, Kera Maria uttered a squawk and rushed towards Jack, throwing up her hands in dismay at his appearance even as she began to complain of his long absence.

“Yianni! At last you come home to us, as I knew you would. But what is this? The English, they did not look after you! They did not feed you as I did. What a terrible people they must be to let you starve so! How thin you are, Yiannakki. You are wasting away. Come, sit here. Irene and I have been cooking. Eat something. It is all good, you shall see.”

Jack was pushed into a chair and handed a deep cup of a murky liquid that at first he did not recognise. Then, as he gave it a cautious sniff, he could smell the subtle note of bergamot blended in with the tea. “The Earl Grey,” he exclaimed in delight, “it arrived!”

Inexpertly made though it was, he drained the cup as though it contained purest nectar and held it out for more. Kera Maria nodded approvingly and bustled off to fetch the teapot. Immediately Koubelos’s wife, Irene, served him a large portion of stew and a hefty chunk of bread to go with it.

“Here you are, Yianni,” Kera Maria said fondly as she returned with more tea. “Now tell us of your time in Iraklion. I hear it is very fine but that the people there think highly of themselves and are not welcoming. Did you find them so? And did—”

Jack interrupted her, laughing, and waved towards Gabriel who had just entered the house and was staring around him in bemusement. “Perhaps you can judge for yourself. This is Dr. Delendas, the nephew of Makarias the vampire-hunter. He is here to visit for a few days.”

Kera Maria cocked her head, her gaze sharpening as she looked at Gabriel. “He has somewhat of Makarias about him, yes. Delendas, you say? Then he must be the eldest son of that family.”

“Yes, he is.” Jack tried to balance his cup of tea and the dish of stew on his lap. He gave up, setting the tea down on the floor at his feet. “It is his first time on Santorini. I think he would be pleased to hear your memories of his nephew.”

Kera Maria waited until he took another mouthful of bread. Then, with a pleased smile, she sailed across the room to greet Gabriel.

Jack watched with satisfaction as his landlady engaged the doctor in conversation. If Gabriel had hoped to have any further discourse of any kind with him tonight, he was to be sadly disappointed. Nobody escaped Kera Maria without very good reason.

Seated beside the fire in the best chair and guarded by Koubelos and his wife, Jack endured a steady stream of visitors. He had heard ten different versions of the funeral of the shrine-children by the time Father Gregory swept in and boomed a blessing at everyone gathered within the house. The arrival of the priest seemed to be a signal for the wine to flow more freely, and the din of celebration grew ever louder.

As the evening wore on, Jack became more restive, but each time he stood up, someone would approach him and he would feel obliged to sit down again so they could converse. Even Father Gregory joined him for a while, although he seemed more interested in speaking of his own role in the burial of the shrine-children than in anything else.

Later, Symphorian and Charis Kragades arrived from Emporio, bringing with them many of the workers from Jack's site. The press of guests in the small house eventually became too much and the party spilled outside onto the street. Doors and windows were flung open and people stood on the cobbles chattering to friends and neighbours. Children raced around shrieking with excitement, dogs barked and chickens fluttered and clucked at all the noise.

It was past midnight when the guests began to disperse. Kera Maria dozed by the fire. Gabriel sat uncomfortably on the edge of the hearthstone, looking exhausted, while Despoina and Nikos lay asleep on a mattress in the corner of the room, blissfully unaware of the continuing revelry.

Charis, who had deliberately hung back from speaking to Jack during the festivities, now came forward as she and Symphorian took their leave.

“He still haunts you,” she said, her voice low. “I can see it in you, how you hunger for him. I am afraid for you.”

Jack gave her a tired smile. “I am not in any danger.”

“You are in more danger than you know.” Charis reached up and touched his forehead, her fingers gentle in the caress. “Remember you are safest beside a hearth in a house he cannot enter. Stay here tonight.”

Koubelos overheard her last remark and he said, “Yes! You must stay here. Be our guest for tonight.”

“You are very kind, but I do not want to put you to any trouble,” Jack said politely. “Besides, it is not so very far to Kera Maria’s. That is, if I am still welcome.”

Kera Maria opened one eye and glared at him. “Of course you are welcome, Yianni! What nonsense you speak. Your rooms are just as you left them, only with less dust.”

He laughed. “Then I shall go home with you.”

“You should stay here,” Charis said again. She pressed his hands in emphasis, and then hurried away without a backward glance.

“A handsome woman,” Gabriel remarked.

“A very wise woman,” Koubelos corrected, taking offence on Symphorian’s behalf. “She is right. You will stay here with us tonight.” He began to prepare the room, evicting the last of the guests onto the street and pulling the mattress from the bed to place it near the fire. “You can sleep here, Mr. Jack. Irene will bring blankets for you. It is warm by the hearth, see?”

Jack looked wistfully at the mattress. “Then it appears I am staying for the night.” He yawned, and said, “My apologies, but it has been a very long day...”

“Then who shall see this old lady home?” Kera Maria complained. “It is dark and I might lose my way.”

“I shall walk with you,” Koubelos began, but then Gabriel spoke up.

“Perhaps I might accompany you? I am in need of a bed for the night before I go on to Oia tomorrow. If Jack is staying here, he will not need

his room tonight. If that is acceptable to both parties, of course.” He slanted a look at Jack. “I would not dream of entering a man’s room uninvited.”

Kera Maria seemed happy enough with the arrangement and said as much. Jack could only agree and he was pleased he had moved the tea chest and its incriminating evidence of human bones—Belas’s bones—away from the house before he had left Santorini.

“That is settled, then,” Koubelos said with satisfaction. He seized a lantern from a windowsill and handed it to Gabriel. “This should be sufficient to light your way. It is not far. Kera Maria could walk it blindfolded and not make a mistake.”

Gabriel took the lamp with a brief word of thanks and then he waited patiently for Kera Maria to finish fussing over Jack. She adjusted the position of the mattress, told Irene her pillows were lumpy and that she would come tomorrow with advice on the best place to purchase new ones. Finally she embraced Jack, uttered thanks to God and several saints for his homecoming, and then made her way to the door.

Gabriel turned to Jack. “I shall see you tomorrow. Perhaps you might like to come to Oia with me.”

Jack unbuttoned his cuffs and rolled up his shirtsleeves. He looked up and smiled and said, “Perhaps. We shall see. Goodnight, both of you.”

“Goodnight, Yiannakki,” Kera Maria cried from the doorway. “Sleep well.”

Jack waved them farewell, and then sank down gratefully onto the mattress, stretching out beneath the blankets as Koubelos closed the door against the night.

* * *

Sleep did not come easily. Jack lay on his side and stared at the embers of the fire, listening to the sounds of sleep all around him. Koubelos snored loudly and Irene shuffled about on the hard wooden slats of the bed. In the corner, the children muttered and occasionally

pulled the blankets back and forth in unconscious tug-of-war. The fire popped and hissed as it died.

Outside, there was no sound at all. Not a dog barking, nor a fox crying at the moon. Jack waited, even sitting up so that he could listen more intently, but Belas did not come, did not call out to him.

Restless, annoyed and more than a little disappointed, Jack waited for another half-hour more before he folded back the blankets and crept out of bed. He put on his boots, lacing them tightly, and then stood up and retrieved his jacket from the back of Koubelos's chair with as much stealth as he could muster.

He made scarcely any sound at all as he moved across the floor, but the click of the latch on the door made him jump. Koubelos grunted and rolled over, but did not waken. Jack waited a moment longer, and then slipped out of the house and onto the street, closing the door behind him.

The moon was fitful, hiding behind dark clouds. He had not gone far before he wished he could turn back to fetch a lantern. It seemed that in his absence, all manner of roots and plants had grown across the paths he usually took and now they conspired to trip him as he walked. It was also much colder here than at the Kephala and Jack hunched up inside his jacket, shivering as the wind blew past him.

At first he did not know where he was going, but blindly followed the road wending south away from Fira. The shape of Mount Profitis Ilias was black against the sky. Even the tiny monastery at its peak was dark and utterly without light. In its shadow, Emporio and his site were blacker still, but despite this, Jack turned his footsteps in that direction, certain that, at the shrine, he would find Belas.

By the time he reached the pale slopes of tuff, the moon hung silver above him. The dust puffed up around him as he came to a halt outside the boundary wall of the church of Agios Eleutherios. The bell glimmered in the moonlight. The windows and door remained in darkness. He half-expected Father Gregory to come out to prevent him from stepping onto the site.

The light of the moon made it easier for him to negotiate the lumps of tephra and the trenches and test-pits left abandoned by his workers, but it also meant the shadows were deeper and the surface of the ground brighter, almost dazzling. Several times he tripped over rocks and bumps in the earth. Finally he reached the scar in the tuff where the rock had split open. As he peered down into the inky darkness, Jack wished once again that he'd thought to bring a lantern.

"Belas?" he whispered, and then he tried again, a little louder. "Belas!"

There was no reply. He felt foolish but nevertheless edged closer to the side of the deep trench and squinted at the shape of the shrine beneath the solid covering of tephra. Without Koubelos or Andreas and a length of rope to help him, Jack knew he would have to climb down.

The tuff was slippery with dust. He kicked up showers of the fine whitish-grey powder and felt his grip slide as he tried to feel his way from one clump of rock to another. Despite the cold, he felt hot with anxiety, and so it was almost a relief when he lost his footing and fell to the floor of the trench.

He lay still and stared up at the suddenly tiny patch of sky overhead and then, with a sigh that became a gasp, he rolled onto his knees and got to his feet. His back hurt and his coccyx was a sharp mass of pain. Jack wondered vaguely if he'd broken it. He could still walk, and so he shook off the bruised feeling and shuffled towards the entrance to the shrine.

Inside, the first room was dark. He hugged the wall and felt his way around, not wanting to stumble over the lustral basin as Koubelos had done. When he reached the niche where the dolphin fresco was painted, Jack realised a dim light was burning in the altar room. The glow of this light spilled out just enough for him to be able to see the floor and edges of the walls ahead of him, and for a moment Jack stood frozen, suddenly terrified.

"Belas?"

Again there was no response, and so Jack forced himself to go the last few feet and into the altar room.

Belas was crouched upon the altar. He was surrounded by light, although there were no lamps inside the room. It was an unearthly light, at once bright and veiled by shadow, and it exposed in its glare the glory and horror of the fresco of the black mountain with its tongues of fire. The blood streaking the walls and altar was as black as the mountain, but as the light changed, it seemed to Jack as if the walls ran red with blood fresh and glistening.

He shuddered and looked at Belas. Under this changing light, Belas was also different. He was thinner, his skin pale and his hair dark, the gleaming strands of copper and gold now vanished. Only his eyes remained bright, feverish and rimmed red with exhaustion. His expression was both curious and unreadable as he returned Jack's gaze, as if he did not know what to do with him.

The silence grew painful. Jack had had no clear idea of what he would say or do when he next saw Belas, but he had not expected this. It felt like disinterest or rejection and it hurt far more than did the dull throb of his bruised body.

He cast around for something to say, anything to break the awful quiet of the room, and so he said, "I thought you would kill Eutimia when I was gone."

Belas shook his head. "You asked me to spare her and so I did."

"In all these weeks, you haven't harmed another human being?"

Belas showed his teeth in what could have passed as a smile but to Jack seemed more akin to a snarl. "Just a little. I took from those silly archaeologists at the hotel. I have no need of an invitation to Eutimia's hearth, if you remember. I did not hurt them, I took just enough for the taste of it. As for the rest, when I was very hungry, I killed a goat."

Jack nearly laughed at the image this conjured, but he stopped himself. He took a step closer to the altar and extended a hand, his wrist upwards in offering. "I am sorry I was away for so long. Sorry if you suffered."

Belas swayed a little on the altar, his gaze fixed to the delicate flesh of Jack's wrist. "You put a high price on your affection, Yianni *mou*," he said huskily. "For all I am not bound to serve you and that I do it from love of you, it is painful to deny myself the blood of the guilty. More painful it is when the guilty ones think to alleviate their forefathers' sins by attending the burial of my children and my woman, for then I cannot touch them."

"Did I do wrong?" Jack asked, his voice soft with distress.

"No," Belas said, equally softly. "No, you did right." He slid from the altar and came close to Jack. He took his arm, bending his head to press a kiss to Jack's wrist and then he let go of his arm and kissed his mouth.

This time neither of them was hesitant, the kiss breaking into a furious desire that forced them closer. Belas bit Jack's lips, his tongue, drawing blood so viciously and swiftly Jack scarcely registered the pain of it. Belas took and Jack gave sweetly and with joy.

They drew apart, the sound of their breathing heavy in the silence of the room. Dazed with longing, still tasting the blood rich in his mouth, Jack clung possessively as Belas tried to move away. "Kiss me again," he whispered.

Belas put Jack aside and wiped the back of his hand across his mouth. He walked a few steps to the side of the altar and looked down at the grooved channels cut into the surface of the marble. Belas touched the ancient bloodstains splattered there and asked quietly, "Why did you come back?"

Jack stared at him in disbelief. "I thought you knew! You watched over me while I was on Crete. You must know why I came back..."

"I tried to keep you safe. No," Belas said, his voice suddenly angry. "I tried to keep you mine. It was entirely selfish. I wanted you to remember me."

"And I did," Jack assured him, approaching the altar and reaching out to Belas, a supplicant before his god. "That's why I came back. You wanted me."

“What I wanted was for you to desire nobody else. It seems as if I failed in that respect.” Belas scrubbed his fist across the bloodstains as if trying to wipe clean the altar. “You brought a lover with you. I can taste him. I can taste his possession on you. And I know who he is. I do not know which betrayal is worse, that you sought another or that you chose him.”

Jack tried to interrupt, grasping at Belas’s hands. “No, it is not like that!”

“Why is he here?” Belas demanded, pushing himself away from the altar to pace up and down the room. “For centuries the eldest son of the Delendas family has shunned this island. Why does he come now?”

“It is not betrayal,” Jack said. “Please, Belas, listen! Gabriel came here because of me.”

“Why?”

Jack shrank back a little at the snarl of rage in Belas’s voice, but then he stepped around the altar to face him. “He is fascinated with me. He wants to study me. He believes you are just a figment of my imagination.”

“Then what a vivid imagination you have, Yiannakki.”

Belas came to rest in the far corner of the room where the blood on the wall was most concentrated. Jack came towards him, one hand on the altar, the other outstretched.

“I brought him here for you. Dr. Gabriel Delendas. He’s the one, isn’t he? The one you’ve wanted for so long, the incarnation of the priest who killed your family. You can end it now. He’s the last of his line. The eldest son. He has no heir. Kill him and it ends.”

Belas smiled, but it was such a sad smile that Jack hesitated to go any nearer.

“Do you know what will happen if I should kill him?” Belas asked softly. He reached out and touched Jack, stroking his shirtfront and then his throat, fingertips gentle as he caressed his face.

Jack gazed at him, triumphant. “You will be avenged. You will be free.”

Belas abandoned the caress abruptly. "I will be dead."

"What?"

"Did you not hear anything I told you?" Belas moved again, shifting sideways towards the door of the altar-room. "A revenant only lives until its purpose is achieved. We are not holy. We are not the *alastoroi*, angels to avenge every crime, to save every sinner. We are the restless dead and we wander only for as long as it takes to exact revenge. There is nothing glorious or good about us. Our motivation is death and then to death we return."

Jack shook his head. "It's what you wanted! I thought only to help."

Belas laughed, but the sound was tearful. "For more than four thousand years I have waited for this moment. Perhaps the waiting has blunted the edge of my desire."

"And yet you killed the others. The old man in Emporio, McKeown—you would have taken Eutimia, even—and these people were not the one you sought!" Jack argued, following him past the altar and swinging him around before he reached the door.

"Then it is you who have changed me," Belas said, his eyes glittering and his words faltering with cracked emotion. "You who have made me wish for life when I am entitled to none. You who have offered me hope where there is only the void. Forgive me, for I do not understand why it is that you do this."

"Because I love you," Jack said.

Belas tried to brush the declaration aside. "You cannot save me, Yianni. It is much too late for that."

"Let me try!" Jack cried, frustrated and adoring both at once.

"I cannot have you without losing you. It is the same every time. I should be used to this pattern of loss. It is Heaven's way of punishing me for my impudence. How can the restless dead dare to love the living?"

Belas made as if to turn away and leave the room. "No," he said with finality, "there was no need for you to come back. You should have stayed away."

Jack let him go, but just as Belas was about to step into the antechamber, he said, loudly and clearly, "If you will not do it, I shall. I shall kill him."

Belas paused on the threshold and looked back over his shoulder. "You would kill your lover for me? I hear the Furies scream outside for your blood, Yianni. Just for thinking it, you are cursed."

"I am cursed anyway for loving you." Jack stood his ground, waiting for Belas to come back to him. "I cursed myself when I let him touch me, but I did it for you. I knew he would follow me. I knew he would come here. If you will not kill him, I shall do that for you, too."

Belas came close to him, looking up into his eyes as if to gauge the depth of intent held there. "I do not want you to go down into Hell just because I am afraid of losing you," he said softly. "The void of death holds no fear for me, but I cannot bear the thought that you must suffer, that I cannot have you..."

They looked at one another and the same idea must have occurred to them at the same time, but it was Belas who turned away from it and Jack who embraced it and put it into words.

"There is a way," Jack suggested.

Belas rejected it outright. "No."

"It seems to make sense," Jack persisted.

"I cannot ask it."

"You do not have to. I offer it freely."

Belas held up his hands and backed away, as if disturbed by the very thought of it. "No, I cannot! Let this Gabriel Delendas return to his lair on Crete. My children and woman are buried, their souls rest easy. I can forget..."

Jack took a step towards him, single-minded now his decision was made, but still anxious for Belas to accept it. "You will never forget and you will never forgive yourself, either, if you let this moment slip away from you."

Belas shook his head. "I do not want to die again. I do not want to lose you."

"Then do it and you shall never have to fear either of these things ever again." Jack knelt on the floor before Belas, taking his hands and closing them around his throat. "Make me anew, just as you are and I will avenge your family."

"I cannot take your life. I cannot damn you for all eternity."

Jack smiled up at him. "I do not care so long as I am with you."

"I cannot think it could be so simple," Belas whispered in protest.

"It is," Jack said. "You promised me once, here in this very place, that your world would be my world. If you love me—if you trust me—then do it now. It is the only way."

Belas tightened his hands around Jack's throat. "Oh, my soul, forgive me."

Jack was still smiling when Belas broke his neck.

Epilogue

Such was the confusion surrounding Jack's death that it was decided to bury him in ground owned by the Dominican monastery in Fira with Father Gregory saying a Mass for his soul in the church of Agios Eleutherios. It was left to the villagers to decide which service they preferred to attend.

The shock and consternation felt by the people was evident in the manner in which the monks laid out the body. Neither Catholic nor Orthodox, Jack was nevertheless arrayed by the monks according to island tradition: laid upon a bier covered with flowers, dressed in his best clothes, his ankles tied with black ribbon and his hands crossed over his chest.

Kera Maria wailed the lament for the dead, too stunned by the swiftness of his passing to be able to force emotion into her song. It was a relief to all when Koubelos and Andreas arrived to help the monks carry the bier through the town to the burial ground. Along the way, people stared and crossed themselves, whispering to one another.

Gabriel was one of the few who attended the actual burial. Although he had carried out a brief post-mortem and had signed the death certificate, he found it hard to understand what had happened. It seemed like minutes rather than hours ago that he had been woken from his sleep by Kera Maria banging frantically on the door to tell him there had been an accident, a dreadful accident, a tragedy, and would he please make haste.

Andreas was waiting for him and they hurried to the excavation site in a terse silence. Gabriel wondered why it was that doctors always felt it needful to hurry to a scene of death, and then answered his own

question by wishing that these ignorant islanders were mistaken and that Jack was still alive.

But he was not.

Gabriel had no need to examine him to know Jack was dead, but he did so anyway, one last, lingering, intimate touch of the body stretched out upon the altar. "His neck is broken," he said quietly, more from deference to the overpowering sense of claustrophobia he felt in the shrine than from any respect for the presence of death.

"When I awoke and realised he had gone from the house, I feared the worst," Koubelos had said from the doorway. "We all knew he was haunted, but never did we think that the *vrykolakas* would take his life."

Gabriel had frowned, feeling the anger rise in him like nausea. "Do you speak of Belas? There is no *vrykolakas*, no haunting. Belas was within his mind this whole time, do you hear me? It is not superstition, but madness."

Koubelos had given Gabriel a look of disbelief. "Surely a man cannot break his own neck so easily."

"It is very easy," Gabriel had said. "He fell. The trench outside is deep. He was wandering in the darkness and fell. It is a simple enough explanation."

"But this," Koubelos had said, gesturing around the room to the flowers that lay in drifts upon the floor and strewn across the altar and to the terracotta oil lamps placed at the head and feet of Jack's body. "Who, then, did all of this?"

Now, as the monks carefully lowered Jack's body into the grave, Koubelos came to stand beside Gabriel. Together they watched the gravediggers shovel earth onto the body, and only when the pale, waxen face was covered from sight did Koubelos speak.

"There was an Englishman who came from Athens to ask questions of Mr. Hunter about the death of Dr. McKeown."

Gabriel nodded, but did not look away from the grave. "Yes."

“None of us here believe ill of him. He is good and kind.” Koubelos’s mouth twisted with sorrow. “*Was*. He was good and kind. He would not hurt another. This we know.”

“What do you want from me?” Gabriel asked, glancing up.

Koubelos fixed him with his gaze. “A doctor is as a confessor. If there are things unknown, we wish for them to remain unknown.”

Gabriel nearly wept at that. “He gave me many things, but never his trust. For all that, I do not believe he was a wicked man.”

“But you believed him to be mad,” Koubelos said doggedly.

“What I believe hardly matters now.” Gabriel turned his back on the grave and offered Koubelos a half-smile. “Besides, it is not wise to speak ill of the dead.”

“Indeed,” said Koubelos, crossing himself hastily. “They are quick to take offence. May Mr. Jack rest easy, and be not troubled.”

“Amen,” said Gabriel, and for the first time in his life, he meant it.

* * *

Later that day, as dusk began to fall and the lamps were lit across Fira, Gabriel walked down the lane to Kera Maria’s. He saw no reason to move out and until the packet steamer called again he was trapped on the island. He supposed he could make himself useful by packing up Jack’s belongings to be shipped back to England.

Kera Maria was prostrate with grief. Unwilling to disturb her, Gabriel went through the house and out into the courtyard. As he passed the water trough, a dark shape darted out in front of him and almost made him trip.

Gabriel cursed, glaring at the animal that now sat smugly upon the wall. Its green eyes glittered at him and Gabriel resisted the temptation to shake his fist at the cat. It was only Skitos, after all, the mangy creature that Kera Maria had so fussed over the night before.

He unlocked the door to Jack’s rooms and went inside, dropping the keys down onto the card table beneath the picture of Kera Maria’s

husband. As he entered the bedroom, he noticed the envelope propped up on the old wooden table Jack had used as his desk.

Gabriel glanced around the room. The shutters were still tightly closed and, until he had arrived, the door had been locked. He tried to ignore the whisper of fear tingling at the back of his neck, and looked instead at the envelope.

It had no postage stamps and no direction, just his name written in a flourish of black ink and with the letters carefully formed. He recognised Jack's handwriting immediately.

Gabriel picked up the envelope, opened the letter, and began to read.

About the Author

Olivia Lorenz lives in Yorkshire in the north of England. Trained as a Classical archaeologist, she has excavated sites in the UK and Greece. A former resident of Edinburgh, Scotland, her dubious claim to fame is that she used to go for coffee in Nicholson's at the same time as J. K. Rowling was writing the first Harry Potter book on the other side of the room. She speaks a number of dead languages with varying degrees of fluency and travels extensively in search of inspiration for her stories. When not writing, she enjoys ogling Cantonese actors in Hong Kong films, playing with her animals, or visiting English Heritage properties. She loves baking and is attempting to become a domestic goddess.

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It takes a young castle guardsman with the heart of a lion to love a Duke...and survive.

Heart of a Lion

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Available now at Samhain Publishing

During a chance encounter, Curran is offered his dream job in Duke Luthias' personal guard. The job soon sours as the lies and deceptions within the castle walls multiply like rabbits until Curran can no longer stomach them.

Tanis, the lover the Duke made Curran surrender as part of his oath of loyalty, is the only man he can trust to help him stop the Duke's ill-fated campaign to punish the northern raiders. But Tanis has secrets of his own. As much as he loves Curran, they could lose much more than their lives if he got involved now.

When the northern savages retaliate for the Duke's acts of war by laying siege to his castle, all three men are forced to take refuge within the fortified walls. Who lives and who dies depends on one man having the heart of a lion...

Warning, this title contains the following: explicit, erotic sex, graphic language, mild blood-letting, and hot nekkid man-love.

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Heart of a Lion*:

Tanis had no chance to whisper a word of warning to Curran as he grabbed his sword and followed the mounted men up the dirt trail that led back to the castle. He doubted the young man would have heeded his counsel anyway. His eagerness to please his Grace had been evident each time Luthias spoke. Poor, unlucky sod.

Then Tanis noted a detail that had escaped him before. The Duke normally traveled with twelve men, a legacy of the roundtable knights

that Luthias superstitiously thought would protect him against the Celts' attacks. At present, there were only ten. Two riderless horses trailed after the last man up the hill. Most of the men had kept to the edge of the trees. Moonlight had cast shadows upon their faces, shielding their identity. Who among Luthias' innermost circle had not made it home alive?

The Duke dismounted and ground-hitched his warhorse. As he wrested his hands free of the steel gauntlets, he said, "I see you have discovered my closest ranks have been lessened by two."

"Who?"

Luthias continued as if the question had never been asked. "The casualties were heavy this time. Some will speak against me for risking so many lives. I would counter, however, that we left behind a greater number of dead godless raiders so the sacrifice was not in vain. It will be some time before they rally enough men to strike against the might of England again."

"Who?" Tanis repeated. Fear as to the answer chilled him far more thoroughly than the steam from the hot spring could counteract.

"Sir Kloven. Damn fine man, but not the best fighter. He was lost early on in the campaign."

Tanis knew little about him, other than Gavin had been the one to champion him as a candidate for joining the Duke's tight ranks. "And the other?"

"Gavin," Luthias said shortly.

The Duke managed to free the buckles holding on the leg pieces. They fell to the ground in a noisy clatter. It was nothing compared to the angry buzzing in Tanis' head. "Gavin is dead?"

Luthias nodded. "A great loss, to be sure. His death came at a most fortuitous time, however. His end became a rallying point. Without that inspiration, I doubt any of us would have made it out of the last engagement alive. Instead, we turned the tide and chased those soulless bastards back into the hills where they belong."

Gavin. Dead. The reality of it had no substance in Tanis' existence. He needed to know more. "How? How did he die?"

"Oh, bravely, you may be assured." The Duke huffed in exasperation as his fat fingers failed to free the breastplate. "Come see to these bindings, will you? They are too tight for me to loosen from this angle."

Tanis launched himself out of the water. Naked and dripping from every possible point, he advanced on Luthias. "Tell me how he died."

"The camp minstrels crafted a song about it. Bloody, useless idiots sing it endlessly. You will hear a thousand different versions of the tale before the month is out, I am sure."

"Give me no tales. I want the truth."

Tanis wrenched at the tight fastenings, aware that if he didn't find something for his hands to do, they'd end up around the Duke's throat. As enjoyable as that act would be, he'd be taking his own life as well. There were ten witnesses, eleven counting Curran, who knew the man last in Luthias' company. And though there were many times he'd longed for death to strike him down, he'd not ever stand for it to come about in this fashion.

The last strap came free, the steel chimed like a death knoll. Luthias heaved a sigh of relief. "The truth is seldom palatable."

Tanis refused to back down, physically or verbally. "Tell me."

"Gavin's last command decision was quite foolhardy. He led his charge at a pace that far outstripped others in the field. He took a good number with him as he went down swinging, but one of those Celtic animals gored him through the heart before any of us could reach him."

Tanis assessed what he saw in the Duke's steady gaze. "You did not even try to save him."

"Well, I do admit that my unit was closest, but we were engaged. I had no free swords to send to his rescue."

Still trying to comprehend the magnitude of such a betrayal, Tanis said, "You stood by and watched him die. He was your lover, and yet you did nothing to save him."

“It had been several months since Gavin had chosen to warm my bed. I assure you, I no longer considered him my lover by the time he died.” Luthias removed the rust-stained padding and other undergarments until he was stripped bare.

Tanis rocked back on his heels, his world spinning.

Words continued to spill from the Duke’s mouth. “I demand unswerving loyalty from my men. All who take the oath understand this. Gavin wavered. I no longer had an obligation to watch over him. It was his own choice, Tanis.”

“You filthy, despicable offspring of a goat.” Tanis backed Luthias into a tree, a sinewy forearm pressed against the Duke’s throat. The impact shook the leaves all the way up to the very top. “Gavin loved you.”

“Once, perhaps. But then he chose Kloven over me. I could not have that.”

“Your damn pride will one day kill us all. I should end your life now and spare the few innocents who believe a human heart still beats in your empty breast.” Tanis raised his arm to strike a killing blow with naught more than his hammer-like fist.

“No one lives forever, and eventually my time too will come. However, remember that if my death should come at your hands, there is more than yourself who will pay the price.”

No, Tanis hadn’t forgotten that, although the implications of extracting revenge for Gavin’s murder—and it was murder, surely as if Luthias had held the killing sword himself—hadn’t completely filtered through his mind. But now that the connection had been made between act and punishment, Tanis’ hands were tied. He let the Duke go, watching as the man nonchalantly returned to the pool.

“Fate will see that you pay a high price for your treachery, Luthias.”

“Perhaps.” The Duke lowered himself into the steaming water. “Young Curran looks a lot like Gavin at his age, do you agree?”

Please, no. Not the sweet rascal Curran. Hadn’t the man ruined enough lives for one lifetime? “I did not study him that closely.”

Luthias fingered the earth that had been roughened during Curran's violent release. "He looks quite the capable sort. Now that there is room in my inner circle, I will have to see if he meets my standards."

"He is soft from guarding your simple-minded wife. Too soft for your tastes, I am sure."

"I thought you did not get a good look at him."

Tanis silently cursed himself. He never should have strayed into the clearing. His company brought nothing but misery of one kind or another to those he met under the moonlight. "I know his duties well enough."

"Speaking of duties, I think it is time that you see to your own. I am sure my people will want to celebrate my victorious return."

Tanis bundled his clothes under his arm, then left the small clearing without so much as a backward glance. By the Gods, he prayed he would live to see the day that Luthias paid for his many sins. Until then there was naught he could do but continue to lead the solitary life that kept meat on his Grace's table and his head off the executioner's chopping block.

And try to forget about Gavin, Curran and any chance at happiness he might have had.

Overhead, Athena soared, releasing the wail that he could not permit to escape his aching, heavy chest.

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