

Barbed Wire in Aphrodite's Garden

John Bandler

Cyprus, 1955-1957. Love and courage collide with bigotry, decadence, and revolution in ethnically divided Cyprus as British control crumbles. A schoolboy battles his mantle of cowardice, a tycoon's son rebels against his heritage, and a young womanizer seeks redemption as a guerrilla-assassin.



Barbed Wire in Aphrodite's Garden by [John Bandler](#) is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](#).

Copyright © 2007, 2010, 2022 John Bandler
All rights reserved by the author



Published by Bandler Corporation www.bandler.com

BARBED WIRE
IN APHRODITE'S GARDEN

John Bandler

Author's Note

The author has rendered historical events, public or notorious figures, as well as geographical scenes, as faithfully as possible. This allows the author to create an authentic mood for the readers. All active characters, their affiliations and specific events in which the author places them arise from the author's imagination. Consequently, any similarity with real people, whether living or dead, is coincidental. Most locations on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus are referred to by their real names. Notable exceptions are the villages of Kalopetria and Pano Vounaki, which the author has placed west of Kyrenia on the northern slopes of the Kyrenia range facing the Turkish mainland. All events, characters, and historical references linked with these imaginary locations, including the artifacts, are fictitious.

Historical Note

Britain annexed Cyprus from the Ottomans in 1914. With financial support from Cyprus's Greek Orthodox Church headed by His Beatitude, Archbishop Makarios, on April 1, 1955, Greek Cypriot George Grivas ("Dhigenis"), Colonel in the Greek Army, started a guerrilla campaign against British rule.

Oath of the National Organization of Cypriot Combatants (EOKA). (From the *Times of Cyprus*, February 17, 1957.)

"I swear in the name of the Holy Trinity that:

I shall work with all my power for the liberation of Cyprus from the British yoke sacrificing for this even my life;

I shall perform without objection all the instructions of the organization which may be entrusted to me and I shall not bring any objection, however difficult, and dangerous these may be;

I shall not abandon the struggle unless I receive instructions from the leader of the organization and after our aim has been accomplished;

I shall never reveal to anyone any secret of our organization neither the names of my chiefs nor those of the other members of the organization even if I am caught and tortured;

I shall not reveal any of the instructions which may be given to me even to my fellow combatants.

If I disobey my oath, I shall be worthy of every punishment as a traitor and may eternal contempt cover me."

My life is a tale. This book is reality.

Chapter 1

"I am Stavros," the young man said.

From her beach chair on the sandy crescent of the Famagusta seashore, Claire Simmons lifted her magazine to shield her eyes. Cloaked in a halo by the sun's glare, the man's head cast a shadow across her face. Echoed by the paper cone in his hand, and distending the fabric over his loins, his hard-on intruded into her space.

Was this a classical hero? A Zeus poised over his next conquest? Cripes, no. Just local swagger assessing possibilities. Like her and fourteen-year-old Jane, her stepdaughter.

Under their umbrella, Jane now slouched in her chair as if to disappear into *Great Expectations*.

She herself, unable to settle, had dragged her own chair and *Vogue* and *Illustrated London News* in and out of the hundred-degree-plus shade. Why douse? Why spoil her makeup in the sea—her hair, her fuchsia lips, her matching toenails? Unlike the local talent, she was a *natural* blonde with sun-bleached wisps that accented her arms—not bad for a thirtyish English bird, albeit a NAAFI accountant's wife. Packaged today in a form-fitting tan bikini that toned with oiled skin.

Still, she envied Jane's Devonshire cream skin set off by jet hair. On jaunts into the pistachio-green sea, neither a Dickens nor a Bronte sister could shield Jane's tits from gapers.

Jane's blue eyes alone merited a detour.

Jane or her? Which of them had reeled in this so-called Stavros?

Stavros's gaze washed over her as he picked a pumpkin seed from the paper cone and directed it to his mouth. He worked open the seed's shell between tongue and teeth. He spat away the shell, ate the kernel—a quick nibble—then held out the cone as if extending his dick. “This is *basadembo*,” he said. “You like?”

She smiled at Jane as they shook their heads, Jane more fervently than she.

“Are you English?” he asked.

“Yes,” Jane said.

Black-haired Jane was as *clearly* English as any red-faced, short-back-and-sides soldier boy commissioned to keep Cyprus British—her Majesty's prize of the Eastern Mediterranean. Jane's answer, though, wasn't the point of this Stavro-man's question.

Old Charlie Dickens now reclined in Jane's lap—Jane's finger lodged to mark the page.

“I'm Greek,” he said, still gazing at Jane as if admiring a Ducati racer. “Are you sisters?”

Jane thumped her book against her knee. A giggle and a shrug, and her shoulder strap flopped at her elbow.

“From London?” he asked Jane.

“No,” Jane said. “That is to say, *I'm* not.” She was trembling, doubtless aware of the beacon he'd focused her chest—boobs that promised imminent unveiling.

He slouched, resting his weight on one foot. Again, he offered her the whatever-he-called-them pumpkin seeds.

“Too salty.”

Fuck it. He'd won. She'd granted him a response—any response.

Back to Jane. “What's your name?” he said.

She blushed. “Jane.”

“Christakis, is over there,” he said pointing. “My cousin. You want to meet him?” He put a finger to his temple. “He’s very clever.”

Jane shivered and plunged back into Dickens.

Stavros raised his eyebrows as if pleading for a guardian’s approval. “He’s a nice boy.”

But Claire squinted through him into the blue infinity.

“Okay,” he said, “see you later.” And he strutted off—this hairy David, practically young enough to be her son.

Jane broke the silence, her breath short, her ears red. “God, I *do* hope he doesn’t drag his beastly cousin here.” Jane paused. “I’ve seen that man before.”

In that case, they were bound to see him again. She was partial to flirtation—good fun—but not when Jane was around. Appearances did matter.

“Be firm. Never show interest like you did back then. And Jane, . . .”

“Yes?”

“Do up your strap, will you, dear?”

Jane wriggled the flimsy support back into position. “Do you think he’s dangerous? I mean, are they all anti-British?”

“They adore us. Where do they all emigrate to? England. Do they go to Greece, to those bloody fascists and communists? ‘Course not.”

“Mobs keep blowing up those electrical transformer things,” Jane said. “And they smashed up the British Institute’s windows the other day.”

“Noise, inconvenience, ghastly delays. Anyway, tear gas, detention, and the British Army will clear that up.”

As she’d discovered, Famagusta, or Varosha as the Greeks referred to the modern part, boasted the best beachfront in Cyprus on which to be seen, to blister in the sun, and to cool off in

the sea. In August 1955, it was an oasis where mulling over the Greek-Cypriot discontent with British rule could be postponed, if not altogether abandoned.

She'd surrendered to the sins of abundance in this British bastion—abundance of great weather, of good food, of gorgeous males. Her balmy arrival with Reggie and Jane, sedately steaming into Larnaca, the magic of anchoring offshore, followed by the sweltering heat and sleepless nights were distant memories. As far a cry from Woolworth's in Kensington, where Jane's dad had discovered her, as the comforts of Buckingham Palace were to the dingy row house in Fulham where she'd grown up. A beach scene as different from their honeymoon week back in St. Ives, where she and Reggie had strolled barefoot, at low tide, along miles of hard-packed sand in the raw wind in what passed for mid-summer in Cornwall, as porridge was from smoked salmon with capers. In St. Ives they'd entrenched themselves in their teeny hotel-room bed. They'd synchronized their lovemaking to each turn of the tide—the bean counter in Reggie addicted to scheduling—until one crest of passion at high tide when she'd burst into the vernacular she'd grown up with and screamed the name of a former lover. Military accountant Reggie's ardor dissolved for good when he finally realized that his new wife's career at Harrods had never advanced beyond the aspiration stage—her regular toils being confined to a counter at Woolworth's—her upper-crust accent and poise having been acquired rather than inherited.

“But what about democracy?” Jane said. “The Greeks invented democracy.”

“Still, they had slaves. I'm sure there's some clever Cypriots, but they don't have the desire—or tradition, or whatever—to organize. Reggie thinks the Union Jack will fly over Cyprus for the next thousand years.”

“Their silly archbishop wants an *end* to slavery,” Jane said. “Cypriots, he says, can't be bought and sold.”

“Jane. No more questions.” She reached for her compact and started repairing her makeup. “It ain’t my bailiwick and it’s too hot to argue.”

“Let’s go to The Othello Tower,” Jane said. “It’s right next door.”

She snapped her compact shut. “I’ve taken in enough ruins this summer.”

“Shakespeare wrote about it.”

“At any rate, we’ve done that dilapidated Salamis.”

“Sun-dweets!” someone yelled across the sand. “Goga-Gola! Goga-Gola! Sun-dweets!”

“I-scream, I-scream,” barked another voice.

“Claire, I’m thirsty. You want anything?”

“Not one of those greasy, canned corned-beef sandwiches.”

“A drink?”

“Okay.”

No harm in a drink. She drew her chair into the shade and returned to the *Illustrated London News* and its report on Donald Campbell’s latest *Bluebird* water speed record.

They made no further reference to Stavros. But she did see Jane scanning the beach and the offshore wooden raft, where the alley-cats lined up to pitch themselves into the sea. When Stavros soared off the high diving board in a tight somersault, Jane pressed the edge of her book into her legs.

Chapter 2

Christakis whipped himself onto his feet and felt the rush of water down his back. Ankle deep in the foam, he stood up, drew a deep breath then let it out slowly. His fast crawl across the lagoon had made his heart thump.

He looked down. The hair at his shins writhed and spread, dark curls against his white skin. Wet but manly. He peeked at the bulge in his swimsuit. Fifteen years in the making. Paws off in public, though. Pity. And a shame he couldn't stay wet all afternoon. In the minute it would take him to push through the scorching sand to his father's restaurant table, he'd be dry.

The town of Famagusta spread beyond the jam of whitewashed hotels, and the awning- and trellis-sheltered restaurants that battled for business along the beachfront. To stride out of a private home onto—surely—the Middle East's friendliest sandy crescent, one had to be rich. Here, iceboxes under arm, sweat-soaked vendors with rolled-up sleeves plied drinks to the sunbathers and local gapers, and the Sunday afternoon volleyball players.

Maybe, one day, he wouldn't give a second thought to any vendor's prices.

He checked the action on the beach. The swim-suited chicks he'd had his eye on were still there, but none looked in his direction. His arrival had gone unnoticed.

Next time he'd parachute from the sky.

Or he could trample across a kid's sandcastle.

Shading his eyes with his hand, he turned seaward. His brother, Odysseas, was probably still where he'd left him, clambering over the arc of offshore rocks that protected the lagoon, and gleaning fish trapped in rock pools. Obsessively, as if willing the next wave to sweep in a creature he hadn't already cataloged, Odysseas explored the reef's surf-hollowed nooks and crannies. It reminded him of the times they poked for tadpoles in the Pedieos River, where he'd once faked credit for saving Odysseas's life.

No need to fret. His twelve-year-old brother had become an excellent swimmer.

Returning his gaze landward, he spotted cousin Stavros, as ever, engaged in the ceaseless quest to check out the talent. Stavros might be no taller, but his three-year age advantage showed—even at fifty yards. Stavros made the paper cone in his fist seem like an Olympic torch.

He combed his chest with his fingers and willed himself a mat as thick as Stavros's.

He'd seen Stavros.

So had everyone else.

And Stavros had seen him.

No need to parachute out of the sky or wreck a kid's sandcastle. To bask at the epicenter of attention, all he had to do was to lurk near Stavros, or follow Stavros's somersault off the diving raft with a belly flop.

"Where have you been hiding?" Stavros asked. "I met two English beauties." He pointed. "Over there, begging for real men. One for you, one for me. Come."

Stavros grabbed him by the elbow, but he resisted. God knew what Stavros had lined up. Whether by empty-headed women or not, a side-by-side comparison with his muscle-bound cousin was not what he craved. If Stavros had already left his doggy scent on those girls, better stay away from that part of the beach.

Back in the restaurant, now crowded, he found his father, Zacharias, slicing a wedge of watermelon with a knife and fork. Neat cubes. Carved by Zacharias, during the school term a popular mathematics teacher, in the summer a frustrated geometer.

Ducking the smoke that curled from the ashtray, he snatched his shirt from the back of a chair. In a restaurant, bare-chested, he felt exposed.

Zacharias speared a piece of watermelon and looked at him. "Odysseas is okay?"

Yes, he nodded and slipped his arms into his shirt.

Without turning, Zacharias gestured across the tables. "Isn't that your English teacher?"

Indeed. Harry Lawrell. Beyond the layered hairdos of foreign women and the slicked heads of local ladies' men. With a so what, he pulled out his chair. But before he could sit down, Zacharias said, "It's impolite not to say hello."

He shoved his chair against the table.

"Be pleasant," Zacharias said. "Then come back and have some watermelon."

He squeezed his way between the chairs, glad that the congestion slowed him down. He needed the time to identify Harry's companions and, if he knew them, to recall their names. A table away, he hovered behind a waiter unloading a tray.

Harry sat with two women, probably Cypriot, well-groomed, neither dressed for a swim. Seemingly hanging on his every word, these dark-haired ladies looked anything but siblings of Anglo-Saxon Harry. Wineglass in hand, lips quivering, Harry held forth. A chimpanzee begging for bananas.

One of the women faced the beach. Young, but serious. In her tight, mauve-and-white checked dress, serious or not, she was too damned pretty for old doughface Harry, no matter how much he pursed his lips at her.

His tray emptied, the waiter swung out of the way.

Okay. Time to be pleasant. He pressed forward.

The second woman sat with her back to him. Black hair. Blue dress. No, turquoise. She seemed to be responding to some inner rhythm. Couldn't be Harry's poetry. As if on a signal she turned and looked out to sea.

She was young too, younger than the woman in mauve. A wisp of a smile played on her lips. Had she sensed his presence? When the single pearl that swung from her ear glittered, a gust of hot wind flushed his face.

"Master Christakis Ikonis," Harry said.

The woman in turquoise turned. The moment he saw her face, an invisible leash tightened around his neck.

"We were just debating the Greek unrest," Harry said. "I hope you and your classmates haven't put anti-British sentiments to practice this summer. Stick to what your dapper Archbishop Makarios says, 'It is with the weapons of our soul that we are struggling'."

Yeah, Harry Lawrell, poet, novelist and aging beatnik, flaunted an oily mouth at the these well-dressed women, while cousin Stavros Ikonis, car mechanic and beach bum, paraded his greasy muscles to the well-*undressed* wenches on the beach. Same objectives. Different bait.

"Introduce us, Harry," the stern woman said.

A lesser man might have been nonplussed. A man who translated classical Greek poetry into English was not a lesser man. Without losing his composure, Harry nodded towards her and said, "Miss Zaira hails from Nicosia." He gestured at the woman in turquoise. "This is her enchanting friend, *Fräulein* Rebecca. *Frisch zurück aus Österreich, Landes Mozart.*"

Fräulein Rebecca? *Österreich?* Harry was not making this easy.

Harry rasped his knuckles up and down his goatee, hardly more than stubble speckled with grey. For some reason the silver flecks of Harry's goatee seemed more annoying than

usual. And Harry's thin smile—Harry obviously saved his fuller lips for women—suggested, bugger off, kid, can't you see I'm busy.

He moved around "*Fräulein*" Rebecca's foot to the unoccupied side of Harry's table.

Red toenails, slim feet, sandals. He looked up along the buttons on the front of her shirt-like cotton dress. Tight belt. Trim waist. It made him feel unkempt, sloppy. Dare he look beyond her breasts, past the string of pearls, past her collar, perhaps even beyond her glossy lips, into her eyes? Oh, God. She was looking at his tummy. His ears began to burn. His hand flashed across his chest. His shirt was hanging open, all the way down. Fuck!

"These charming demoiselles haven't yet been snared. Unbelievable, what?"

Charming demoiselles. Snared. Harry must like the sound of his own voice. Where *was* Harry's wife?

Rebecca smiled at him. "Would you like to sit down?"

She had brown eyes, flecked with gold. Her *voice*, hardly German. Her accent was Armenian, like Zaira's. For a moment he became aware of the drone from nearby tables. He looked around. Why wasn't every man staring at her?

Stavros, stay away.

"I'm sure he has some boyish agenda," Harry said. "Don't you, Master Ikonis?"

Yeah. I could get out my bucket and spade and build a sandcastle.

Harry raised his glass. "The beach awaits, lad. Go sample the benign fallout from Bikini Island."

"You've lost me," Rebecca said.

Was that annoyance in her voice? Good.

"The bikini," Harry said. "Louis Réard's invention. Better have our Cypriot boys drooling over those newfangled two-piece bathing suits than chucking bombs."

He had to get closer. He had to smell her. Perhaps he could drop something by her sandal. He could knock over a saltshaker. Stupid move.

A cat appeared, a straggly restaurant scavenger that fluffed the hem of her dress and stroked her leg. It was a welcome excuse to look somewhere harmless, back at her feet. If only he could be that cat.

Wait. She'd spoken to him. She'd asked him to sit down.

He pulled out the empty chair, drew his open shirt together, and sat down across from Zaira. Revenge. Harry could wait until class next term to take revenge.

"Watching him in *in-action*," Harry said, "the casual observer would find it hard to believe that this mute young man has the verve and intellectual wherewithal to make something of himself. As long as he resists the incipient street gangs. Don't lose it, lad."

He looked at the empty wine bottle and sensed the progress of Rebecca's fingers across the table. He knew she was looking at him. Her hand had slipped closer to him, her fingers outlining an invisible coin. How old could she be? For sure, she'd smell right. What had the maestro himself once declared in a poetry class? That when you fall in love, the usually insignificant becomes special?

"Are you a poet too?" Zaira asked.

"Far from it," Harry said. "The boy thinks poetry is useless, that it has no value. Isn't that, right, Ikonis?"

"Poetry has no utility," he said, still staring at the empty bottle, straining to make his voice sound more mature than his years. "Utility and value are not the same."

Rebecca's finger still caressed the tablecloth. Yes. Harry would surely get his revenge.

"The incorrigible thorn in my side has recovered his tongue," Harry said. "When he does speak, as you might say, Rebecca, he speaks *con brio*. Sadly, with the cold logic of a scientist. I

once made the mistake of challenging him to a game of chess. Now be a chevalier, Ikonis, and collar yon steward on your way back to the beach. We need more wine.”

Rebecca snapped open her handbag and pulled out a folded sheet of paper. She hesitated for a moment as if reflecting. Without unfolding it, she held out the sheet. “Tell me, is this your name on my list?”

List? He tried to ease it from her grasp. No, he had to pry it from her.

She broke into a smile.

Harry banged the table with his fist. “By Jove. Miss Rebecca Ouzanian is your new piano teacher.”

Chapter 3

In Nicosia, two days later, Claire didn't at first recognize him—the beach-jock—across from her house, leaning against a lamppost, chewing his thumb, with a do-you-recognize-me-with-my-clothes-on look.

Crumpled white shirt. Shirtsleeves rolled up as far as he could get them. Trousers that would surely split if he bent over. Strewth, just another bother. Trying not to further grind her Volkswagen's corners or to plaster additional beige scuffmarks on those infuriatingly placed gateposts, she nursed the VW into her driveway. She let the car idle and adjusted the mirror to examine her face. Sure enough, he'd strutted across the street and propped himself against a gatepost.

She could pick from thousands of sex-deprived soldiers barely out of nappies to an inexhaustible supply of stiff-uppers that sloshed their whiskeys around the swimming pool or at the bar of the Nicosia Club. But her erstwhile expatriate lovers bored her even before the morning-after letdown, particularly the married ones who used her as a sounding board for complaints about frigid wives—mostly their own. Pigs.

What the hell? She cut the ignition, but the engine whirred on and the car wobbled—irregular firing of the pistons, Reggie called it. The engine put-putted, seemed to hover. It backfired, then died.

She nudged open the door and stepped out—skimpy sandal, ankle, knee, the hem of her lightweight cotton dress. She slammed the door and turned. He teased a comb from a hip pocket, ran it through his curls, slick. Drainpipe-trousered, velvet-collared London Teddy boys flashed into her mind—those thin-lipped, razor-armed pests who'd still be plaguing her at her Woolworth's if they could.

The rasp of the cicadas—what the locals called *ziziro*—shattered the air. The camouflaged critters shut up when she got too close. She never could manage to spot one.

“You live here, in Ayios Pavlos?” Stavros asked.

The early afternoon Nicosia sky blazed intense white. By day, every object soaked in the heat, only to discharge it at night, to thwart sleep. It was too hot for flying kites. With their bamboo, string and newspaper contraptions, the kids came out in the evening when the wind strengthened.

Like the Liquorice All-Sorts she craved for Christmas, here he was, a gift box begging to be unwrapped—Stavros. A dog, nose to mother dust, stopped at his ankles for a sniff. As if to boot the dog, he pulled back a foot, and the dog whimpered and slunk away. She leaned onto the car's bubble top. Ouch. She jerked upright, her elbow seared.

He smiled. “I live in Ayios Dhometios.” He waved at the rooftops behind him. “Your engine. It needs work.”

“My husband looks after that.”

He didn't budge from the gatepost. “Next time, use the clutch—”

“You men, you're all the same—always telling the fairer sex how to drive.” Just one drink, she resolved, no alcohol. “Would you like something to drink?”

“*Efharisto*. That means ‘thank you’.”

She beckoned him, skirted the front of the car, and made her way along the yellow sandstone wall of the house. Aware of her sleeveless dress fluttering in the slipstream, she hopped up the steps onto the jasmine-covered veranda, and led him through the snowy garland of jasmine into the cool darkness of the shuttered interior.

The cries of the *ziziro* faded. A car clamored for attention Cypriot style, bounding off the tarmac—a familiar sound—into the unpaved side-street, gravel pinging its underbelly. Its sputter faded into the distance. Good. It wasn't Reggie bringing Jane home. She kicked off her sandals and turned to Stavros.

His motionless presence took shape. Shit. Even the first time with a doughy Brit might merit a rush. But with this Romeo?

“Wait out there,” she said pointing.

He crossed her bedroom and opened the shutters to her verandah, where a pomegranate tree and a bougainvillea hedge blooming purple, orange, and white secluded them from the neighbors.

She returned with a tray and stood in the doorway to the verandah. Ignoring the tumbler, he lifted the Coca-Cola bottle to his lips. His biceps swelled and danced. Hardly the effort needed to have a drink. Madness. Still, if Reggie burst in she could explain that the boy had offered to solve their car's annoying dieseling problem, or whatever Reggie called it. She'd asked him often enough to get it fixed. Anyway, you could set a clock by Reggie. She put down the tray and led Stavros back inside. “We have until three-thirty.”

She followed his gaze around her room. The single bed, her bed, was unmade. On the night table—a bottle of booze, a paperback, a cigarette box, an ashtray.

“Your daughter, Jane—”

No. No double rum and Coke needed to make this guy palatable. “Stepdaughter.”

“She’s pretty.” He thrust a hand into his pocket and wiggled his cock.

She punched him. “She’s too young for you.”

He raised his hand in protest. She grabbed it. “What’s your name?”

He drew himself tall. “I told you. Stavros. Stavros Ikonis.”

His hand was hot, firm, solid. “Oh, yes, Stavros. How old are you, Stavros?”

“Eighteen, and I work in a garage. My name, when you pronounce it *Stavros*, means cross.” He tugged at the cross hanging from his neck.

“Do you have a girlfriend, Stavros?”

“No.”

She had a cozy arrangement at stake—he at most his worthless virginity. Control, that’s what she needed. “You’ve never been with a woman, have you?”

He dropped his hand from her shoulder.

She had him unnerved. “Are you anti-British?”

“I *love* the English. Anyway, I want union with Greece.”

Fifteen-love for Claire. “I’m Claire.”

“You’re beautiful. So is Jane.”

“You practically scared her to death.”

He looked away, at her dressing table, cluttered with jars, short pencils, combs and hairbrushes; her suitcase and hatbox stacked on a wardrobe. “But you remembered me,” he said.

“To attract a lady you have to delight—not bulldoze and aggravate.” She drooped her shoulder, freed a strap of her bra, and coaxed it to slither down her arm. Not a male on earth could resist this move, as stepdaughter Jane was discovering.

“Sorry.” He gently pulled her strap back into place.

“Don’t move.” She fastened the verandah shutters, and went to the bedroom door.

“Is this your room?”

She shut the door, whisked aside the negligee hung on the back, and turned the key. “I sleep alone.” She led him to her bed, kicked a pair of slippers out of sight, then turned him and backed him to the edge. “What’s this scar?” she said easing his finger across her breasts.

“From a fight.”

She released his finger. “First, we’ll unroll these sleeves and redo them to make your arms more attractive. Now the shirt—you’ve too much showing.” She fumbled with his buttons. “Hang the first phase. I’ll teach you something that’ll make you forget this union thing or whatever you Greek chaps call it.”

She eased off his shirt. His trousers proved difficult. He had an obstruction—the *flèche d’amour*, as the drips at the Club called it. “Breathe in. God, you’re firm.”

Having disposed of his pants, she ran her hands up his arms and shoved him onto his backside on the bed. She hoisted up her dress, sank to her knees, and wiggled herself between his legs until his cock pressed into her tummy.

Brakes squealed. A door slammed.

Gears crunched as a voice called out, “Darling, we’re home.”

A truck engine began its first gear whine. She snapped to her feet. But Stavros, legs thrashing, clutched in vain at the space vacated by her breasts—he was in climax.

“Pull yourself together,” she said as she captured his come with her hands. “Get up!”

She yanked his arm. After an eternity, he yielded and she bundled his clothes and shoes into his hands, and shoved him to the verandah doorway, thankful of the shrubs.

“I will see you again?” he said.

“I’ll arrange something.”

Chapter 4

Once outside the grocery store, Christakis rubbed his toes in the dirt and looked at himself. No problem. This errand for his mother—this bagful of eggs in his hand—called neither for shoes nor a clean shirt. Besides, this side of September, he wouldn't be bumping into Miss Ouzanian again, nor anyone else he needed to impress, because those who could afford it, Miss Ouzanian included, had long abandoned the August swelter of Ayios Pavlos to the dogs. He knew, because teacher Harry had wanted him to know—and seemingly took pleasure in letting it be known that he knew—that *Fräulein* Rebecca would be “finishing off” the holidays at the Berengaria Hotel.

He sniffed. He could do with a shower before losing himself in his books for the rest of the day. Scanning ahead for glass-splinters, he hopped onto the roadway for the short sprint across the hot asphalt.

A girl startled him. A foreigner with cool eyes and midnight hair. Pale skin, dark hair, yes, but how could anyone's eyes be so blue? His soles were sizzling but he stood firm. Smash. He looked down. Broken eggs oozed around his feet, and hers. He looked up. She might have been amused, perhaps horrified, but he couldn't tell—sweat was streaming into his eyes. He blinked. She was still there. Suddenly aware of his pain, he leapt to the side of the road and clawed his toes into the dirt.

When he cleared his eyes she was gone.

In September, while cycling to school, he spotted her crammed into the back of a covered army truck—a makeshift bus for British kids. She sat shoulder-to-shoulder with other blue-uniformed schoolgirls. He hitched onto the truck and freewheeled along in the driver's blind spot—precarious, for sure, but necessary for cover.

“What's your name?” he yelled at her.

Her lips moved but the truck's whine, the whoosh of traffic, and the torrent of girl-babble he'd evoked drowned her out.

He perfected his new skill—one hand on the truck, the other on his handlebars—as he followed her all week to the Terra Santa School for Girls.

On Saturday afternoon he cycled up and down every street in his quarter, looking for her. He found her standing at her gate. He turned, accelerated on a wide arc, and slammed his bike into a gravelly, broadside skid.

“Hi,” she said. “I'm Jane.”

“My name is Chris-t-takis.” Fuck it. He'd stuttered. “Chris. You can call me Chris.” He dug some fruits from his pocket and held them out. “We call these *mosfila*. Take one.”

She furrowed her brow. “It looks rather like a cherry. Too yellow, though.” She took a bite and puckered. “It's sour.”

“Watch out for worms.”

She spat out what she'd bitten off and wiped her mouth. “Would you like to come in?”

He dumped the fruit, dropped his bike, and followed her. She bounced up the steps of the verandah in her white plimsolls. When she turned in the jasmine shade and swished her hair, her deep-sea eyes triggered a thrill as close to panic as anything he'd ever felt.

“Who's your friend?” a woman called from within the house over the radio blare of Rosemary Clooney.

“Chris,” Jane said softly, stroking her hair.

“Christakis Ikonis,” he said. Too loud.

“Ikonis, Ikonis,” the woman said, her appearance in the doorway foreshadowed by perfume. “Are you related to a Stavros?”

“He’s my cousin.”

“This is Claire,” Jane said.

Claire wore hip-hugging shorts and a poppy-red bikini top clasped precariously between yummy tits. Too blonde, too sexy to be Jane’s mother, or anyone’s mother. Mothers weren’t supposed to be showy.

“My stepmother,” Jane said with a glint in her eye, perhaps born of startling the ignorant with her revelation.

“You know Stavros?” he asked.

Jane echoed his query.

“Oh, you know, Jane, that boy we saw in Famagusta—that flasher, that beastly Adonis.”

The Sunday he’d met Rebecca at Harry’s table, Stavros had boasted about a couple of English sex-pots. One each, Stavros had proposed, a suggestion that had killed any possible introduction—he’d have had to admit to knowing Stavros.

Jane wrinkled her nose. “How do you know his name?”

Claire fanned her face with a hand. “He introduced himself, remember? Anyway, one day he came by and insisted that there was something wrong with our car, and tried to wheedle himself in for a drink.” She chuckled. “Fought ’e ’ad me by the short’n’curlies.”

Curlies?

Jane flushed. “Guess what?” she said. “You were on the beach that Sunday too.” She hesitated. “That man asked me if I wanted to meet you.” She blushed again.

Could he have fallen in love twice on the same day? Yet Stavros had made his mark, doubtless with something more masculine than the usual cock-fondling. In Stavros's wake, he couldn't have pulled off a first meeting with Jane as well as he'd pulled off his introduction to Rebecca. With Rebecca he'd been guided in some manner by Harry's companions, by Rebecca herself, by simply keeping his mouth shut.

What about that sweat-soaked jerk who'd dropped a bagful of eggs at Jane's feet? What about his display, moments ago? Thank God, he hadn't ended up in the ditch.

"Are you friends?" Jane asked.

He shook his head. "He hunts."

Claire flapped her arms as if to encourage a breeze. "He hunts?"

"He hunts for partridges, and whatever else moves."

While the bright tango of Hernando's Hideaway competed with radio static and buzzing cicadas, the air bubbled with perfume and body scent. His eyes took in Claire's armpits. He wasn't used to female armpits around the home, but when he did see them, they weren't shaven.

"What does your father do, Chris?" Claire asked.

"He's a teacher of mathematics in a secondary school—a gymnasium, as we call it in Cyprus. My mother teaches in a kindergarten. I go to the English School."

"Academics," Claire said. "Savants. Isn't that what you say in French, Jane?"

Jane seemed annoyed with Claire. Still, this wasn't the usual parent-child tension. This was rivalry.

"Your classes are in English, aren't they?" Jane asked.

"In the senior years."

"Any brothers and sisters?" Jane asked.

The more she spoke, the more he craved her voice. “Only Odysseas. He goes to the Pancyprian Gymnasium.”

Making ready to reenter the house, Claire said, “I’m wilting out here. So glad we have these floor tiles—freezing though they’ll be in winter.”

“You’re bleeding,” Jane cried.

Dirty pink splotches with bits of embedded gravel covered the foot he’d dragged along the ground while skidding his bike. Idiot.

Claire pulled him into the house. “Jane, fetch the iodine. And a bowl of water. And offer Chris something from the fridge. We’ll show him that we British are as hospitable as Cypriots.”

In the kitchen, Claire seated him opposite her, rested his injured foot on her knees, and tended to the cuts. Jane stood by with iodine, cotton balls, and Elastoplast. His stunt was to have attracted *her* attention. Instead, a blonde with sky-blue eyes—or were they green?—was caressing his foot, inches away from her tits.

“How old are you?” she asked without looking up.

“Fifteen.” Next time he’d scrape his hands too.

Chapter 5

Chris felt certain that Rebecca had been scheduling him at awkward times—sandwiching him between other students as if to regulate his access to her. As he awaited his turn at the piano, he'd watch for her smile. He never again saw her in her turquoise dress, the tight one with buttons down the front. She avoided his eyes. She'd walled him out.

He'd suffered Harry's wrath too. Someone had chalked "Not good is the much, but good is the not much" across the blackboard before the term's first English class.

"Fix it, Ikonis," Harry had said holding out a stick of chalk. "The ancient Greeks would have appreciated clarity as well as brevity."

He walked past Harry and wrote on the board "Not in the much you find the good, but in the good you find the much."

"Right," Harry said, "I want an essay out of each and every one of you miserable hacks. By tomorrow, in two hundred and fifty words or less you will discuss the notion of whether the gallows should be reserved not so much for the murder of a man, but for the murder of a man's spirit."

He handed in his essay the next day: " 'On the Murder of a Man's Spirit,' by Christakis Ikonis. The death of a man's spirit may be more contagious to other men than the mere death of a man. Thus, the murder of a man's spirit deserves the greater punishment." Harry awarded him a C-minus for his effort, with the annotation, "Shallow, slapdash."

At the start of his first session, Rebecca just patted the space on the bench beside her. She'd said nothing—didn't have to. She poked his shoulder blades with her finger. "Posture," she said, raising her chin and straightening her torso to demonstrate. He tried not to stare. She spread his hand between hers and curved each of his fingers in turn into the form she wanted him to adopt at the keyboard. Then she ran her fingertip along the top of his fingers, one by one.

She'd taken over her aunt's house and students. He wondered where her parents lived, and the rest of her family. Most likely she'd grown up in the Armenian quarter.

As the lessons flew by, he would gaze at her manicured nails and at the glisten of cream that highlighted her fingers. A piano teacher's hands were, after all, about the only parts of her body her student could examine. While they hovered over or swept across the keyboard, or she made notes on his score, he could gape at her beautiful hands as much as he liked. He imagined her in her bedroom, sitting braless at her dressing table, looking at herself in the mirror, applying cream to her hands. He willed her fingertips to touch him. She did touch him, but she never let her hands stray, and they rarely lingered. Her perfume electrified him, and he loved seeing her bare arms, particularly on stifling evenings, and those dancing patches of light on her lip, and the sparkle in her eyes. He watched how the bench formed her thighs—rolling them closer to him than she might have intended, even brushing against him. Unthinkable contact.

"Sound and silence have equal value," she said. "Stitch them together. Layer the tones over the background." She tapped the score with her pencil. "Those spaces between the notes are as important as the notes themselves. Where we touch defines where we don't—that creates tension."

His first impropriety occurred while Rebecca was erasing a scribble, far over in the left-hand margin of the score. As she leaned over to blow away the debris, he touched her breast. Or

did her breast stroke his hand? She caught her breath and slapped his wrist. "If you do that again," she said, "I will ask you to leave my group." Her voice was gentle.

From that moment on, just by sucking his finger, he tasted her nipples.

As the term rattled towards October, he cut down on stunts. No more hanging onto Jane's school-truck. They met after school, beyond the shrub-lined driveway by the side verandah of her house. Out of sight, on the bare earth beneath a fruit-laden pomegranate tree still coated in summer dust.

The first time Jane brought up politics, the year's second crop of lemon blossoms sweetened the air. Still in their school uniforms, they sat on the ground, their backs against the wall of the verandah. His shirt lay tucked into his slacks *and* he wore shoes. Her blouse, crumpled white, hung loose over a blue skirt. She liked *her* feet bare.

She stretched her skirt over her fidgety knees, squished against him, and said, "What *does* 'EOKA' mean?"

He stared at a peach-colored pomegranate, whose surface slashes of red reminded him of Claire's lips. "It means 'National Organization of Cypriot Combatants'."

"What about 'Enosis'? I hear it chanted in the streets."

"It's what EOKA's fighting for. It's been our dream, even under the Turks. Union with Greece."

Still clutching her legs, she arched her back against the wall. "But that's not what the Turkish people want, is it?"

He peeked at her breasts, at the top button of her blouse, which seemed on the point of ripping open. "The Turks are only a fifth of the population. Cyprus is Greek."

"Daddy says we've fixed up our colonies with the best political and legal systems ever created. You chaps ought to be glad we manage things for you."

You chaps? “The British fought against Hitler,” he said, “so why is it so difficult to understand freedom? You English haven’t been traded like serfs from ruler to ruler.”

“Gosh, I hadn’t thought of it that way.”

He could deal *Harry* a death-blow. With Jane he wanted no conflict. He said, “Some Turkish Cypriots are of Greek origin. For protection or self-preservation under the Ottomans, they adopted the Muslim culture and Turkish language.”

“Greek Muslims?”

“My father was born in Smyrna. The Turks kicked out his family in 1922.”

Seemingly aware of his fixation on her chest, she dropped her cheek to her knees. “So you’re not really Cypriot, totally?”

As he stared at the pale down on her calves, she leapt up and dashed to the lemon tree at the end of the garden. She pulled down a branch and sniffed the blossoms and fidgeted with her blouse before returning to his side. “Daddy thinks that if Cyprus goes with Greece it’ll become a province. Anyway, he says, Greece is practically fascist.”

‘Fascist’—a remote concept. Something about Germans and Italians, Hitler and Mussolini.

“Daddy also says that you EOKA chaps are gangsters. Gosh, it’s late. Have to run.” She brushed her lips against his cheek and jumped to her feet. “Horrid poetry. See you tomorrow.”

Who cared about poetry, let alone horrid poetry?

Frustrating discussions—the propaganda of a withering empire. The more he saw of the carryings on of the British, the more he became convinced that they used their airs to mask their incompetence. They’d been booted out of colonies less blessed with educated natives than Cyprus. Still, he envied their history, their might, and their privilege. Anyway, much like he separated his teachers from their subjects, he should separate Jane from her prejudices.

“Who is Digaynis?” she asked one day.

“Not Dee-gay-nis. Dhigenis”—stressing the last syllable. “He’s the leader of EOKA.”

“Thee-geh-niece?”

“Better.”

She pressed hard against him. “And those Volkan types are Turks, right?”

“They’re against us,” he said.

“What does ‘pan’ mean?”

“As in Pancyprian Gymnasium? It means ‘all’.”

“Funny. All. Well, the *Cyprus Mail* says that that school’s mixed up in horrid politics.”

“My cousin Stella was handing out leaflets signed by Dhigenis,” he said. “Your soldiers tried to catch her. Odysseas jumped in their way. He got bashed by a gun.”

“How old is your brother?”

“Twelve.”

Chapter 6

“Don’t slop on the floor,” Kleio said.

Chris shuffled behind his mother across the faded green and red floor-tiles of the kitchen, and tripped down the cement step into the garden. The sight of the decapitated chicken slumped in the kitchen sink, waiting to be plucked and gutted, was too fresh. Moments earlier, it had pranced headless around the garden. Now its blood trickled down the drain.

“You’re with that girl every day, wasting all these months.”

He dropped the bucket of washing on the ground. That girl. All these months. To be precise, since September, seven months that had raced by like seven weeks.

Kleio picked up a dripping pair of underpants and slung it over the clothesline. “You’ll fall behind, like Odysseas.”

He held out the Peak Freans biscuit tin filled with clothes pegs. “All that matters is that I’m ahead of everyone in mathematics.”

“If only Odysseas kept off the streets. *Odyssea mou, Odyssea mou*, what’s to become of you?” Her breasts heaved as she pegged the garment to the line. “Another peg, boy. Snap to it.”

Close to the kitchen door, at the back of the house, her clothesline stretched between a skewed pole planted among the citrus trees and a nail hammered into the chicken coop, itself an unruly structure that should have been flattened by the most recent winter storm. This is where he’d grown up. Here, in this tiny mud-and-straw bungalow, with its familiar white stucco

façade, its green shuttered windows and terracotta-tiled roof, and its tiny garden crammed with apricots, figs, almonds, and vines, as well as orange and lemon trees, all fenced in by rusty barbed wire strapped to rudimentary posts. The Zacharias Ikonis family lived as comfortably as a schoolteacher's family could expect.

Only minutes ago, cleaver in hand, Kleio had loomed in the doorway against the afternoon glare, then stepped into the garden and, with the determination of a movie buff elbowing her way to the last vacant seat in the cinema, cleared the space to the coop. Inside, on the ground, the cock was parading, inspecting his row of hens on a broom handle that doubled as perch and structural support for the coop. When Kleio lifted the latch, the commander-in-chief's roll-call disintegrated. He soared onto the perch, displacing his harem in a bluster of feathers, dust, and down.

The first candidate for dinner had wriggled through her fingers. She yanked the next in line out of the coop, pinned it to the ground, and thwacked it. As its dismembered head ploughed through the dirt, its torso slipped from her grasp. Squirting blood, it sprang up and staggered around the garden like a seaman on a night out—then keeled over.

Emotion? Futile. The clan had already accommodated itself to one less member.

Kleio stooped to her bucket of washing and pulled out a towel. "The English are barbarians. No better than Turks." A tear rolled down her cheek. "Beating, humiliating our children. Odysseas is only twelve. Twelve."

This lament she repeated daily, ever since Odysseas had appeared in court with three boys and two girls, aged twelve to sixteen. Odysseas had been charged with "unlawful assembly" and alleged to have "acted as a decoy during a fatal shooting in Ledra Street." In court, the Ikonis family heard Judge Entwistle-Smythe scold the kids with, "Much as I abhor cases where juveniles are caught up with hardened criminals, it is my duty to uphold the law and

encourage proper conduct.” The judge sentenced each offender, including Odysseas, to “Six strokes with a light cane and to be bound over in the sum of twenty-five pounds for one year.”

At which, all mothers assembled broke into wails.

Students took to their streets. According to the newspapers, each convicted boy and girl, with his or her clothes on, and in the “customary presence of a medical examiner,” had to bend over a chair. A man wearing a hood then “administered punishment on the buttocks.”

Kleio sniffed and selected a peg. “What do you do there for so long?”

“Where?” he asked, staring at the line of muddy brown craters, where the drips from the washing pricked the ground.

“Don’t act stupid. What do you do at that house with that dreadful woman and her daughter? Hold this end of the sheet.”

“We talk about books—classics.”

“Comic books, if I know you. Now, the towel.”

“We’re reading *Nicholas Nickleby*,” he said mustering an indignant tone.

“Remember, no more cinema this week.”

“I know,” he said. “Abbott and Costello are detrimental to juveniles. They induce irreversible sloth, not to mention mental decay. Don’t worry. Teachers go to the cinemas to spy on us. Next day, ‘habitués of the matinee’ get punished.”

“Habitués of the matinee?”

“Mr. Lawrell’s words.”

“I don’t want you in the streets, young man.”

As if in sympathy with him, the chicken-coop’s bluster had escalated. He and his brood stood united.

“Are you paying attention?” she said. “You are to stay off the streets.”

Kleio trundled the empty bucket to the kitchen door, stood for a moment on the step, turned her head and said, "It's tragic enough to have one rebellious child in our family. I can't handle another."

"Odysseas looks up to Stavros."

The English called the EOKA fighters 'terrorists.' Outnumbered hundreds to one, perhaps the 'terrorists' should wear uniforms to help the English identify them. Perhaps both sides should face each other in some empty field and have a shoot-out at high noon. Stavros they had 'detained' for rioting. Under the 18b law, the Governor could detain for as long as he liked "any person he is satisfied is a terrorist." The English called their prisoners 'detainees.' Perhaps this distinction justified torture.

Such discussions, his parents forbade. They would all be swept up, they said, have their fingernails ripped out, and worse.

That Greek boys appeared militant was an imperative. Some pushed outrage to madness one day, then loved everything English—or American—the next. None questioned EOKA. Regardless, loyal son Christakis still helped his mother hang up her washing.

Even Stella, Stavros's sister, yelled slogans. She was fiercely Hellenic.

Why on earth wasn't *he*?

Chapter 7

Chris leaned against the verandah wall and watched Jane—and the wrinkled end of her blouse that refused to stay tucked into her skirt. She crouched by the pomegranate tree, where she fussed the wild poppies he'd brought her into a tumbler, and twisted the makeshift vase into the soil. Her handiwork done with, she slid backwards, and worked herself between his legs.

He put his arms around her, ran his nose through her hair, and kissed her neck.

A chicken clucked towards them, then veered around the vase—a near miss—and shuffled on through the lush April grasses under the bougainvillea-covered, barbed-wire fence as it journeyed to some clandestine spot, perhaps in search of an affair with next-door's rooster, perhaps to park today's double-yoke egg in a grassy hideaway, perhaps on its way to nowhere in particular. Chicken be damned. It offered no relief to the rising ache in his belly.

"I do love the flowers," Jane said bending forwards. She pulled herself away and sat beside him, as usual, on his right-hand side.

She'd turned breathless, somber. He must have done something wrong. Next time he wouldn't press so hard. Next time he would bring her double the number of flowers.

She picked up the orange-and-cream Penguin paperback, the book she'd brought for today's read, and handed it to him. "*Lady Chatterley's Lover*," she said. "It's Claire's copy. She hides it in a drawer under her clothes so I won't find it."

He flipped through Lady Chatterley's soiled pages.

“Look,” she said. “These words have been censored—expurgated. Gosh, that sounds so awfully disgusting, like gutting a fish. Don’t you think? Ex-pur-gated.”

“How about ‘abridged’?”

“Or ‘expunged.’ Imagine being expunged.” She giggled.

As they pored over the text and restored the meaning of the occasional sets of four asterisks, Jane sketched Lady Chatterley’s affair with Oliver Mellors. Hearing her voice, let alone the story, was turning him on again. He’d better push his thoughts elsewhere, to Rebecca. Perhaps, right now, Rebecca was in her studio, rapping the piano with her pencil, or doing something sophisticated with the insufferable Harry Lawrell—

“Claire has dalliances,” Jane said. “I’m sure of it.” She broke into a whisper. “She had this nightmare once—actually more than once—and yelled out something about her dad and her sister. Know what? She doesn’t have a sister that I know of. And she screamed her head off at me when I asked her about, you know, this so-called sister.” Jane leaned closer. “Does your mother cry in her sleep?”

He shook his head and made a note to look up “dalliance.” He smoothed Jane’s hair over her ears and kissed her eyes and caught himself thinking of Rebecca.

“Funny,” Jane said looking away. “One Sunday, last month, we drove out Myrtou way to look at the wild flowers. Well, Stavros, sort of, appeared. You know, before he was arrested.”

“Stavros sort of *appeared*?” he said.

“I found him with Claire when I came back from picking flowers.”

Claire occasionally poked her head over the verandah wall and asked him about Stavros, and whether “our boys” were still treating Stavros decently. “And your father?”

She reddened and pressed herself against him so hard that he had to prop himself upright with one hand on the ground. “Daddy travels an awful lot for the NAAFI,” she said. “There’s

one wherever the British forces are—Aden, Egypt. Did I tell you we lived for a year near the Suez canal? There's Kenya and Nyasaland—I've lived in all sorts of weird places."

Strangely, the more she opened up, the more the void of her past expanded. What did she fantasize? Stavros? Good thing the bastard was in jail.

"I want to go to England," he said. "And America too."

Drawing circles in the air as if to jog her memory, she described Piccadilly Circus, Oxford Street, Buckingham Palace, the red double-deckers, and black taxis. She spoke of the wet winter streets, the numbing dampness, and "those horrid pea-soupers."

"Pea-soupers?"

"A kind of yellow fog. It stains your shirt-collar and chokes you."

How could people live in that?

She tossed back her hair. "They call you 'luv' in England."

"Why?"

"They just do. Now, show me what's in that box."

He opened it. "*Loukoumi*."

"Goody. Turkish Delight."

She picked one of the powder-covered cubes and licked it with a sweep that coated her tongue with the sugar. She kept her mouth open and he licked her tongue until he couldn't see a trace of the sugar-powder whiteness.

"*Greek Delight*," he said when she pulled away. "Now bite it."

"Scrumptious," she said amid another mouthful. "Sho-rry, they're sh-ticking to my teeth. Lick me again," she said and stuck out her tongue.

He'd taught her the Greek alphabet and passable Greek phrases, sprinkled with the Cypriot dialect, as well as expressions probably unheard of in Greece. She wanted to dwell on

words she'd heard in the streets, on those naughty back-and-forths, as she called them. She seemed familiar with the Arabic curses. The Turkish ones were new.

"I want to be an engineer," he said.

"And build engines?"

"My father drilled me in mathematics, which is all I need. I want to go to Imperial College, in London."

She chuckled. "Fancy that, arithmetic to build greasy, oily engines? Yuck."

"Maths isn't just arithmetic, Jane."

"And I thought you just built engines from bits of metal. Stupid me. Well, I *hate* maths but I'm into poetry. We have a copy of Mr. Lawrell's new book in our library. I met his nibs once. He's quite famous."

His nibs. So, Harry's tentacles had found Jane too.

As they munched on the *loukoumi*, the next-door neighbor started up on the piano.

"That gorgeous tune," Jane said. "It reminds me of running water, a mountain stream. It's so romantic."

Brigitte Feldman—Gitty, Jane called her—would puncture the bougainvillea hedge with carpet beating, semi-classical piano, and screams at an apparently absentee husband. The screams Gitty orchestrated to shattering glass. Gitty's piano solo was preferable.

He bit into another *loukoumi*. "I don't know its name. I'll ask Miss Ouzanian."

"Dah dah . . . day day . . . dah dah oh day day . . . dah dah oh . . ." Jane rubbed her head against his cheek. "I'd like to hear *you* play it," she said.

He slipped his arm around her and mussed her hair with his mouth. As she turned and brushed him with her breasts, the music, and her voice and scent triggered a first-time feeling, like suddenly realizing that you could ride a bicycle or float in deep water.

*

“It’s the ‘Barcarolle’ from Offenbach’s *Tales of Hoffman*,” he told her later that week. “Miss Ouzanian says it’s played in the style of a Venetian boating song.”

“That’s why it has a watery sound.”

“More likely the Feldman piano needs tuning.”

Jane stood up and pulled at his hand. “Come, I want to hear you play it. You promised.”

Hand in hand, they walked to his house. He’d avoided bringing her here before, to the cracked walls and crumbling plaster, particularly to the grotty bedroom he shared with Odysseas that also functioned as the piano room. She stood in the garden and watched through the window. He shoved Odysseas off the bed and out and into the kitchen.

“The Barcarolle,” he said and began playing.

“Again,” she said when he stopped.

This time she hummed along. “I wish I could play like that.”

Nothing could be sweeter than basking in your lover’s attention. He ruffled the music sheets as if looking for another piece. “I’m average. Odysseas is practically as good. But Miss Ouzanian does have *really* good students. Like Fulya Özal.”

“Is that a he or a she?”

“Fulya? A she. Fulya’s a *fabulous* piano player. At certain times, when Rebecca—Miss Ouzanian—is annoyed with me, she says that Fulya is her only student with any talent.”

Jane’s silence made him wince.

“She sounds German,” Jane finally said.

“Oh no, she’s Turkish.”

“What’s she like?”

He hadn't heard this tone before. He stared at the music and cracked his fingers.

"Is she pretty?" Jane asked.

He thought of Rebecca leaning across him to mark the score, rubbing her hips against his, drenching him with body-heated—

"Well?"

He scraped the stool's legs on the floor. "Well, yes."

"*Really* pretty, I mean, prettier than me."

"Jane—"

"You like her, don't you?" Jane said as if prepared to fire a volley of darts. "I thought so. You love her." She rapped the shutters with her knuckles. "I bet you can't look me in the eye and deny it."

Oh, God. He willed himself not to look away from the keyboard, where his index finger struck middle C. "She's too old for me." Not that old, just a little bit older, as gorgeous, as dark-haired as Jane, but years too sophisticated.

"You've got the hots for her."

He rose from the stool. "I think this piano needs tuning."

"Where does she live?"

When flustered, Rebecca tapped the piano with her pencil, fired a remark, and shot a follow-up as if to thwart a reply. Or she'd repeat her question in mid-answer. "You *know* where Miss Ouzanian lives—"

"Why d'you keep changing the subject? I mean that *fa-bu-lous*—" a mocking staccato
"—girl, what's her name. Well?"

He pointed over her head towards the Kyrenia Mountains, curving his arm to denote height and great distance. "Fulya comes from Pano Vounaki, way on the other side of the

mountains.” He walked over to Jane, placed one hand on the windowsill, and waved the other in an easterly direction. “During the school term she’s with relatives in Omorphita.”

Jane grabbed his wrist and twisted it. “How do you know so much about her?”

The clatter from the kitchen signified his mother’s annoyance at the uproar. For once, he found himself praying that his brother would bound in to demand a turn at the piano. Damn the wrist. What really hurt was Jane’s rage.

“Really, Jane,” he said trying to keep his voice low, “I’ve never even said hello to Fulya except at Miss Ouzanian’s.”

Suddenly calm, she lifted his wrist and kissed it. “Friends again?” she whispered. “I hope it’s not too sore.” She turned his wrist gently to another spot and licked it. “You liked that, didn’t you? I can tell. Got to run off to supper now. See you tomorrow.”

And she dropped his arm and ran away.

In bed that night, he thought of Rebecca, and Rebecca’s list. Those students she’d inherited from her aunt weren’t all so unattractive, but until Jane raised the issue he hadn’t given Fulya Özal any special attention. Fulya was pretty, but she was also Turkish and had three brothers. Sticking to Jane and dreaming of Rebecca was safer.

“Mrs. Simmons—Claire—isn’t really my mother,” Jane once said, for no apparent reason. “My real mother left me when I was very young.”

Jane wove stories—made up or true, he couldn’t tell—about her past. Her Spanish heritage, she said, explained her complexion. She hardly spoke of her real mother. She lingered on dreams—those she remembered, or perhaps invented. She frequently displaced Rebecca as his last thought before drifting to sleep.

Rebecca must have had stories too, but Rebecca lived in a world beyond his reach.

Chapter 8

Alistair watched Claire pad out of the dining room. Too much lipstick. And too clingy a dress, practically see-through. Barefoot—nice feet.

Pipe cradled in a trembling fist, husband Reginald tilted his face to escape the curling smoke. “Don’t you think Harding’s made matters worse by deporting Archbishop Makarios?”

Alistair felt the pressure of scrutiny, notwithstanding the bottle of Johnnie Walker Black Label, which occupied a commanding spot on the dining-room table and whose content level plunged—along with Claire’s inhibitions. He measured his words—tight cover required discipline. The Simmons’ dining room, smoke-filled in spite of windows and doors thrown open to coax movement into the May stillness, had ears. Daughter Jane’s boyfriend—an English School whiz kid with a jail-bird cousin—was lurking within earshot. He reached for his packet of Players and lit another cigarette.

“It’s the clever ones that need watching,” Harry Lawrell had said. Writer-celebrity Harry probably supplemented book royalties by keeping tabs on student agitation for His Excellency. The kid must have crossed the bugger.

Alistair had been assigned to Cyprus by British Military Intelligence under cover of freelance photographer. His obligation to deliver “truth” as a journalist decidedly conflicted with loyalty. Facts were exploitable commodities—to be processed and released when it furthered the agenda of the Colonial Office—and then only after checking with London.

Anyway, Reggie's whiskey was smooth. "I wouldn't mind being exiled to the beaches of the Seychelles, staying at the Governor's residence to boot. Sterling spot for Makarios. Sir John made the right decision."

Reginald knocked the ashes from his pipe into the ashtray and began the ritual unwrapping of his tobacco pouch. "The Orthodox Church . . . Shouldn't it be our bastion against the bloody communists? We should be encouraging it, not squelching it."

"We did, but Makarios turned against us. We're stuck with the blighter."

Claire returned. She slipped into a chair, picked up her whiskey glass, and rattled the ice. "What about all these beastly allegations of torture?"

"We don't torture," Alistair said after a measured pause. Not by a long shot. Not the way fascist Greeks, Nazi collaborators during the War, and Greek communists tormented each other. "We're British—remember?"

Reginald stopped chewing his pipe. "Those cesspool terrorists are shooting civilians in the back. Women too."

The lanky, red-haired visitor knew he fascinated Claire. And why not? He'd met her at functions, even at a garden party at Government House, but this was the first time Reggie had invited him to their home. He blew smoke at the ceiling lamp. "Aye. We've no option but to adopt appropriate measures."

"Scupper the lot of them," Reginald said.

Alistair understood the British need for counter-terrorist measures, pressure during interrogations, executions timed for political mileage. Staged acts to suit rifts between Greek and Turk were part of the game. EOKA leader George Grivas understood. In Greece after the War, Grivas did Britain's dirty work. Why not? He'd done Germany's *during* the War.

A final drag and Alistair attacked the ashtray with his cigarette, stabbing the mounting pile of stubs until he'd choked off every wisp of smoke.

"They're no more than children," Claire said.

"Children that throw bombs," he said. "You know, I'd keep the windows facing the street closed if I lived here."

Something bumped his ankle. Claire's foot. Her toenails clawed and scratched their way his up his calf. He glanced at her. She pouted. As he creased his cigarette box against the edge of the table, Reginald threw him a puzzled look.

Just then, a girl scooted in through the front door. She wrinkled her nose in apparent disgust at the cocktail of smoke and booze, headed for Reginald and pecked him on the cheek.

"Jane, meet Mr. McKay," Reginald said.

Jane nodded in Alistair's direction. "Is Chris outside?"

"In the garden," Claire began, but Jane had already vanished.

The chamber seemed suddenly drained, emptier than before she'd entered, as if stripped by a whirlwind.

"Pretty, isn't she?" Claire said.

He felt himself blush. Couldn't prevent it, but he hoped the stippling of his skin would be washed out by sunburn. The massage halted. Instead, pain, above his ankle as Claire's toenails ripped his leg. Again, he caught himself fiddling with his cigarette box. He let it drop.

Her surge of jealousy had evidently surprised her too. She said, "Alistair, do you speak Greek well—?"

Reginald scowled. "—He was with the Greek resistance during the War. Liaison assistant."

She squeezed her neck as if to distract herself. "I've a devil of a time understanding their gobbledygook."

Alistair's leg remained on fire. "My Greek is serviceable." Serviceable rang better than fluent. "And I'm beginning to master the Cypriot dialect. But Turkish is rather phonetic once you figure out all those funny little curlicues."

"Those old geezers," she said, "you know, the ones who spend all day in the coffee shop—what is it they're puffing through those hubbly bubbles—hashish?"

Keeping a wary glance on his host, he took a bent cigarette from his crushed box. "Mostly tobacco, I'd guess."

"When I drive by they yell 'yavash, yavash' at me," she said.

"*Yavaş* is Turkish for 'slowly'," Alistair said. "Women drivers make them nervous."

"Talking about women," Claire said, "How's Zaira?"

The Armenian lass who wrote for the Cyprus Broadcasting Service. A relationship he'd cultivated—part of his job, his quest for intelligence. "She's at work," he said.

"You look so odd together," Claire said, "your red hair and all. What does Zaira say about torture, and about that Karaolis chap they just hanged?"

"We can't give up Cyprus," he said, "not with the Suez Canal minutes across the Mediterranean and that Neanderthal Nasser pounding his chest over the airwaves in Cairo."

"Right," Claire said, "That's why the locals call Governor Sir John, 'Harding the butcher' and put bombs under his bed."

Aghast, Reginald jumped to his feet and shut a window. "Karaolis killed a constable, Claire, and witnesses identified him, albeit Turkish."

"He went to the English School," she said. "Karaolis. Like Jane's boyfriend."

Reginald returned to his chair. "We established that ruddy school to boost the ranks of an English-speaking civil service. Can't have the buggers blowing it up. Our problem is this Christakis."

"He's just a bookworm," Claire said. "Besides, she doesn't bring him into the house."

That an Armenian woman had fallen in love with a Scot seemed natural. But the idea of a well-bred English schoolgirl—a ruddy bombshell—wasting herself on a Greek Cypriot—

"His brother's another rotten apple," Reginald said. "Along with the rest of them at that Pancyprian Gymnasium. He was a decoy, don't you know. During a shooting."

Alistair nodded. "I covered the story. Schools went on strike that day."

"A thrashing's hardly enough, what?" Reginald jumped up again, pointed his pipe at Claire, and shouted, "his fucking cousin's a jail-bird—"

Claire leapt to her feet. "Alistair's heard enough for one night. Sit down!"

Still standing, Reginald shuddered with anger.

Claire's interest in politics seemed a wee bit odd for a cockney girl with a phony accent. Reggie and Claire. Mere mention of Stavros had set them off. Claire's passion had just earned her a tail. And Harry might be right. Young Christakis could be ripe for drafting by EOKA.

"Sit down," Claire said.

With a muttered see-you-in-a-moment, Reginald left the room.

Alistair said, "Reggie's right, you know. You—"

Upon which, Claire sat down and squeezed Alistair's hand. "If it's any consolation," she said, "I broke a nail back then. Listen, Jane and I are staying at Seven-Mile beach—Zephyros—next weekend while Reggie is on one of his tedious trips. Drop in and have some fun."

Cool bitch.

The toilet flushed. She disengaged.

As Reginald returned to his chair, she said, "Alistair and Zaira are joining us at the Ledra Palace for one of their romantic dinner-dances." She rose and said, "Alistair, I do hope you're a good dancer," and left the room.

Hand shaking, Reginald grabbed the Johnnie Walker and poured a round of drinks. "Penny for your thoughts, old boy."

Alistair raised his glass. Who was responsible for the boa in his throat? Not Claire. Maybe Stavros's sister, whom he'd found in the street, battered and raped by thugs in British uniform. Stella, who'd spat in his face. Yes, a stiff one should clear the hatch. He swallowed but the boa couldn't be flushed away. "There's worse things than torture, Reggie. Lots worse."

"Well, I have a surprise for Jane," Reginald said. "I'm taking her out of circulation."

"Let me guess," Alistair asked softly. "A trip to old Blighty?"

Chapter 9

The Simmons front door slammed. The conversation hushed. Soon the verandah door-hinges rattled. As light burst through the doorway and poured into the moonless garden, Chris looked up. Jane's hair fell across her face as she bent over the wall and reached for his hand. They touched. She peered back into the house as if to make sure that the chitchat had settled back into its routine. Light flared through her blouse. Sweat ringed her eyes. Droplets trailed the flush of her skin down her neckline.

Her lips formed "I love you."

She hopped over the wall, down to where the maze of plants shaded them from the houselights and streetlamps. She pulled back her skirt and pressed herself into him. She murmured something about touching him, but didn't wait for his response. She slipped her arm around his leg. He glanced from the black curl plastered to her temple to her eye. She'd escaped into a trance. She walked her fingers up his leg and cupped her hand over his crotch.

He pressed himself into the wall. She pinched his pants between thumb and finger. He jerked. Her breathing sharpened. His had stopped. When he began breathing, her scent found his nose—

"His fucking cousin's a jail-bird—" The chatter from the house was turning bitter. "Alistair's heard enough for one night. Sit down!" Claire's voice. After a while, again, "Sit down!"

Jane stroked his hair until the house had calmed down. Distracted by a pink patch stuck to the most private curve of her thigh, he didn't immediately register the silvery flicker from under the shrubs. When he did, he delayed for a few seconds, then whispered, "Snake."

Jane squealed and leapt to her feet with him.

The snake slithered under a bush.

She dug her fingers into his shoulder as they examined and stomped the earth where they'd been sitting. "Is it poisonous?"

The words viper and adder sprang to mind. But he had no true idea—just fear. He pulled her to the ground again and asked, "Did you hurt yourself?"

"What?"

He pointed. She felt between her legs and said, "Oh, you mean the Elastoplast." Rising to her feet again, she said, "Stupid me. I just bashed into a silly door handle."

A door handle didn't cut you, he wanted to say. It bruised you.

She pulled him up. Then she drew a handkerchief from her waistband, folded it into a bandana, and fastened it around his eyes.

Was she undressing?

She took his hand and spread his fingers around her breast. "It won't break," she said.

The first time he'd touched her breasts, before Christmas, his fingers had been icy. She'd pushed his hand under her sweater and he'd worked his fingers through her blouse, between the buttons. She'd shivered then. Not now. Tonight her flesh was taut and cool and, between his fidgety fingers, her nipple was rising. Rebecca flashed to mind. Why? Must have been that Elastoplast fib. Dumb story.

"Will you like me forever and ever," she whispered, "cross your heart, hope to die?"

"I love you," he said.

“Cross your heart?”

“Cross my heart.”

Her hair tickled his cheek. Her lips found his. He held his breath, not wanting to let go. He licked her mouth and eased his tongue between her lips.

She let him in. She never refused. When she pulled away, she said, “Now, what’s the naughtiest thing you’ve ever done?”

Chapter 10

Claire squinted through the open shutters at the traffic that wormed along Ledra Street, one floor below Gitty's workshop.

She tried but couldn't blink away the grit.

"Ara's Fine Swiss Watches: Sales and Service Rolex Official Agent"—set back from the other buildings—a thimble-throw from and directly opposite Gitty's. Ara Gulbenkian flashed smiles of welcome at the entrance to his glittering emporium. A trim bachelor of ambiguous age, the parting in his slick black hair was as straight as the knife-edge in his gray flannels. And as smooth as his spats. He seemed so close she could whiff his cologne.

If Ara were a spy he'd be well positioned to survey the doorway whose modest sign "Hats, Corsets and Brassieres by Gitty" beckoned customers up the stairs to Gitty's shop. When not at home next door, bashing her piano or traveling husband, Gitty plied female devotees of all anatomies with tea or a shot of slivovitz, each according to the crisis in her life. Blonde hair pinned severely behind her head, armed with a measuring tape, she was ready to conduct war against the ravages of time and indulgence. Curvaceous sentinels clothed in bras, corsets, and stylish hats stood guard among the litter of pink, and black and white cuttings on the tile floor. Fortified by Singer sewing machines and a middle-aged Turkish seamstress—no doubt a principal source of odor, or was it the mothballs? The mainstay of Brigitte Feldman's made-to-measure campaign was the stay. Silly word. Silly as tea served in a glass without milk.

Stavros was late, or perhaps she was early. She glanced at her watch. Gitty would soon close for lunch and scurry over for her own midday rendezvous with slime-ball Ara.

Barely wider than an alley, Ledra Street was the locals' best attempt at elegant shopping within the walls of old Nicosia. The main drag was a rickety spoke connecting the encircling moat to the hub, where streams of smelly trucks and beast-drawn carts scraped, stained, and gouged the buildings. Where Byzantine and Levantine geezers huddled in coffee-shop archways smoking water-filtered tobacco from floor-standing hookahs. Where sun-warmed dung, oriental spices and Turkish coffee commingled in a potent nasal cocktail. A seedy labyrinth where Europe, Africa, and Asia coalesced, Christians and Muslims bargained for the best price.

On that day, as always, Claire watched banged-up Chevrolet taxis and neon-gaudy buses laden with mattresses, trunks and bicycles, choke the street. Baritone peddlers jockeyed with shrill bicycle bells. Aggressive beggars mingled with Morris Minors. Like all streets, Ledra Street haphazardly widened and narrowed, as recessed modern boxes with their useless lengths of pavement abutted projecting fronts of crumbling buildings. A zigzag hodgepodge of antique Turkish houses with shuttered upper-storey windows and quaint overhanging balconies were interspersed with new structures and plate-glass shop windows. Town planning, Cypriot style.

Until the cops had tossed him in the slammer, she'd conducted her trysts with Stavros in Gitty's storage room. Lilliputian, windowless, reeking of mothballs and sour sweat, but intimately set among pile upon pile of women's undergarments, stacks of hats and bolts of fabric, floor to ceiling, the space was partitioned off by a curtain. They didn't need to meet at her house. Lunch breaks could be two or three hours, depending on the time of year. They'd coordinated their affair with Gitty's. Every girl to her type.

She recalled her peep over the verandah wall to see Jane with Chris—ecstatic, oblivious. Stavros wasn't the only one to have done time. Where was he? Hurry up, man.

Chapter 11

It was a June weekday afternoon like any other.

So far.

The lunchtime shut-down. The heat. It was past the calls to the faithful from Nicosia's minarets and long past the final echo of the one o'clock siren. Even the lime-green and dusty-olive grapevines festooning rooflines, verandahs and water tanks, paused in the vacuous afternoon.

Chris cycled westward along the almost deserted Ayios Pavlos Street, lapping up the endless *tick . . . tick . . . tick . . .* of his Raleigh's Sturmey Archer gearshift, belching from the *gazeux* he'd stopped to drink after crossing the now bone-dry Pedieos River, hungry after the unavoidable Wednesday soccer practice.

Ahead of him, a cyclist, pedaling with his heels, toes up, knees out, back arched. Stavros. Cousin and ex-detainee, in a rumpled shirt overhanging his pants. The British wanted EOKA leader George Grivas, nom de guerre "Dhigenis," for sabotage and terrorism. Stavros must have a nom de guerre too.

An eardrum-slashing RAF jet skimmed the rooftops.

Was this the moment to appreciate the rattling chain-cover, which protected his neatly creased trousers from oil stains? Not really, he just didn't want to catch up with Stavros. So he stopped pedaling, allowed his legs to rest, and watched the warm breeze flap his pant-cuffs.

Stavros might sweet-talk him into something illegal. But Stavros knew he was spineless, that his father's pro-British mind-set disguised fear, that *he'd* inherited the fear.

He mulled over the multi-directional tyrannies of his existence—obedience to parents, loyalty to heritage, dedication to science. He'd overlooked fear of the law. British law. Extra homework was due from his class the next day in reprisal for a huge LAWRELL GO HOME slogan and a sketch of the Greek national flag chalked across the blackboard in time for Harry's Wednesday English literature class. Lord Byron and Winston Churchill, friends of the Greeks, or Archbishop Makarios and Colonel Grivas, enemies of the English. Which of them was the champion of freedom—the mythical *phileleftheros*? Questions provoked by Englishman Harry—why was every Englishman called Harry?—but answers not ventured. Hell, big-mouth Harry found nothing too controversial. Was Harry a writer of poetry (what *was* the value of poetry?), a philosopher, or merely the Governor of Cyprus's hireling, masquerading as English teacher? A Greek-speaking Harry. Harry's first novel, they said, had been banned in England. Good, but why?

Now twenty yards behind Stavros, he followed along as Stavros reached the street's open northern expanse, where, framed by the serrated crest of the Kyrenia Mountains, an ocean of shimmering cornfields buffeted the sienna hull of the sullen Nicosia Central Prison, where Stavros had just spent three months.

Tick . . . tick . . . tick . . . “You break the law too, Ikonis,” Harry had smirked, “and instead of doing time on your degree in England you'll do time in an English clink. Assuming you're not hanged.”

At the end of the school year, just days away, Jane was to leave Cyprus for the summer. He would wait for her letters, practice Chopin, cram integral calculus—the best way to forge ahead of the herd—and daydream. What if she never returned?

Tick . . . tick . . . tick . . . What if? What if what? What if she returned and didn't like him any more?

Fourteen-year-old Kokos Sophocleous came into view, just beyond Stavros—barefoot, unkempt and tatty. Nothing usual. Nearby, handkerchief in hand, in the shade of an apricot tree that overhung the thistle-lined ditch, stood an old man in a black *vraka* outfit—traditional baggy pants, waistcoat, and hob-nailed boots. The man's cane rested against the fence, his hat dangled from a post. Mouth hanging wide like a dog's, the old man was mopping his whiskers. Little wonder. It was June, and the fellow had dressed for Christmas.

What was Kokos up to? The bugger had snapped something up from waist-level and, with an over-the-shoulder motion like casting a fishing line, whipped it into Stavros's path. Stavros wobbled to a stop. Kokos's toy spinning-top, propelled by unraveling string, pinged a stone then skipped through the gravel.

Better slow down, snail's pace, hang behind Stavros.

Stavros swung his arm backhand through the air. "Fucking bastard. Haven't I told you not to bother me with your baby games? Out of my sight, you moron."

Stavros continued on foot clasping the seat of his bike.

Kokos pointed a finger at the old man.

What the hell now? He flicked his brakes and stood astride the crossbar.

"*Tourkos*," Kokos mouthed at him. "*Shilloturkos*." Dog-Turk.

The old man seemed oblivious. No harm done. He gestured a 'so what' at Kokos.

Kokos swung around, darted into his house, and returned in seconds, fuck it, if not with a double-barrel shotgun. Gun cocked and leveled at Papanikolaou, Kokos looked down the barrel, but flicked the gun up a tack, and fired into the tree. Pellets ripped through foliage and pinged off a tank. A sparrow flopped to the ground. Chris jerked downward and banged his head on the

handlebars. Big dogs roared. Little dogs yelped. The blast ricocheted from the jail across the field. He opened his eyes and, thank God, Stavros had turned back.

Papanikolaou gaped, wide-eyed, spewing foam. As dust, down, and greenery trickled on him from the tree, Kokos took aim at his face.

Lunging forwards, Chris shouted, "What the hell are you doing?" but he tripped and fell.

Stavros dropped his bike and closed in. "You idiot," Stavros yelled. "Stop this at once."

The shotgun wavered. Fire at something else, please God, but not at Papanikolaou.

"Grab him, *Christaki*," Stavros said in a steady voice.

Right. He scrambled to his feet. *Bang*. Papanikolaou spun around and nose-dived into the ditch. As Stavros ran to him, the old man raised himself onto his elbows and in a feeble voice cried out "Why, why?" then slumped back into the dirt.

Stavros knelt beside him.

"He's just a Turk," Kokos said approaching the body. "He's not dead yet."

Stavros shielded Papanikolaou's neck with one arm and braced against Kokos's advance.

"You moron," Stavros yelled. "Stop at once or I'll break that gun over your head."

Lifting his gun high, still pumped with bravado, Kokos hissed through chattering teeth, "Slash him, *Stavro*. Cut out his heart. He's just a dog-Turk."

Surprised to hear his own voice, Chris shouted, "Bastard! You shot Papanikolaou."

"You shot old Papanikolaou," Stavros said.

Kokos stared at the body, then inately at the gun, as if he'd been betrayed. "*Ochi*," he wailed. "*Xenos*. I heard him. He speaks like a Turk."

"He's a village simpleton," Stavros said. "His family keeps him at home, locked up. Today is his unlucky day. And yours. You're worth less than a spit in the dirt."

Kokos flung away the gun and tore his fingernails into his forehead, drawing blood. His face filled with snot, blood, and dirt—a brown slime. “What am I going to do?”

“Pray he doesn’t die,” Stavros said still kneeling by the body.

“He looks like a Turk, doesn’t he, *Christaki*?”

“Quick,” Stavros said to Chris. “Run to his house—between the church and the racecourse—and tell them their old man is hurt.”

“It’s a *mistake*,” Kokos sobbed. “I really thought he was a Turk.”

“If the police don’t get you, *Koko*,” Stavros said, “Papanikolaou’s grandsons will.”

Chapter 12

One August afternoon, while—as his mother would say—the sensible napped or reviewed the year's schoolwork, Chris headed for Jane's house. She'd been gone for weeks.

The previous year's work? He'd already flipped through *next* year's schoolwork. When he propped his head on a dining-room table strewn with paper and textbooks his mother couldn't tell whether he dozed or studied. Today, he'd tinkered with a formula relating minimum fuel consumption to payload for a rocket striving for escape velocity from Earth. But he didn't feel like plotting the graphs. Moreover, the effect of atmospheric friction he could ponder tomorrow.

A few houses from Jane's, he ducked out of the sun under a fig tree and looked at his watch. Three o'clock, he decided, would be a decent time to knock on the door and ask Claire if she'd heard from Jane.

Escape velocity. Jane might wonder when someone zooming upward would spot the Earth's twin on the hidden side of the sun. If the legendary planet existed, he'd reply, they'd see it sooner than one might think. Why? she'd ask. Because the sun bent light-rays. Gosh, she'd say, why did he always complicate things so?

Last week, sprawled in an armchair, his heels rubbing the finish off his mother's sideboard, he'd discovered Joseph K. He whizzed through chapter one, then snapped the book shut, scurried to Jane's house and watched Claire back her VW out of the driveway. After wrestling the engine into gear, Claire let her car idle in the middle of the street and raised her

sunglasses to look at his book. She nodded, gave him a thumbs-up, and gunned gun the corner onto Ayios Pavlos Street in time for a taxi to blast its right-of-way across her path—why yield and have to revert to first gear after going to all the trouble of finding second?

On a sun-burnt fist shoved out of a Land Rover, a Brit's thumbs-up would have seemed much like a 'fuck off,' but Claire's surely said 'good for you.' And her smile added 'I really mean it.'

After she'd gone, he'd slipped into the garden, first stop the water tank at the back, where he undid his shirt, opened the tap and doused his head—a poor man's air-conditioning. Next stop, the side of the house by the verandah and pomegranate tree, where the now half-ripe pomegranate-clusters that had spawned to Dickens and D.H. Lawrence had continued their fattening process on Jane's fantasies, and his.

He rested against the wall and read aloud. "*The Trial* by Franz Kafka. Chapter two. First cross-examination. K. was informed by telephone that there would be a small hearing concerning his case the following Sunday"

The air hung still. Oven-hot, humid, and still—indifferent to the piercing territorial calls of the *ziziro*. Indifferent to his reminiscences of Jane. Indifferent to the distress of the accused, Joseph K. Before turning each page he'd look to where her face would have been if she'd been sitting next to him. He imagined the sparkle in her eye, and the I-love-it-when-you-stare-at-me-as-if-you-think-I'm-pretty shake of her hair.

That was last week. This was now. He parted the fig leaves and caught sight of Stavros. A blink and Stavros had disappeared with his bike into the Simmons driveway.

English women paid Italians for sex. Why not a Greek? Nonsense. Stavros wouldn't pay for sex. Neither would an exotic blonde—and in Cyprus any blonde qualified as exotic.

Love or sex? You can't pay for love, some said, but you *can* pay for sex. Women wanted love, women said. Men wanted sex, the same women said. Women have too much to say—Q.E.D.

He shuffled in the dirt. The grit tickled, the dust felt like talcum powder. Those convenient scrapes and bruises, *his* convenient scrapes and bruises, seemed to satisfy everyone—Papanikolaou's family (fortunately)—after the customary wailing and yelling—and Jane too, before she'd set sail for England. And the old man had survived having the pellets dug out of his flesh. Meanwhile, Kokos had dashed off and never returned home. Why, the CID police had asked them, why had they let Kokos escape? He'd looked at Stavros. Stavros just shrugged.

"The devil take that motherfucker," Stavros had said. "Christakis tried to stop him."

What *had* semi-athletic Christakis suffered, though? About as much as he might have from a spill into the ditch. If only he'd yelled out the old man's name. Why hadn't Stavros? He looked at his watch again. Stavros, by now, must be about as familiar with Claire's short'n'curlies as his own. Anyway, the lovers had all day. And all night, while Jane and her father holidayed two thousand miles away. So he'd better go home. He snapped off an elephant-ear fig leaf and ripped it to shreds. How did one measure jealousy? On a scale of one to ten, his score right now had to be a belly-ripping nine.

"Always remember," Stavros said to him after the police had gone, surprisingly satisfied, "our parents have only us to look after them."

Was that about Stavros's sister? He hadn't seen Stella smile in weeks. His own parents whispered about unmentionable things that had happened. Whatever, Greek kids could pump each other up with the most fantastic tales. But now, Stella hated everything English.

"What happened to Stella?" he asked Stavros.

"Beware, *Christaki*. Beware of who you talk to. A policeman could be EOKA, a rock-thrower a traitor."

“I’m not asking anyone, I’m asking you.”

“Forget it. You will stay at school and look after your mother. You want to understand imperialists? Just remember what the Turks did to the Armenians.”

Armenians. Rebecca. You’re the brain, he wished Stavros would say. Brains are as useful as hands, and mightier. Right. He’d design a bomb—build it in his chemistry lab.

He looked up. Oops. Stavros. Better hide. He hoisted himself into the tree. Stavros might venture towards him. No, the bugger cycled off the other way. Good. He walked over, made his way to the side verandah, and peeped over the wall. Claire lay sprawled, topless, face down on a mat, straw hat covering her head. He retreated, tiptoe, and called out a hello.

“Blimey,” she said. “You back again?”

His heart thumped so hard he was sure she could hear it. He cleared his throat. “Sorry to bother you, Mrs. Simmons. I wondered whether you’ve had any news from Jane.”

“Oh,” she said. “Chris.” After a few seconds, “why don’t you come and talk to me.”

He tiptoed back. He’d never seen a woman semi-dressed, in a private place, inches away. And Stavros had been with her here—like this and more. What topics for discussion had Stavros offered her? Ninety-nine ways of killing imperialists? Methods of driving the Turks into the sea? Car repair anecdotes?

Pointing vaguely, Claire said, “Be a dear, rub some of that on my back. There’s spots I can’t reach.”

He scanned the area. The *Times of Cyprus* lay scattered on the floor. The word EOKA, as usual, formed the kernel of the day’s headline: something about the 18b law, which permitted the Government to detain people indefinitely without trial. A report on Kokkino Trimithia—detention camp “K”. A packet of Craven A’s, a lighter, whiskey, a small bottle, an ashtray with

cigarette stubs. Why did women smoke only half a cigarette? Lipstick. But the other cigarette was clean, a tiny butt flattened into the ashes—

“The Elizabeth Arden,” she said.

He scaled the wall. As he stepped over her, he caught a whiff of her perfume. He tried to pour the lotion into his hand. No luck. He shook the bottle. He shook it until it gurgled and white dollops sputtered from its mouth. Cream splattered the floor, the newspaper, and Claire. He tried to scoop the larger plops from the floor with his fingers.

“Make the most of it,” she said.

He knelt beside her, and watched the sweat drip from his face onto her back as he touched her with his greasy fingers. Lying partially in the sun, her back should have been piping hot. That was it. She'd been inside the house with Stavros. He stared at her naked back. No one was watching—he could linger with his hands as much he pleased.

“How was your year?” she said.

“Really good.”

“I dumped school at fourteen—my teachers bored me. Jane says you fill pages ‘n pages with squiggly hieroglyphics. That you're on the straight and narrow to becoming a boffin. I hope, though, never to see you wearing Harris Tweeds with elbow patches.”

He slid his hand over her back in ever increasing circles. “I want to go to America.”

If only this were Rebecca, in a darkened bedroom, in bed, in her turquoise dress but barefoot, her unbuckled belt lying beside her. He'd tickle her neck with a sprig of jasmine. She'd turn over. He'd hand her the jasmine before tracing the buttons from her pearls to her knees. Starting with her lowest button, he'd touch each one with his lips before undoing it.

“Whatever's got into you, young man,” Claire said, “don't stop.”

Rebecca might make him solve a musical riddle before she let him undo the next button of her dress. And, *poco a poco*, she'd make each question harder. Hell. There was no point imagining Rebecca. No matter how much he squinted, Claire's hair wouldn't turn black.

"Met your piano teacher at Harry's," Claire said. "Miss O, he calls her. Harry's a keener for those sultry types." Her back stiffened. "Hey. Not so hard."

What had Rebecca worn that day, he wanted to shout. Her turquoise dress? Rebecca O and Harry—disgusting. He clenched his fists. A bomb under Harry's car—the school chemistry lab was the answer after all.

She writhed and lifted herself against his hand. "Lower. Do it like you enjoy it."

Too bad the sun had fried most of her—but her remaining pale bits looked delicious. He bent down and sniffed. She'd taste good too.

"What about Jane?" he said.

"Hasn't she written you? Poor boy. I'd have had a postcard on your doorstep every bloomin' day. Last I heard, Jane and Reggie were touring the Lake District."

Her bikini bottom and her legs were still splotched with lotion. What to do? He shuffled forward until his knees touched her. If she couldn't see him then what he was doing must be okay. As if from a jam-jar, he scooped some lotion from the crook of her leg and spread it on her back. A splotch rode the swell of flesh high up on her inner thigh, close to a straggle of thread, just a finger-width from her bikini. Its unstable-looking conical shape foretold collapse—at any moment, it would trickle to oblivion between her legs.

"Gently now," she said as his finger slipped down her thigh.

She rubbed one leg against the other and the dollop separated into creamy dribbles. Oh, oh, she was rolling down her bikini bottom. He tried to distract himself by visualizing the blistered red faces of British soldiers.

“Ain’t you seen a girl starkers before?” she said.

Right. There was lotion enough and little time to act. He scooped what he could and spread it across her buttocks.

“I’ve seen you with Jane,” she said. “That’s why Reggie snatched her out of your grasp, you know. But she’ll be back and we’ll thwart Reggie.”

Close up, prone she seemed larger than when standing—his calibration points to size being his hands. He continued to glide them around her shivery flesh, less mechanically now, increasingly desperate to squeeze her breasts. Probing her willingness to roll over, he nudged her. She resisted. He tried again. This time she obliged—lifting herself part way.

“Well,” she said, “are you going to or not?”

He reached around her and cupped her breasts. She let him take her weight but, all too soon, she slumped back onto her belly. For this, his mother would lock him into a dungeon, but not before flogging him with her carpet beater.

“Don’t worry,” Claire said. “It’s normal male. But you’d better not fall in love with me.”

Chapter 13

“Shut up, you idiot.”

There was that voice again. The sheets. He must sneak the latest semen-spattered evidence past his mother. That's it. Hadn't he traipsed in and out of his window, drenched to stay cool? So, he'd accidentally stepped into a muddy flower-bed.

“You were shouting all night,” Kleio said when he appeared at the kitchen door.

“Bad dream.”

She waved a finger at him. “Pull yourself together. I bumped into Olympia Naxiotis. Of course, she was singing the praises of Gitty's strapless corsets. Too provocative for me, I said. Anyway, she invited us to Café Viennois this afternoon. You know Irakles, her son, don't you?”

Café Vienna? A sissy place for foreign women. But then, he might meet Rebecca there—after all, the best fruit hung at the top of the tree. He scraped a chair across the floor, sat at the table, and flipped open an exercise book.

Strapless corsets. Perhaps women glued them on, rigid contraptions that funneled breasts into twin cones. Medieval torture.

“I wonder how they manage to send him to England,” Kleio said. “They live modestly enough. You can talk to Irakles about England, about universities. He's so charming, and a wonderful artist, unlike your good-for-nothing friends.” She crossed herself. “Dear God. The Lord rested the day He formed Kokos's brain.”

Did God create mothers for the sole purpose of annoying their sons? “That retard wasn’t my friend.”

She placed a hand on his shoulder. “Irakles Naxiotis is a good contact.”

He stabbed his exercise book, breaking the point of his pencil.

She wagged a finger. “Half the summer has gone, and you still spend too much time with that girl.”

“Jane hasn’t been here for ages.”

“Furthermore, I don’t approve of her mother’s comings and goings. She’s immoral.”

He’d better figure out how to salvage those stained sheets before his mother found them.

“The English have different customs,” he said.

Claire’s spine hadn’t been *that* bony, though—why *did* dreams have to lie?

Chapter 14

As far from their mothers as they could get, Chris sat with Irakles by an open window in a corner of Café Viennois. Across from him, Irakles rested under the boots of a framed sepia print of Emperor Franz Josef in full military regalia.

Outside, Metaxas Square squirmed with traffic. Inside, the ceiling fans ticked and wobbled but smoke still hung in humid clouds. He fidgeted with the bowl of sugar cubes and pondered Irakles's hair. Black but more foreign in cut than Cypriot. Too long and flat, it practically covered Irakles's eyes. Made him look too young, too English. And shorts, fuck it. Men didn't wear shorts unless they wanted to show off their muscles.

"I can hear my heart pumping," he said. "Except when someone's turning the page of a newspaper."

Irakles snorted. "Patrons pretending to be genteel. If you look carefully you'll see that they're actually reading the comics in the *Daily Mirror*. *Garth* is my favorite."

The *Daily Mirror* ran a strip called *Jane* too, but he couldn't remember much about it.

A dumpy woman set down two coffee cups big as soup bowls. They oozed froth like white lava.

"What's that funny bamboo-rack thing?" he asked with a nod towards the next table.

"Something-holder. Yes, *Zeitunghalter*. Really. It's fashionable in Austria."

If he had to appear blank before a superior being, albeit of the same age, same height, and a Greek Cypriot, then pretending ignorance of the mechanical properties or fashion advantages of an Austrian *Zeitunghalter* seemed preferable to gaping at a bowl of overflowing *Kaffee*.

“Mother says you saved your baby brother,” Irakles said. “Snatched him from the Pedieos River during a storm.”

He'd begged his mother never to mention anything. Why not? she'd said.

Irakles spooned cream onto his tongue. “I swim for my school in England—”

Chris grabbed a sugar cube, popped it into his mouth, and crunched it.

“—But I prefer boxing.”

Of course, this explained the bit about swimmers and saving baby brothers. If the spoon-licker claimed to play the piano too, he'd lunge over the table and drown him in his coffee. He snatched and ground another cube. “If you must know, I pulled Odysseas out of a puddle. Even the tadpoles were practically beached.”

Irakles picked up the menu. “*Kaffee Maria Theresia. Doppelter Mocca mit Orangenlikör, Schlagobers und Zuckerstreusel.*”

He took a look. “This shit's worth three tickets to the cinema.”

“Like you, I thought this was a sissy place until I met a girl last summer who turned out to be the owner's niece. I came back as often as I could. Got her to drill me in German while I sketched her portrait. It all happened right here under the blaze of her aunt's Teutonic eye. She'd goose-step to the table and blare”—Irakles banged the table with his fist—“you vill giff me your order—now!”

Chris grinned. He put the menu down, picked up his coffee cup in both hands, and tried to swill the mound of whipped cream out of the way. He took a slurp and swiveled his chair to scan the place. “Is the niece here today?”

"I'd try one of their giant meringues," a familiar voice said.

He turned. "Mrs. Simmons."

Wow. She wore an orange scarf over her hair like a turban, and a sculpted, lime-colored dress trimmed with orange piping.

Irakles snapped to his feet.

She waved her hand. "No, don't get up. Chris, will you join us at the beach next Sunday? Jane should be back in Cyprus by then."

Shit in your pants, Irakles, Chris thought as he rose to his feet. "I would love to, Mrs. Simmons."

"Say, nine o'clock?" Claire said. "Whose your handsome friend?"

Irakles thrust out his hand. "How do you do, madam? My name is Irakles Naxiotis."

" 'Madam' makes me sound so decrepit."

Irakles released her hand but apparently not eye contact. Playing Russian roulette, or just begging for an invitation to join them on the beach? That's long enough, nice boy. When Claire turned to him, she studied his face for a moment, leaned forward, and seemed to kiss the end of his nose, a move so fleeting he wondered whether he'd imagined it.

She smacked her lips. "Sorry, Chris," she said with a chuckle. "Couldn't resist." Wrinkles of glee danced around her eyes. "I guess I traded you my lipstick for your cream."

She pulled a compact out of her handbag. A quick check, a pout, and she strode out with the absolute certainty that at least two males monitored her every move. As for as the rest of the clientele, cups froze in midair, newspapers on *Zeitungshalters* in mid turn-of-the-page, and mouths in mid-sentence. He grabbed a serviette and attacked his nose.

"I say," Irakles said after they'd sat down at their table. "Has her daughter inherited her looks. Or those model-on-a-runway tricks?"

What had his mother seen? Probably everything. Proper women only open their compacts in the ladies' room, she would say. He stuffed the frayed serviette into his pocket and vowed never to introduce Jane to Irakles. "Stepdaughter," he said.

"You lucky bastard."

Claire's aura still glowed in his loins when Irakles said, "I have my sketchbook with me. Want me to show you what she looks like under that dress—with architectural fidelity?"

If only you knew.

"That look," Irakles said. "It's from *The Postman Always Rings Twice*. One day, I'm going to direct films like that."

And I'll fly to the moon.

"Let me tell you about my bicycle trip," Irakles said. "Well, I didn't exactly pedal all the way to the top of Mount Olympus. I took the bus part way. But I freewheeled down the other side, all the way to the coast." Irakles paused. "Chris, you'll crack your teeth."

Right. He glanced at the dwindling reservoir of cubes. Swimmer, boxer, artist, film director, and marathon cyclist. Assigning one cube of sugar to each of the swelling list of Irakles's talents, he'd have to snatch that full bowl off the next table just to keep up.

"Are you interested in archaeology?" Irakles said.

This cried out for a checkmate strategy. He had to skin this over-the-top braggart. Claire's invitation wasn't nearly enough. "I'm top of my class in mathematics, in my school for that matter. Are you?"

Chapter 15

Irakles stopped pedaling in Pano Vounaki. Like its sister village Kalopetria, two miles to the east along the mountain, Pano Vounaki ended a sinewy three-mile ascent from the coast.

Beyond the whitewashed dwellings, the single-lane artery frayed into a network of goat paths that soared towards the ragged crest of the Kyrenia Mountains.

He wheeled his bike into a patch of shade. As his heart rate eased, his shirt and khaki shorts began to itch. He pulled out his shirt, peeled it from his chest, and wiped his face on a sleeve. A swim in the sea later, he promised himself.

A door banged.

He turned. A toddler gawked at him. The kid pressed a bundle wrapped in a newspaper to his chest, and hopped off the step. On bare feet that seemed impervious to the sharp-edged stones, the kid streaked across the street.

The windowless little house from which the kid had emerged displayed a hint of forlorn commerce—an off-center Coca-Cola sign. The village grocery shop. Irakles leaned his bike against the wall, licked his gritty lips and entered.

A girl's voice, barely audible over the music from a radio, greeted him with, "*Oriste?*"

The cramped room, a hodgepodge of tins of sardines, jars of olives, and sacks of oregano, reeked of dust and cumin—or was that coriander?

Classical music seemed oddly out of place.

He swept the hair from his eyes. "Coca-Cola?"

The girl pointed. "The ice box. Twenty mils, please."

He took off his sunglasses and helped himself to a bottle. Her form, behind the desk, backlit from a window, took shape—petite, with black hair pulled back into a pony-tail.

He slapped down a coin. "Chopin?"

The cash drawer creaked open. "Are you a pianist?"

"No, but I can recognize Chopin. Can't everyone?"

She slid the change towards him.

"A pianist," he said noting the manicured fingernails behind the change and the sheets of music paper. "And you compose."

Her hand sprang back. Papers scattered onto the floor.

He picked up the sheets and returned them to her desk. "I sketch and draw," he said. "Never went far with music, though—don't have the patience to practice but, I guess, we're fellow artists anyway." Her Greek had hardly betrayed a trace of accent, but he asked, "Are you Turkish?"

"You can tell?"

He'd heard about this prodigy, but not what she looked like. "I thought this village was Greek," he said.

She said nothing.

He shrugged. "Who teaches you piano?"

She fumbled with the cash drawer. Wood groaned against wood as she forced an apparently stiff handle around its retaining screw. "Why do you want to know?"

Why indeed? He'd best clear out. At any moment one of her brothers would show up with the family shotgun. "Just passing the time," he said. "It's hot outside. Do you have a bicycle?"

"You *do* ask a lot of questions."

He pulled on the end of his shirt. He changed his mind, reached into his pocket for a handkerchief, and mopped his face. "Come for a ride with me. Tomorrow."

He wasn't in London, and this wasn't a Saturday night at the dance-hall. This was his homeland—his *patridha*—a backwater of the British Empire, where 'dog-Turk' still escaped even the most genteel of Greek lips, and where an ethnic bullet in the back had become a daily hazard. As he waited for her response, his pulse hammered.

She opened the cash drawer, then banged it shut, rattling the contents. "I don't know you."

He let out his breath. "My name is Irakles Naxiotis. I'm Greek. I study in England." He downed the last drops of Coke and approached the desk. "I'm on holiday at my godfather's house in Kyrenia, the Petrino estate. I'm sixteen."

She shrank back.

"Please," he said. "Don't say anything now. I'll be down at the junction with the Kyrenia road tomorrow morning at nine o'clock. Don't worry. If you're there, fine. If not, that's okay too. What's your name?"

Twisting her pony-tail around her finger, she whispered, "Fulya."

Why go on? He could get himself carved up for this. She'd fare worse. "I'll be there, Fulya," he said, "waiting for you. Nine o'clock. Bring your bathing suit, or come prepared to explain the difference between a polonaise and a nocturne."

She looked at him in terror and whispered, "We don't *do* these things in Cyprus."

Chapter 16

Saturday night found Chris half-naked by the water tower in his garden. Curtained by the darkness, he crouched under the tap and showered. Still dripping, he scaled the tower and crawled via the trellis that supported the grapevine onto the roof of his house. At the apex, he rested on the warm terracotta tiles. A full amber moon floated into the obsidian sky, the same moon that crossed over minarets and church steeples all over slumbering Syria, Lebanon, and Israel and, although he couldn't see them from where he lay, the minarets and steeples of Nicosia. What made its disc so huge at the horizon?

Back in bed, he slept fitfully. Better not fall in love with me, Claire had warned him.

The morning star still shone when he returned at daybreak. The sky's orange gradient flared to vermilion at the treetops. Strips of slate-colored cloud condensed from the void and hung like mobiles, their hard edges soaked by the sun. As swarms of sparrows fractured the Sunday stillness, he, the sun, chased Jane, the moon, through the sky.

He climbed down from the roof, tiptoed into his room, and fumbled under his bed. He found what he wanted. *Newtonian Mechanics*. Introduction. Escape velocity, motion under gravity. Radial motion under variable gravity. Collisions and explosions. The conservation of momentum. The firing of shells, the penetration of bullets. Post-Newtonian mechanics . . .

The household stirred. He shut the book.

He swallowed a hurried meal of bread, olives, and tea. A dutiful son had to eat.

A minute after escaping Kleio's gaze, he zoomed into Jane's street. Comb in pocket, swimsuit rolled up in a towel, he was ready for anything. Not really. His heart had taken off like he was meeting Jane for the first time.

Jane was loading the car with baskets. In profile, in her sleeveless blouse and bare legs, she'd matured somehow. At first she hugged him with English reserve. "I've so much to tell you," she said and squished herself into him, legs and all. "Why the long trousers? You'll be frightfully uncomfortable."

Shorts made him feel naked, he wanted to say, strictly for children and sports.

He'd forgotten the intensity of her hair. Against her white skin, blacker than a Cypriot's. It seemed shorter. Her breasts felt bigger than he remembered. Her body too had more shape.

Claire dragged them apart and packed him into the rear seat. She climbed into the driver's seat and Jane got in beside her. No sign of Jane's father. Perhaps they'd pick him up, perhaps he'd join them later.

They set off. He rested his forearms on the front seatbacks, inches from Claire's earrings and Lana Turner turban, this time red like her bikini top. Strands of Claire's hair wriggled loose, curled around her sunglasses, and snapped in the wind.

Jane stuck her arm out of the window. As she swiveled her hand, her hair lifted in silky sheets. He basked in her scent and waited for the humidity to do its work—to turn her fragrance of soap and shampoo into an earthier cocktail, spiced with the outdoors—fine dust and drought-shriveled weeds. Her even-toned pale skin made her legs look softer, more inviting than Claire's. More so since she had tucked her hand between them. An arm's length away, he could have touched them. Instead, he reached for her shoulder.

At the Pedieos Bridge, Jane smiled back at him and said, "Whereabouts did you save Odysseas?"

He pointed vaguely leftwards. Nicosia's riverbed had been dry for months. His little brother and winter storms seemed so remote. "Near the prison."

"You must have been terrified," Claire said, "so close to those awful convicts."

Did she have to say that? The ground rushed up at him, like the time a tennis racket had jammed itself between his handlebars and front wheel. Then, as if on a hinge, he'd jackknifed sideways and whacked the ground.

"Drat," Claire said. "We're out of petrol."

A sharp left and they careened onto the bottleneck bridge. Beyond the roundabout by the Municipal gardens, Claire jerked into the Esso station.

Secured by barbed wire, Wolseley Barracks, British Army Headquarters, teemed with military vehicles. "Poor Reggie," Claire said as they swept by. "In there, doing some beastly work. Sweating like a dog."

Past the barracks the road curved around a cemetery. Beyond the houses, the landscape fell towards Nicosia's dry moat beneath its Venetian wall. Unless commissioned for spectacles, that section of moat overlooked by the Armenian quarter served as a communal playing field. Like all concealed walkways, the stairway carved into the wall doubled as a urinal. Whenever he passed close by, as today, he'd remember the British Monarch's birthday parade before His Excellency the Governor of Cyprus, and recall the smell of piss.

They clattered by the Ledra Palace Hotel—tall, symmetrical, Nicosia's sandstone sentinel. Outside, as always, Chevrolet and Dodge taxis vied for passengers. Above the din of the engine and the whoosh of traffic, Jane spoke of the places she'd visited, from the canals of Venice to blustery Land's End. He'd seen photos of Venice, but he couldn't picture Land's End. Venice—volatile natives. Land's End—volatile seawater.

One day, he and Jane would travel there together.

The dusty leaves of the roadside eucalyptus trees flickered overhead as they passed the wall by the old Turkish quarter. At the Cold Store, across from the Turkish cemetery near the Kyrenia Gate, they joined the road to Kyrenia. The roadway snaked through the Turkish villages of Orta Keuy and Geunyeli. There they slowed to well below the thirty-mile-per-hour limit to navigate through the meanderers—barefoot kids and old men in boots. Anyone could throw a stone. At anything, at anyone. Not just here, anywhere. Kids picked up rocks on the flimsiest of provocations, malicious intent disguised by toothy smiles.

Back in the countryside, as they headed north into the sparsely populated Kyrenia foothills, he relaxed. Nothing must upset his first outing with Jane.

“You’re getting quite the nose-full back there,” Claire said peeking at him in the rear-view mirror. “Evening in Paris.” She chuckled. “Have trouble the other day, you know, getting my lipstick off your nose? I hope I didn’t embarrass you in front of your friend.”

Jane looked at her in disbelief.

What drove Claire to be cruel? Well, sometime today, Jane would interrogate him—and flare like an acetylene torch.

Claire straightened her fingers on the steering wheel as if to take stock of the polish on her nails. “I do hope we’re not in for a tiresome roadblock.”

He imagined being slammed against Claire’s car. A pat-down. An army interrogation under Jane’s eyes to save her the trouble.

Viewed from home, the rust-spattered tawny mountains dotted with greenery straddled the horizon from east to west. Here, against the insignificance of their car, loomed an immense barrier of rock—orange and purple. Limestone or granite? He’d have to look that up. Three cars in low gear, their engines protesting obviously floored throttles, overtook them. Each driver honked at Claire. The last car cut in to avoid an oncoming bus.

On the approach to the Kyrenia pass, cars bunched and jockeyed for position. No Cypriot, with or without a driving license, could bear the humiliation of being trapped behind a Sunday driver on the way up. A Cypriot ploughed ahead for open road like an escaped convict dashing for freedom. The upward-bound lane sorted drivers into a hierarchy based on nerve—acceleration for the timid and sheer momentum for the daring. At thirty-six horsepower, Claire's Hitler-approved people-mover lacked the oomph, but Claire didn't lack the stomach. This was the main Nicosia-Kyrenia road—without military roadblocks, half-an-hour of madness.

“Penta—penta ...” Jane began. She reached across Claire and pointed to the familiar outline against the sky. “It reminds me of a dinosaur.”

“Daktylos,” he said. “*Pente*—five, *daktylo*—finger. Pentadaktylos.”

Claire swerved and snatched Jane's arm. “Out of my face.” She let out a whew and pressed herself into her seat. “One day I'm treating myself to a TR3,” she said as her VW panted up a tree-lined hill. “Reggie's sorry to have to miss today. He loves the Kyrenia beaches.”

Jane looked at her but said nothing.

For sure, there'd been a family quarrel. But over what?

Beyond the hump of the Kyrenia pass, the road clung to the side of a valley. At the second to last hairpin bend, the terrain unfolded and plunged to the north coast. The silhouette of Turkey's Taurus Mountains, its snowcaps long since melted, shimmered across the sea.

“Look, Chris,” Jane said. “The coast's an endless string of u's and w's, all wiggling their way as far as you can see. Just think. We're heading for one of those little wiggles.”

A few miles east of Kyrenia they found a deserted beach, one of Jane's wiggly u's. They made for the water right away, Jane in a one-piece, zebra-striped costume, Claire in a red bikini. Stoked by the day's sun, these women would soon be hot enough to soften steel.

Claire alternated between sun and sea, cigarette and lotion. A wide-brimmed straw hat replaced the turban.

After their swim, he led Jane to the rocks at the end of the cove. Out of sight, under an outcrop hollowed by centuries of wind and surf—their hideout for the day—they set their towels on the sand. Still wet, they huddled side-by-side, facing the wavelets lapping the shore.

He slipped an arm around her shoulder. She hugged her legs. He pulled away her hair and kissed her ear.

She pulled away from him and sucked her knees. “It’s so perfect,” she said. “A Sunday in August and we’re the only people here. England was positively arctic compared to this.”

He ran his lips down her neck.

She worked her legs against his, letting sand sift through her toes. “We’re all alone.”

She sounded sad. Anyway, he *wanted* to be alone with her, couldn’t imagine the next hour without her, or another summer without her. He listened with her to the Sunday morning peace—no chugging, no clanging, no blaring, just the surf hissing up and down the sand, and birds swooping silent against the crash of waves.

She took a long breath and said, “Did you miss me, sweetheart?”

“Awfully.”

“Lie back,” she said.

He glanced along the shoreline. Deserted.

She centered herself between his legs and pulled down her swimsuit. Breasts naked, she propped herself on straightened arms above his head, and let her hands slip forwards. As she came down, her hair tickled him. He took her weight when, finally, she let go and pressed her open mouth over his.

After a wobbly start, the sun had caught up with the moon. Nothing could go wrong.

Chapter 17

After a swim to wash away the sand and sweat, they settled in their hideaway.

Jane propped her elbows on her knees and cupped her head in her hands. "I can't get over the lack of a tide in Cyprus." She sniffed. "I'd almost forgotten about them until I was back in England." She sniffed again.

She was weeping. He put his arm around her shoulder. "What is it?"

"Daddy and Claire are splitting up."

Was there anything else he could say but, "Are you sure?"

As if mesmerized, Jane stared at the eddies generated by submerged rocks. A tear rolled over her wrist. "Daddy can't stand it anymore." She wriggled her shoulders, her signal to coax more contact with him, and murmured, "Do you have recurrent dreams?"

Yeah, Rebecca—good dreams, bad thoughts. He stroked her hair. "I dream of flying over my house," he said.

Her attention still seemed fixed on the swirling water but she'd stopped crying. She waved her arms and said, "Do you flap your hands like wings?"

"Yes. Well, no, I use my arms like levers, I think, to crank myself higher. The higher I get the more I see."

"People?"

“People, bodies, shapes,” he said. “Some nights I go higher than on others, but a kind of barrier presses me down. I always struggle against it.”

“My dream is about leaving home,” she said. “With my suitcase in my hand.”

He watched Claire wade out of the sea, totter in the wet sand. Not as elegant as the heroine in a film. They must retake such shots endlessly to get them right. She recovered her posture and turned in their direction. A blonde in a red bikini. Before the day ended, every male within fifty miles would be parading up and down this beach. In moments, her poise dissolved—she skipped across the sand as if over the grate of a glowing barbecue. Once in their shade, she grabbed a towel and wrapped it around her head. “What are you two chattering about?” she said.

“Dreams,” Jane said.

“You shouldn’t stay in the sun for so long, Mrs. Simmons,” he said.

“All I know is it’s more comfortable in the shade,” Jane said as her stepmother withdrew.

“You grew up with the sun,” he said. “She didn’t.”

Jane dug her feet into the sand. “In India they say sunburn is the fate of the lower caste—the laborers. In England, if you’re burnt, blisters and all, it means you can afford a holiday in a far-off place.” Without a change in tone she looked at him and said, “You and Claire.” She paused. “Don’t look so surprised! If you and Claire . . . I’ll just *die*.”

He could make up a story. Like she did. He’d scooped that dollop of lotion from Claire’s leg, yes, from much the same private place as where Jane had cut herself, and lied to him about it. He’d been caught in bed with Claire, but only in dreams he didn’t have to share. Jane had dreams too—something about suitcases and going somewhere.

A commotion.

They jumped to their feet and stepped out of the hollow. A flatbed truck stood next to the Simmons’ VW. A gang of shirt-flapping, tight-panted show-offs trolled around Claire, threw

stones into the sea, volleyed a ball over her head, offered her cigarettes. One guy dropped his trousers beside her and raced into the sea in his underwear.

“Tell them to go away,” Jane said.

They approached the gang warily. “*Re, palikaria,*” he said. “What do you want?”

One of them broke away and said, “*Christaki.* My friend.” The greeting came from Kokos Sophocleous, missing since shooting old Papanikolaou. Perhaps Kokos lived because Papanikolaou hadn't died.

“This is Fivos,” Kokos said referring to the swimmer—now in dripping underwear—who'd just rejoined the group.

Chris said to Kokos, “Where have you been?”

“With Dhigenis,” said Fivos.

An admission of association with the EOKA master guerrilla, true or not, demanded respect. Kokos grabbed Chris's hand and shoved it against something hard under his shirt. “My Beretta,” Kokos said. “Stavros trained me.”

Neither the gun nor even the calluses on Kokos's hand made him squirm as much as the belch from the bastard's mouth. Kokos had spiked his bravery with alcohol. Chris pulled away, his heart pounding like a runaway oil drum. “Hey, it's so quiet here. Shame on you.” This was the correct thing to say, but dangerous.

Fivos closed in. “Who the fuck do you think you are,” Fivos said. “You're lucky these cunts don't understand what we're saying.”

Chris backed away.

“Have you fucked your whores yet?” Fivos said. “We can help you.”

“I'll take the blonde one,” someone shouted.

The gang guffawed.

Kokos took Fivos's arm. "Slow down, slow down. This is Stavros's cousin."

The laughter died. Then came the tugging at pants snagged in buttock clefts and repositioning of penises—the usual show—after which the loudmouths clambered into their truck and departed.

Jane hugged him. "Creepy men. Thanks awfully for getting rid of them. Lucky one of them knew you."

"Blathering gutter-boys," Claire said and reached for a cigarette.

Those creepy men also carried weapons. What Claire and Jane didn't realize was that the one who knew him was probably the craziest of all. "They may be back, Mrs. Simmons," he said. "We mustn't stay here too long."

"Is Stavros around?" Jane asked.

"Stavros?" Claire said.

"They mentioned his name," Jane said.

Chris shrugged, yet Stavros might well have been watching. Claire had chosen this beach, a remote place where she and Stavros might have met before. She seemed in no hurry to leave.

"If they return," Claire said, "tell them I'm packing a gun too." A smile played on her lips as she gazed out to sea. "Now then, children. Let's have lunch."

Her hamper offered ham-and-cheese sandwiches, with sliced tomatoes, and fruit. The Thermos flasks supplied the drinks. But he declined a Marmite sandwich. Jane had asked him once before to try Marmite. It wasn't a taste he needed to relish twice in a lifetime.

Family ties had been effective at getting rid of those buggers. Stavros had clout. Should he have felt pride or humiliation? Did Claire really carry a gun?

After lunch, Claire took photos. She placed him and Jane ankle deep in the surf. Thus posed—action frozen, subjects holding hands and squinting into the sunlight—Claire snapped them with her Voigtländer. A standard pose as per crinkly Kodak instruction sheet, except for the time of day and no-no overhead sun.

“I’m burning,” Jane said grabbing her towel and draping it over her head.

“Rinse off, dear,” Claire said. “We’ll skedaddle soon.”

Jane pulled him back to their hideout.

“I really missed you,” she said. “You know, talking about books and things.”

He stared at the horizon. “There’s this dream,” he said. “The sky is black, as if before a storm, and I’m in a truck struggling up an enormous slope. The slope becomes steeper. The truck slows. It slips. The road is practically vertical but my truck somehow scrabbles to rest at the very top, on a plateau. I float out. The bottom is a hundred miles away, blurry. My dream repeats. I start again at the bottom, like in ‘snakes and ladders.’ I feel I won’t make it to the top. The feeling gets unbearable. I wake up.”

He should tell her he’d read *The Trial* and dreamed of her in her own garden. He opened his mouth again, but her eyes flashed him a look that would have sucked Joseph K out of Kafka’s inkpot. They fell back into the sand and kissed, long, hard—salty.

He hadn’t quite caught his breath when she rose to her feet, reached out, and said, “Let’s swim.”

As other bathers covered their beach with footprints, but before the sun’s rays cast long shadows, they abandoned the cove and drove further along the coast to sightsee, then returned and headed to Kyrenia. To “tidy and refresh” themselves, they stopped at the Country Club.

The English had tucked their beachfront haunt in the eastern shadow of Kyrenia Castle, whose crenellated walls, loopholes, and towers provided a sand-colored Crusader backdrop for

its exclusivity-yearning members. A backdrop, nevertheless, that housed captured EOKA guerrillas. As he sipped his lemonade, Chris wondered what the prisoners thought of the partying, a spit away from their dungeon.

After Claire had chatted up everyone from waiter to ex-patriot warrior—they strolled westwards around the castle to the fishing harbor, then along the crowded seafront towards the Dome Hotel. Claire had returned to wearing her turban. Jane wore Claire's straw hat, which she held against the gusts.

While Claire disappeared for a fresh packet of cigarettes, Jane and Chris watched the wind-driven surf tumble over the rocks and slash the seawall.

“*Yasoo, Christaki*”—a familiar voice.

Please, God, not Kokos— He spun around. “What are *you* doing here?” he asked in English.

Irakles extended his hand to Jane and said, “You must be Jane. My name is Irakles. In English, Hercules. You can call me *Hercule*.”

Jane stifled a giggle. “Her-cool.” Turning to Chris, she said, “You didn't mention you had a friend called Her-cool.”

The bastard must have been following them to meet Jane. “He's in England most of the year.”

“Unlike Professor Ikonis,” Irakles said, “I don't swot all summer, so four days at sea will wash the alluvium out of my brain, prepare me for term. I sail Tuesday on the Athena Queen.”

Alluvium? Smooth bugger.

“That's the barge we just came back to Cyprus on,” Jane said. “Daddy and me. We embarked in Venice.”

“I hope you traveled first class,” Irakles said.

“Second.”

Irakles leaned towards her. “I had a reservation for third, but I changed it to deck class.”

“That’s at the back end,” she said. “All those poor people, fenced in, sleeping on deck for days and days.”

“And, even if they could free the ones cemented-in by umpteen coats of paint, not enough lifeboats to go around.”

“Golly,” she said.

“Anyway, you meet more interesting people there,” Irakles said. “First class or deck class. The in-betweens are snobs. Don’t you think?”

She reached out as if to touch him. “I say, which school are you at?”

“Windham, near Redhill,” Irakles said. “Do you know it?”

She blushed and shook her head.

Irakles whipped a sketchbook from his hip pocket and flipped to a fresh page. Following a curt “Take off your hat,” he blinked from Jane to the sketchbook while stroking the page with a pencil. He asked her to remove a hairpin from above her ear. He ignored her “But my hair’s all tangled,” and said, “Let’s back out of the spray,” and without interrupting his rhythm, he said, “Chris, do you know a Turkish girl called Fulya who plays the piano?”

“We have the same teacher—”

“Bumped into her. Smashing stroke of luck.”

Jane frowned.

Irakles continued sketching. “Hold still, Jane. Hey, smile. I made a date with Fulya for today but she didn’t show up. Well, she never actually agreed to be there. What the heck. She must have a boyfriend. Not you, I hope.”

Not even a kiss-off embarrassed the bastard.

They listened to the surf pulverizing the seawall while Irakles continued to sketch. In minutes, Irakles ripped the page from the sketchbook and handed it to Jane.

Claire joined them. "Sorry, I bumped into Alistair."

"We just saw him at the Club," Jane said.

"Hello, Mrs. Simmons," Irakles said sounding out the 'ello as in mellow.

Jerk.

Jane smoothed her hair, replaced her hairpin, and stuck Claire's hat back on her head.

"Look what he did," she said holding out the sketch.

"Jane, that's really you," Claire said. "How very twee."

Irakles glanced skyward, put the tips of his fingers together, and pursed his lips. "Do not thank me," he chanted, "for I know not how I come by this heavenly talent. My hand is but a Divine instrument of the Lord."

They laughed.

Irakles winked at Jane and said, "Will you pose for me one day?"

She just did, you prick. Her blush refreshed itself a radiant pink as if Irakles had suggested she pose nude. And what in the name of the devil did 'twee' mean?

Irakles darted to his side and whispered, "The moment you see Fulya again tell her I'll write to her from England. Really. Don't look so surprised. Hey, and your Jane's a smasher."

"Are you *insane*?" Chris said making sure everyone heard.

"Toodle-oo," Irakles said, "I'm playing table tennis at the Dome Hotel." He punched Chris's shoulder, shook hands, and left.

"Handsome young man," Claire said.

The sight of Jane gawking at Irakles, and Irakles returning her look—mortifying. "His father runs Lavox Enterprises," he said. "A detergent factory."

Jane clutched the sketch like a baby glued to a teddy bear and when Irakles disappeared she held it out. Irakles had rendered her graceful, with a hint of determination in her eyes and on her lips—as if divining her future temperament. He'd even captured the gusts in her hair.

“*Hercule* is so cute,” Jane said as they continued their stroll. “I’ll always call him that. Terrific accent. And fancy that,” she said in a sarcastic tone, “he knows your pretty Fulya. I’ve heard *so* much about her, I’d like to meet her myself. What did he whisper to you? More about that horrid girl?”

“His last words were about you, actually.”

“That’s a fib,” she said.

“Enough, Jane,” Claire said and walked over and hugged Chris. “Poor Chris, having to put up with us bickering bitches all day in this frightful heat.”

Back in the car, during the next leg of their drive to the western side of Kyrenia, he wanted to rip the portrait from Jane’s hand, shred it, fling it out of the window. Today might have been idyllic. Table tennis. Someone once suggested that mathematicians excelled at it. Complex trajectories, Newtonian *with* atmospheric friction—more easily played than computed. He should challenge Irakles and blast balls at him like a Tommy gun. But he mightn’t have to. When Fulya’s brothers found out that a Greek boy sent love letters to their sister, they’d spare him the trouble of a table-tennis duel. They’d cut off lover-boy’s hands.

Likely, the courier’s too. He should have turned Irakles down.

“That’s where Irakles stays when he’s in Kyrenia,” he forced himself to say as they passed the turnoff for the Petrino estate, hidden from the road by dense cypresses. “The seaside residence of Sokratis Mavropoulos, his godfather.”

“Do they have their own beach?” Jane asked.

“Yes.”

"I would so *love* to be invited."

A private beach—the deal-clincher in her new-found rich-boy daydream.

"Do they have any kids?" she asked.

"I don't think so," he said. "Irakles is their godson."

Jane turned and looked at him. "Then why on earth would that silly girl stand him up?"

He shrugged. "Fulya's Turkish. Her family wouldn't go for a Greek boy. Anyway, you've seen him. He must have scared her to death."

"I've met Sokratis and Elena," Claire said. "Quite the couple. I guess that's where Irakles gets his panache."

If not those spotless, expensive-looking, silky slacks with knife-edge creases that Irakles likely flashed all through Fulya's village.

They continued west along the washboard asphalt, now through carob and olive orchards. As they rounded a curve, Jane said, "Look at that crazy goat."

Claire eased out of the traffic and stopped the car. A herd of goats had surrounded a tree. They seemed hypnotized by the spectacle of a fellow goat determined to reach the tree's upper foliage by actually climbing the tree. The choicest pickings are hardest to reach—Harry Lawrell. That animal in the tree would make goat history.

"Kalopetria three miles," Jane said.

He turned away from the goats and looked at a sign pointing into the Kyrenia Mountains.

"*Kalo*—good," Jane said. "*Petra*—stone. Right, Chris?"

She looked at him. He nodded. "Is that where what's-her-face lives?" she asked.

"No," he said, "Pano Vounaki is further on, along the mountain."

"Anything to see up here, then?" Claire said.

“Not really. Just a village and an old church. Typically Cypriot. I’ve been to its annual festival—the *panegyri*. There used to be a monastery there, but nothing’s left, except caves, maybe snakes.”

Jane shivered.

“Then I vote we head back to Miss Beecham’s tearoom,” Claire said.

After several tries, she crunched the transmission back into first gear. They started to roll, waiting for the traffic to clear. Before she dared a U-turn, a truck careened by. The moment Chris recognized those cock-jiggling loudmouths at the flatbed’s side-rails, he heard a car swerve—an oncoming car, frantic. It jumped the ditch, ploughed through the goats, and smashed into a tree. Car and herd vanished under a mushroom of dust and steam.

“Jesus Christ,” Claire shouted and stalled her engine.

A Land Rover screeched to a halt before the cloud had settled. Police in khaki uniforms, hats, shorts, and long socks leapt out and rushed to the scene. Had they been following the truck? Oh, but the man hunched in the Land Rover’s back seat seemed horribly familiar.

“Look who’s in that jeep-thing,” Jane said.

Stavros perked up, evidently surprised he’d been left unguarded. He turned his head in their direction, but if he recognized them he didn’t betray it. He rolled off the Land Rover and collapsed headfirst into the ditch. Without using his hands—they’d handcuffed him—he worked himself upright among the thorns and broken bottles. Barefoot. The police must have taken his shoes. They watched Stavros scramble towards the mountains through thistles and stones until the olive grove had swallowed him.

“He was bleeding!” Jane said.

“Well, there’s nothing for us to do here,” Claire said. “The police have it all well in hand.”

“But they might . . . want to know where he went?” Jane said. Her voice slowed, and faded into a question, as if she wanted to backtrack on what she'd just said.

Claire restarted the car. “Gosh, I need a breeze.”

“He's hurt!” Jane said.

“It's so hot when we're not moving,” Claire said.

“What, what?” Jane screamed at her. “Are you going to tell me? There's a secret between you and Chris. There's something between you I don't know.”

Claire looked over her shoulder and started to turn the car. As they drove away, Jane punched her legs and choked back sobs. He reached for her shoulder. She jerked away. He fell back into the seat and shut his eyes.

The day had changed her. They were no longer friends.

Stavros would surely elude the police, but the police would have noted the witnesses to his escape and would catch up with them. What then? For the moment, Chris thanked God he had Claire on his side. He hadn't seen Stavros since the sun-lotion affair. Claire surely had.

A cypress-lined, sandy driveway marked the entrance to Miss Beecham's Olde English Tearoom. Among date palms heavy with clusters of honey-colored fruit, entertained by the rasping *ziziro*, Chris and the ladies sampled finger sandwiches, biscuits and jam, and drank tea with milk. He shifted about on his chair. He was the only Cypriot in an open-air Alice in Wonderland—an oasis of England's green and pleasant land carved into the land of his ancestors. He'd joined the Mad Hatter's tea party, hobnobbing with elderly spinsters in baby blue, a character in one of those novels Harry Lawrell made him read. At any moment a retired military geezer would huff, “Anyone for croquet?”

For once, he sympathized with Claire, whose bikini top, sheer blouse and fire-engine lipstick teased the old toads. She was a misfit too.

Jane's profile seemed wistful. Cyprus had offered her its full spectrum of manhood today, from a truck-full of braggarts to Mister drooling, take-off-your-hat Panache with access to a villa and a private cove. When Irakles asked her to remove her hairpin and let out her hair, she'd acquiesced without a decent second's hesitation. She'd screamed too, to mask her feelings for injured strongman Stavros—her stepmother's lover—now scrambling handcuffed and barefoot into the mountains, probably heading for the nearest church.

It couldn't be he himself—predictable, safe, Chris.

A truck wheezed to a halt.

The now familiar EOKA horde—had they been trailing him?—descended on the tearoom like locusts upon a forest. The white-haired hostess, who'd introduced herself at each table as Priscilla Beecham—Miss—scuttled out with flailing arms, to shoo them away.

Something pulled at him. He belonged with them, with EOKA—he wasn't the anglophile everyone presumed.

“There's our friend,” the one called Fivos said pointing at him. “Sitting with these marmalade-eaters.”

“Marmalade-eater, marmalade-eater”—a chant in Greek, with guffaws from the gang.

“Do you actually *know* these vulgar men?” Miss Beecham asked him. She'd cast him a wary glance earlier, but he must have seemed safe since he escorted two English women.

“Please ask them to leave at once.”

While she spoke, he scanned the melee. The gang had spread out between the tables, mingling with the seated ‘marmalade-eaters.’ A few hands reached for the mandatory rocks.

What had sparked the rage of these Neanderthals? English retirees dipping biscuits into tea hardly qualified as official EOKA targets. On another occasion he could have stood aside, let

matters work themselves out. No one, though, would let him talk his way through this mess.

This time, Jane and Claire were in imminent danger.

While Kokos cowered in the background, Fivos had started towards Claire's party, tossing aside chairs and tables. Some patrons jumped to their feet, others stayed put, everyone yelled.

Then Gravel clanged metal as wheels scraped to a halt and truncheon-wielding constables rolled out of a Land Rover.

Kokos began to run in circles, screeching, "Police, police."

Surrounded by indignant colonizers, indigenous rebels, and salaried security forces, Chris felt like a beached sardine. "Get under the table," he shouted at Claire and Jane.

Neither moved, so he yanked Jane off her chair and kicked it out of the way. She flopped on all fours to the gravel. He shoved her under their table.

Still seated, Claire reached for a cigarette.

The police set about with their truncheons—wood whacked flesh, wood cracked bone. Kokos reached under his shirt. A constable swiped a truncheon into his face.

Cutlery clattered. China smashed. A voice on a loud-hailer ordered—"Stop."

Too preoccupied to notice or too angry to care, Fivos closed in like a jackal converging on prey. Fivos wanted trouble.

Chris stood up straight. This time, he did too.

Something slammed into his face.

Chapter 18

Rebecca ushered Chris and Fulya, her last two students of the day, through the door. Resting a hand on Chris's shoulder, she tilted her head and examined his bruises and black eye—Fivos's handiwork.

"I must run before the shops close," she said. "You'll look after Fulya, remain by her side until she's picked up." And she shook her head and walked back into her house.

He crammed his stuff into his bicycle's saddlebag, unlocked the rear wheel, and set off with Fulya for Ayios Pavlos Street. While he walked his bike, Fulya scooted alongside, her scores and music albums tucked under her arm.

That day in the Mad Hatter's tearoom, he remembered a flash, then darkness. Later, after the chairs and tables had been righted, Claire told him that the bobbies had scattered the gutter-boys before she'd done with her fag. She'd vouched for him, she said, or he'd have been hauled off with the rest of the buggers.

All except shotgun-happy Kokos, who managed to flee once again.

Fivos, the police had snatched. "So sorry, my dear," Claire had said while fixing her lipstick. "Today's been a right balls-up. You won't soon forget that runt. Trouble is, he won't be in much of a rush to forget you either."

"My friend Irakles Naxiotis told me he met you," Chris said to Fulya.

"Your friend?" Fulya halted and glanced around. "Really? You know him?"

“I slipped a note into your books. He wants to stay in touch with you.” He spoke rapidly, to dispense as many words as possible in case she silenced him before he’d finished. If she rejected Irakles, it would feel like she’d rejected him.

She cast her eyes downwards and hugged her bundle more tightly.

“Right,” he said. “I told him he was crazy.”

On second thoughts, it wouldn’t be so bad if she did reject Irakles. The bastard probably flaunted multiple girls in England and needed Fulya for holiday sport.

They strolled side-by-side saying nothing, but he noticed that she marked every few steps with a skip.

“You’re a fabulous pianist,” he said to keep the conversation rolling.

“You’d play well if you practiced more,” she said.

“I practice only what I preach,” he said, “and I don’t preach piano practice, whereas you are preaching—”

“—What I practice.”

They laughed.

He’d known her for so long that her joyfulness came as a shock. He must admit it had escaped his notice. On those winter days when Rebecca shut the windows, when Rebecca’s fragrance swirled through the studio, he’d fixated on Rebecca not on Fulya.

Fulya added, with a note of glee, “Miss Ouzanian wants me to start on *Fantasia-Improptu*.”

“I could never play that,” he said. “I’m— What do you think?”

“A little pedantic?” she said ending on a question as if to soften the remark.

He stopped and looked at her. “A little pedantic?”

“Sorry. It’s a word I learned from Miss Ouzanian. When you follow the rules too simplistically, the musical expression becomes lifeless, dull, soulless. And the tension is missing.”

Dull and soulless. Yes. A flock of swallows swooped low across the street.

She continued, “Most students shove mechanically—they just hit the keys.”

“Most students, meaning me?”

She looked at him. “Remember how she says you should let the music *emanate* up out of the piano?” She fidgeted with her bundle of music. “Don’t be despondent. I’m sure you have talent. And . . . I do want to write to your friend”—she rushed her words—“in secret. Not a word to anyone.” Her face reddened. “I like him.”

For a few moments they walked in silence, then she stopped him and looked at him closely. “Have you been in a fight?”

Only now she asked? “It’s nothing,” he said looking away.

“I’m so sorry.” Embarrassed, she said, “Because of roadblocks and riots, I moved in with relatives in Omorphita.” When they arrived at the junction with Ayios Pavlos Street, she said, “This is where Mehmet turns. We can wait here.”

While she scanned the street for her brother’s van, occasionally lifting her heels as if to see further, he studied her neck. Her neck curved gracefully from her carefully-ironed shirt collar. Necks. Better enjoyed surely than even the best rendition of Fantasie-Impromptu.

“I’ve always been afraid of you,” he said. “And those annual recitals. I hate them.”

“We’re even then. I’m bottom in science.”

He took her hand and pressed it. “Since you proved yourself at improvising and jazz, Odysseas spends every minute experimenting, driving our mother crazy. He keeps trying to alter the times of his lessons so he can be in the studio with you. Did you know?”

Her ears crimson, Fulya rolled gravel under her shoe. “As Miss Ouzanian’s only boy students, you and Odysseas should be looking forward to those recitals amongst the young ladies—dressed in their prettiest clothes. You should practice more diligently.”

He stood so close to her that he could feel the freckles on her cheek and the soft line of her lips.

She looked at him, then downward, shy. “I love it when I can barely make out a song, maybe because the radio’s not loud enough, or something, another sound, mingles with it. Door-hinges, goat bells, the wind howling in a winter storm. Can you imagine? When I get hints, I’m swept into fantastic worlds of sound, layer upon layer of melody, as if I’m sailing through Aphrodite’s garden on a gondola.”

He stared at her—this keyboard prodigy. No wonder Irakles was aching to bag her.

Mathematics and music. Perhaps he could wow Rebecca—converse with her on sine waves, harmonics, and Fourier analysis. Trigonometric identities, he could inform her, explained the tuning of a piano to eliminate unwanted beats.

Fulya looked at her watch. “Mehmet is two hours late. I hope he’s not caught up in a riot.”

“Here, let me carry your music,” he said and reached out. Just then, a pack of dogs scrambled past them, an unhappy guinea pig lodged in the lead dog’s saliva-dripping jaws. Fulya stumbled. He hurled his bike at the dogs, and grabbed her.

“My music!” she cried pulling herself free.

He lunged for the sheets. Brakes squealed—spine-chilling. He jumped as if caught stealing fruit and bashed into a car.

The car rocked to a standstill. He stared at Claire. Knuckles wrapped around the steering wheel, Claire stared back. Jane was rubbing her forehead. Holding onto the car, he scrambled

upright. Claire popped her head out of the window and shouted, "God, I'm so sorry. It's been an awful day. Are you hurt?"

He shook his head.

"Do you need a lift?"

Still clutching a handful of creased sheets, he punted to Claire's window and gestured at Fulya, disheveled and dusty, meekly adjusting her skirt. "Thank you, Mrs. Simmons, but I have to stay with her."

He stooped to look at Jane. She was glaring at Fulya, glare set to broil a steak.

Twenty minutes later he and Fulya occupied the two available chairs in the front room of his house. She crossed and uncrossed her ankles. He followed her gaze as she scanned the room, from the framed photos above the cabinet to the fly-paper dangling from the ceiling lamp; from a bowler-hatted cigar-chomping Winston Churchill to an insect thrashing away its final seconds of life against the sticky tape.

Jane. He'd seen that look before. Soon as possible, he must dash to her house.

Kleio bustled in and set a tray on the table. With a flourish, she plied Fulya with sickly walnut *glyko* and a tumbler of tap water. "Are those flies still bothering you? That sticky tape is supposed to be irresistible. Where *is* Zacharias when I need him?"

Kleio left the room then reappeared with a Flit insecticide pump. Cupping its cylindrical reservoir in one hand and grasping the pump handle in her other, Kleio misted the room with DDT. "Usually, we close all the windows and doors. That makes this Flit last longer."

"I'd rather face the flies," Chris said coughing. "Esso claims that a five-second spray kills all flying insects in an average room. That must be an American room."

Kleio scowled and pumped a gratuitous drizzle into a corner of the ceiling, whereupon the resident spider yo-yoed itself into pinhead size.

“Welcome to our humble palace, *Despinis* Fulya,” Kleio said, when apparently satisfied that the air had been sufficiently drenched with DDT. “We’ve heard good things about you,” she continued over the boogie cranked out by Odysseas in honor of their unexpected visitor. “Stop that noise,” she yelled. “You’ll ruin the delicate instrument.” Before hurrying away, she turned to Fulya and said, “I apologize for my son.”

Odysseas couldn’t resist that final emphatic ba-bam! . . . bram! before banging the dust cover shut.

A smile crept across Fulya’s lips—which she tried to hide behind her hand.

“Odysseas only has two records,” Chris said as Little Richard’s opening shrieks cut through the haze. He dived at the record player and pulled out the plug.

“Look at this, Fulya,” Odysseas said holding up a folder. “It’s the original newspaper story about how my brother saved my life.”

Bastard. Chris tore the folder from Odysseas’s hands.

“Is that the two of you?” Fulya said pointing at the wall.

“Christakis is the ugly one in shorts and a tie,” Odysseas said. Jockeying to block his view of Fulya, Odysseas said, “How d’you do it—play anything you want?”

“When I memorize a piece,” Fulya said, “the notes dance in front of me like subtitles on a cinema screen and my fingers play what I see.” She swirled the water around her tumbler. “Miss Ouzanian finds it hard to believe.”

“But anything?” Odysseas said.

“If I hear it, I can more or less play it, and improvise. Particularly repetitive motifs like rock’n’roll.”

At last their father strode in through the front door.

“There are roadblocks everywhere,” Zacharias said speaking from one side of his mouth, a cigarette stub tight-pinched, Humphrey-Bogart-style, on the other. “It took me two hours to exit by the Paphos Gate.”

Zacharias tossed his hat onto a hook and lit up a fresh cigarette from the stub. His tone mellowed as he caught sight of Fulya. “Who’s this delightful young lady?”

Chris leapt to his feet. “This is *Despinis* Fulya Özal, Miss Ouzanian’s student. Her brother didn’t show up so I brought her here.”

“Where’s home?”

“Right now, my uncle’s house,” Fulya said. “In Omorphita.”

Between extravagant emissions of blue smoke, Zacharias said, “The city’s gates and the roads over the moat are blocked. Auxiliary police—uncouth Turks the lot. Two incidents. A bombing near Hermes Street—the municipal market—and another shooting, a woman in Ledra Street. They say she was killed—”

Fulya cried out, and slumped back into her chair.

“Perhaps your brother— I’m sorry, *Despinis*. As usual, the British were herding suspects into barbed-wire pens.”

“Suspects?” Fulya squeezed that last ounce of air from her lungs, cradled her arms in her lap, and broke into a fit of hyperventilation. “Mehmet went to the market.”

Kleio sprang to embrace her. “Be quiet, *Zacharia*. You’re making things worse.”

“Who’s Mehmet?” Zacharias asked.

“Her brother,” Chris said.

Zacharias turned to Odysseas. “Go. The radio. See if there’s a curfew. We’ve got to get her home before she’s trapped.”

Fortunately they still had time.

Zacharias bade his sons stay at home, but Odysseas plunged into the back seat of the car. After several hugs, Kleio coaxed Fulya into the front seat.

“I don’t want you out here too long,” Kleio said as the car teetered away.

Chris watched their Ford Popular strain to reach the municipal speed limit, as ever, threatening to topple at the first hint of a curve. So much for the world’s lowest priced car. Today, at least, it hadn’t needed a crank to get started. He looked towards his home. His mother had left the door open for him.

Riots and curfews be damned, he’d face her lectures later. Rebecca’s wellbeing overshadowed everything.

But Jane’s house was nearer.

Jane opened the door. Her eyes were red, her cheeks moist with tears, her forehead bruised where she’d banged herself.

“Fulya’s not interested in me,” he said. “Truly, I can explain everything.”

“You hugged the bitch. Anyway, it’s too late.”

Too late? She couldn’t possibly suspect Rebecca. No one could. He stepped towards her and raised his hand. “I love you, Jane.”

She slapped him hard, the side that hurt. “You’re pathetic!”

“I—”

She slapped him again. “I’ll *never* forgive you. Never!”

Chapter 19

Why was Chris sitting on Rebecca's front steps? Better he should have stayed at home with his mother. Be a good boy. Waited for his father and brother to return from driving Fulya home. There'd been bombings and shootings, his father had said. There would be arrests. Detentions. A curfew.

If he'd stayed at home, he wouldn't have had that scene with Jane. He could have phoned Rebecca's house from a neighbor's. Rebecca's orders had been clear. Stay with Fulya. He rose and knocked again, put his ear to the door. He heard his heart. Nothing else. He returned to the steps and sat down.

His father would protect Fulya. Right? The Omorphita Turks wouldn't stone the car with Fulya was in it. But what if the Turks didn't recognize her? Two Greeks driving some girl through a Turkish area during riots. Bad move. There would be roadblocks. Barbed-wire pens. Suspects.

A woman had been killed. *That* was why he was cowering on Rebecca's doorstep, praying for her return.

The sun had dropped below the rooftops. Perhaps at this very moment Rebecca was languishing in the Nicosia General Hospital. Perhaps shot. He hugged his knees, curled into a ball, and tried to stop the tears from squeezing through his eyelids.

Harry Lawrell's face popped up. "Shape your thoughts, lad," the ogre said. "Remember, the lowest hanging fruit is the easiest to pick. Once in your hand, it's bound to look smaller than what you left in the tree. The juiciest bitch is way up there, at the top."

He remembered the day he'd first ejaculated into Jane's hand. The day she'd stared into his eyes while sucking her sopping fingers—the day too that he'd noticed the Elastoplast on her thigh. Salt and sweat. A powdery, crusty film. The taste of her skin when they lay together on the beach. The sweat on her upper lip he'd licked dry, her thick heat, her sticky wetness. God, what if she'd changed her mind? She might be waiting for him, right now, at his house.

He must get up, check the back door. No. Better he rush to the hospital. Hold it. What if Rebecca's back door was actually unlocked? He could enter the house, hide in her bed—

The gate jangled.

Thank God. He looked up. "Miss Ouzanian." His head slumped back to his knees.

Rebecca clanged the gate shut. "Is Fulya all right?" she asked. "Look at me." She touched his shoulder. "Didn't her brother pick her up? Why, you're teary."

He didn't look up. "My father drove her to Omorphita."

She walked past him up the steps. "Good, then she should be all right."

She unlocked her door and pushed it open. "Come."

His nostrils flooded with the comforting scent of her warm skin as he clambered to his feet. Like he'd arrived early for his lesson, she waved him to the chairs lined up at the perimeter of the carpet and hurried into the kitchen.

She returned with wineglasses, a bottle of aspirins, and a pitcher of water. She swept aside the pile of magazines that littered her coffee table, filled the glasses, and emptied some pills into the palm of her hand.

He took the pills and gulped at the water. He could ram the pitcher down his lungs.

“Are you ill?” she said.

“It’s good to see you.”

“Then why that face?”

She was right. He should have argued with Jane, returned and argued. He said, “I have to know if Fulya is okay.”

Rebecca stepped to the bookcase, thumbed through a diary then picked up the telephone and asked for what sounded like a Turkish grocery shop. She glanced back at him. “I asked you to remain by her side.”

He bashed the coffee table with his fist. He bashed it again. Crunch—his hand had sprung a leak. Single beads at first, like bursts from blood-saturated ticks picked from a dog’s belly. He watched the little ovals merge into a pattern around the splinters. The carpet darkened between his shoes. He dropped the remains of his glass.

She scurried to his side. “Chris, I’m so sorry.” She stroked his neck. “*Of course* it was okay for you to turn Fulya over to your father.” She sat down beside him and slipped her arm around his shoulder. “You’re soaking my carpet. Into the kitchen. Quick.”

As she ushered him along, she said, “Fulya’s fine. So is her brother. Carpets and imitation Rosenthal are replaceable.”

Twenty minutes later she’d bandaged his hand and scrubbed the carpet. Back in the studio, she turned down the lights and started on a glass of wine. He irrigated his throat with a fresh glass of water.

This was his injured foot in Claire’s lap all over again. Women tended to his pathetic wounds, while his friends and family fought for freedom.

The telephone rang. She rose and picked up the receiver. "Hello." She looked his way and smiled. "He's made himself at home. Tell them he can stay during the curfew. Yes, sleep here." She replaced the receiver and returned to her chair. "That was your neighbor."

Relief, right, the wimp cared. But for whom? "There was a shooting. Fulya—"

"Have you fallen in love with her? Of course, how could any man not?" She took some Nivea cream and massaged her fingers between sips of wine. "I didn't go to Ledra Street. I visited a friend, Zaira. Remember her?"

When his gaze drifted from her eyes down to her hands, she snatched them away from her chest and folded them in her lap. As if embarrassed, she angled her legs away from him. There wasn't much to see. Not even her knees.

"Arthritis," she said. "If you hurt, at least you know you're alive." She hesitated. "Did you get her pregnant?"

Her hands. Young, too young and beautiful for arthritis. "Who?"

"Your *philenada*."

"Oh God. Nothing like that."

Philenada signified more than 'girlfriend.' It signified commitment.

Rebecca refilled her wineglass. "What's her name?"

His throat tightened. "Jane."

She lifted her glass and seemed to study it. She nodded slowly, frowning at the wineglass as if she'd been forced to decline an offer that had been priced just out of her reach. "English. Yes, of course." She looked up. "A summer romance? The first?"

He should blurt it out—Jane was, and would always be, his *second* love. But this confession, tonight, his first shot at socializing with Rebecca one-on-one, would hardly score

him points. Unfaithful bastard. Jane had filled out his daytime life, Rebecca his dreams. A summer romance? Rebecca wouldn't really want to know.

She said, "The very essence of romance is uncertainty"—Oscar Wilde."

"I love . . ." he said. Dear God, would she be able to play the piano if she had arthritis? He'd heard older women complain in winter about rheumatism. This was summer. What was the difference between rheumatism and arthritis, anyway?

"Imagine," she said softly, "if my piano could read your thoughts."

"Your hands. They're beautiful."

She smiled. "I envy her." She began working on her wrists. "I knew a boy in Vienna, a violinist. One evening in a *heurigen*—a wine garden—someone vis-à-vis us carried on about Armenians, Negroes, and Jews. My boyfriend had kept his head down. Later, I wondered aloud if he'd dare protect me against Nazis like that one." Her eyes searched his. "He ran out—"

He jumped to his feet. "Sorry about your carpet. And your Rosenthal. I have to go."

"Not during the curfew. Tonight you stay right here. Don't pretend . . ."

When she'd started her story, it seemed she drew closer to him. Then her story turned to shit. Jews. Nazis. Shit.

He sat down.

"Utility and value," she said. "Remember? You ruined Harry's weekend. I once saw a language professor start a fistfight with less provocation." She leaned towards him and said, "What do you want, Chris?"

He brightened. "I want to go to America, to study the formation of traffic jams, to develop a general solution of the vehicle pileup problem. Subject to simplifying assumptions, I already have a workable solution."

She sprang to her feet. “How dull. Yet, how strange.” As if embarrassed, she rushed to her record player and fumbled with a record. “Your eyes. Your excitement.” She scratched the needle across the disc.

What was strange? That he'd just confirmed being dull and pedantic?

The record began to hiss. The music started. “Schubert's Unfinished Symphony,” she said. “Wilhelm Fürtwangler, conductor.”

What could a backwater like Cyprus offer a piano instructor with blue eye-shadow and perfect eyebrows? The chance to prod the unwilling, to flatter the untalented? A husband?

A prodigy. Fulya, of course.

Rebecca shut her eyes and swayed with the rhythm. “If I'm happy, it makes me happier. When I'm lonely, it makes me sadder. So too with Ave Maria and Serenade. Schubert strove to capture the unattainable—the tragedy, the loneliness, the longing of every human being.” She opened her eyes. “Can you feel it?”

She returned to her seat and frowned into her empty wineglass. “For the denouement of your affair, whenever that arrives, promise me you'll do nothing tragic. Promise.”

This dynamical system was prone to instability, yet any idiot could figure out possible solutions. She moved right, she sounded right, she smelled right. No checklist needed—religion, family status, intelligence—nor her smallpox certificate. Who cared whether she read Kafka or whether she played tennis? Anyway, he hadn't spotted Kafka on her bookshelves and there wasn't a tennis racket in sight.

When *exactly* had he fallen in love with her? When had time *t* reset itself to zero? One Sunday afternoon, he'd found her in her turquoise dress, trimmed with a plumb-line of buttons that hung down her cleavage and spilled over her belly. Instructions: ‘to open package, tear along dotted line.’

She played with her pearls. She let him stare.

In the lamplight, those little flecks in her eyes that sparkled gold in the sunlight had softened to orange.

The record played. The minutes ticked by.

“This Schubert,” he said, “makes me think of The New World Symphony. Of hope.”

Still looking at him, she tilted her head sideways and unclasped an earring. She held it as if deciding what to do next then set it on the table. “You’ll teach me to play chess.”

Jane had dumped him. He had no mementos of their relationship, no specimen of her handwriting, nothing.

What had Rebecca just requested? Something about chess. “I beg your pardon?”

“Teach me to play chess.”

He looked at her. Hell, if chess wouldn’t work out, he could drill her in anything from tiddlywinks to integral calculus. Tiddlywinks, no problem. Integral calculus he’d have to swot up on. In return, what? She could teach him to dance, slow and close up. She’d ordered him to stay, to sit out the curfew. They had all night.

Beads of dew misted her forehead. Her wall was crumbling.

“Well?” she said. Her lips remained parted.

Did she realize how beautiful she looked? He should tell her straight, just like he did about her hands. No, not now. One day, the right day. He dug his fingers into his thigh and glanced at the bottle of wine. Three-quarters empty. Chess. She was waiting for his reply.

“What if I did, and you became too good to play against anyone else—”

“—Then you’ll have a good reason to visit me again.” Her face flushed. “Of course, just for tea.”

Chapter 20

Reginald slipped the unlit pipe out of his mouth and nodded at the mess of photographs on the kitchen table. "There's only six prints here, Jane." He popped the pipe back into his mouth and fumbled for his tobacco pouch. "Where are the other two?"

The scab on Jane's forehead had practically vanished, but the red tinge to her eyes had deepened, and her normally clear skin looked blotchy. Poor Jane. Since they'd returned from England, she'd taken to locking herself away, like Claire. Three bloody rooms for a godforsaken threesome family, whose father slept alone. At least Jane had ended those evenings in the garden groping her Cypriot boyfriend.

Jane yanked the cap off a bottle of cherryade, and tossed it at the bin.

"There are eight shots to a roll, Jane."

She peered at the photos. "Well, one would have been Chris and me on the beach after we came back from England." She took a drink. "I tore it up."

"That's the seventh. Where's the eighth?"

She shrugged.

He chewed his pipe. "Maybe the negatives slipped behind Claire's bedside table. Go and take a butcher's, will you, dear?"

Jane huffed off in a why-do-I-always-get-to-do-these-silly-things shuffle. She was right. He should stew in his own muck. Like that night on their voyage back to Cyprus when he

stumbled out of the ship's bar and hung over the side. "Don't drink so much, Daddy," she'd whispered as she pulled him away from the heaving blackness. "Please."

He poured himself a whiskey and propped his elbows on the table. By God, but if Jane gave up now, he'd give up too.

She pattered back into the kitchen a few minutes later and placed an envelope in front of him. "They'd fallen behind the night table, just as you thought, along with the nail-clippers she said she'd lost. Ugh. The filth. This horrid creepy brown thing with hundreds of legs practically jumped into my face."

He dusted off the envelope, slid out and held the negatives to the light, and compared them with the set of prints. "Here, these two. Which one is your friend?"

Jane plopped the bottle from her lips and peered. "This one, I think."

He downed his whiskey and reached for his pipe. "The other. Who's Claire with?"

She squinted. "Negatives are so silly—so ghostly."

Like fondling tobacco in its pouch, suckling at the pipe's mouthpiece, lit or not, demanded nothing but delivered everything. It served well to dampen bad news.

Jane glugged the rest of the cherryade and rummaged for a spot in the crate of empties.

He rapped his pipe on the table. "Out with it, Jane!"

She turned away and leaned against the kitchen sink. "Chris's cousin."

His lower lip twitched—time for the pouch. "The what's-his-name criminal who's done time in the slammer?"

She hugged herself. "We saw Stavros in a jeep once. It was horrible."

He'd better keep his shirt on, try to ease the information out of her. "What the devil is he doing in a snapshot with Claire?"

"Must have been that Sunday in spring. Lovely anemones, marvelous. Funny, really."

He shuffled the photos. "Where's the print?"

She frowned. "Stavros just sort of, you know, turned up out of nowhere."

He looked at the negative again. No flowers. No bloody meadow. "Hold it up to the light. That's the same background as in the other photo." Claire must've stashed the print or given it away. At least she had her clothes on.

Jane held the negative to the light. After a moment she turned red, and backed away. "Shit. I should've shredded this stupid thing."

So, she'd disposed of an earlier set of negatives. What about the corresponding prints? "This photo wasn't taken last spring."

Jane stroked her hair. "He wasn't with us on the beach. Honestly."

Had they been alone together that day in spring, he wanted to scream. He needed every goddamned detail. But wait. Stavros and Claire, or Stavros and Jane? He tapped the table with his pipe and said, "Claire must have met the bugger while we were in England."

Her lips trembled. "Why does it *matter*?"

Useless try. He brandished his pipe at her. "Jane, I've made up my mind. You're not to hang around with these scumbags any more." He raised both arms. "No arguing—that's final."

Her eyes swelled with tears. "Can I go now?"

"Give me the negative."

"No." Before he could get up, she rushed out with the negative and slammed a door. Claire's door. *And* she turned the key.

Jane was a dead ringer for her mother—not only Millie's looks, Millie's spirit. He slumped back into his chair. Ten years ago in Nyasaland, he'd waffled with the local big-shot Greek about greasing the wheels on NAAFI tenders. So the big-shot's sidekick fed him a hefty roll under a night-club table. First installment. But he chickened out. Good thing—that Greek

would have supplied the NAAFI with John the Baptist's entrails, let alone fucking pork carcasses, offal, or other shit du jour. He caught up with the underling next day, tried to return the cash. When the underling professed ignorance of any deal he panicked and flung the money at the man's feet. Bad thing. Worse, he threatened consequences. Official consequences.

When machete-swinging thugs crashed into their house, he'd greeted them sloshed. Millie resisted. At the cemetery, four-year-old Jane—witness to her mother's slaughter—held his hand, looked up into his eyes, and asked, "When is Mummy coming home?"

She'd long ago given up asking.

Right now, she was sobbing in Claire's room. He jumped to his feet, rushed into the bathroom and threw up.

Another swig of whiskey—that should do it. He flushed the toilet, returned to the kitchen and poured himself another drink.

He recalled the day he met Claire at Woolworth's in Kensington High Street and invited her out for a coffee. A miserably cold January evening five years after Nyasaland. When he had to escape the London drizzle and Jane's eyes. His urge for salted cashews had brought him to Claire's counter. She'd spun a yarn that she actually worked in the fashion department at Harrods, but was covering at Woolworth's for a sick friend. One-off Claire. Her manicured upper-crust accent had clinched his attraction—not a trace of cockney, except when she wanted to fit in with an earthy crowd in a pub. In colonial circles a wife with looks and effortless enunciation opened doors. Like Millie once had. But he'd replaced Millie with a vixen—a self-taught stiletto-heeled Eliza Doolittle with eyes like baited hooks.

When Claire padded barefoot through the door, he'd saturated the kitchen with blue haze and Jane's sobs had subsided.

“My, we’re drinking early,” Claire said. She dumped her shopping bag on the table, undid the buttons to her blouse, and removed her earrings. She pulled open the refrigerator door and said, “I need a shandy.”

He rattled the ice in his glass and fought back the impulse to strike out.

History had nearly repeated itself during his stint in Port Fouad. As it might now in Cyprus. Sunday evening, Sokratis Mavropoulos had picked up their tab in the Ledra Palace ballroom. “If you ever decide to leave the NAAFI,” Mavropoulos said, “I can offer you a good position.” More finesse than his Grecian counterpart in Nyasaland. Trust Claire to chirp in with a “Why not, Reggie?” Righty-ho. His worldwide NAAFI-command contacts would have been on sale as of yesterday. Naturally, along with Claire. A job lot.

He watched her mix beer and *gazeux*, the best compromise for lemonade. At least Cyprus beer had flavor—unlike its vinegary wine—good enough for a shandy anyway.

She turned to him and said, “I bumped into Alistair. Sterling old boy, as you’d say.”

McKay. Doubtless, McKay had sampled her working-class charms. Calm. Remain calm. “Sit down, Claire.”

She scraped a chair across the floor and sank into it.

He flicked a negative towards her. “Jane found you in one of these with your boyfriend.”

“Why is my room locked?”

“Don’t change the subject.”

She knocked back some shandy and smacked her lips. “Never could figure these out.”

Confess, bitch, confess.

But she plucked up the celluloid strip like a back-street card shark and rubbed it along the surface of the table.

“You’re not supposed to grease it up,” he said. “Hold the bloody thing properly.”

She rotated and inverted it in front of her eyes. "It's dark," she murmured.

"That's because it's a bloody negative," he shouted. "It's overexposed, like you."

"Keep your voice down."

"I've a good mind to give you a sound drubbing."

She slapped the negative onto the table and glared at him. "Try that once again, just once, and you're on your own, kiddo."

"Who's your latest Priapus?" he shouted.

She jumped up, bolted the kitchen door, and shut the window. "Keep your voice down."

He made a fist and whacked his temple. "We've exhausted the top-flight fuckers at the officers' mess and reduced ourselves to the dregs of the Cypriot barrel now, have we?"

She sidled behind him and rubbed his shoulders, as she always did when she wanted something. "Drink that whole bottle? Silly twerp. You know what happens when you drink."

He struggled to regain calm. "Why in sod's name are you in a photo with a criminal?"

"Every kid in Cyprus wants to be in a photo." She guffawed. "Let me take a gander."

Was that relief in her voice? "Jane has it."

"Well, there you are, then. You're so suspicious, Reggie, I'm quite flattered."

As she continued to work on his back, he struggled for composure. Where did Jane fit into this? Why had she absconded with Claire's negative? She had to be hovering by the bedroom door, listening. "Cypriots. Church-sponsored terrorists, the bloody lot."

"Oh, look. You've found my nail-clippers."

His pipe no longer soothed. "Jane's not to see her Christodoulos—or whatever his name is—or any other horny-toad Cypriot prick for that matter. That goes for you too."

"So, Reggie, if you feel so strongly, why are we living here, right in the middle of the locals? Let's move." She snatched his bottle of whiskey and took a swig.

An inflammatory act, calculated to rip through his strongest façade. Beer, okay, but whiskey drunk by a lady from the bottle? He snatched it from her grasp and smashed it on the floor. Brown fluid oozed over curved slivers of glass and splashed her bare feet.

She froze.

He fell to his knees, buried his face in her skirt, and sobbed. “Sometimes, I feel so lonely.”

“Don’t be so bloody *feeble*,” she said. “Get up.”

Every time he sobbed at Claire’s feet he swore he wouldn’t do it again. He pulled away and rushed back to the bathroom—to vomit whatever was left in his stomach.

As he spat the dregs of his vomit into the toilet bowl, he heard banging on a door. Claire yelled, “Would you open the door, luv?”

“Go away,” Jane shouted. “I can’t stand any more of your fighting.”

Claire rattled the bathroom door handle. “Reggie, order your daughter to open up.”

He grabbed a towel and wiped his mouth. “What’s the bloody harm?”

“There’s things I need.”

He heard Claire pounding her bedroom door. “Open up, damn it.”

“Go away,” Jane shouted.

“Leave her alone,” he said. God, if Jane but only realized that this country-club imposter, this human waste, had caused her mother’s death. He sank back to his knees, slipped his arms around the toilet bowl, and pressed his nose into the seat.

Claire continued pounding. “She can’t stay in there. It’s my room. Petulant, self-centered little minx.”

“If you try to come in, I’m going to scream and scream and *scream!*”

Chapter 21

The night sky saw Chris in his favorite place, on the roof. He lay on his back, above the kitchen door by the chicken coop, where the trees and trellised vines hid him from the neighbors and the street. The bunch of *veriko* grapes that he'd picked on his way up rested on his bare chest. He pinched a grape and let its juice trickle to his belly.

Rock'n'roll from Odysseas's record player drilled through the ceiling. The lyrics that blasted off neighboring walls and skittered along the tiles drowned the slamming of pots and pans. It had to have been the hundredth time that Little Richard had spotted Uncle John abandon "bald head Sally" and "duck back in the alley."

He held another grape over his mouth and squeezed the juice.

After Jane had dumped him, to catch a glimpse of her—to figure out some other opening—he'd kept an eye on her house. The morning he saw her father and Claire leave without her, he skipped school. He knocked on her door, put his ear to it, and called out her name. Thump. A body slumped against the door. From within, a little girl's voice seemed to rise up from the floor. "I won't share you. I just won't."

She'd change her mind if he touched her. He was sure. "Remember how we used to hold each other and hum the Barcarolle?"

She pounded the door with her fists. "Don't do that. I'm leaving."

"Please. Open. Please."

“And I never want to see you again.” Inside, something rolled along the floor and dinged into a wall. Sounded like a bottle. “I have a knife in my hand,” she said. “On the count of three, if you don’t leave, I’m going to do something horrid.”

Rejection. Her ultimate weapon. Poet Harry once said—the bugger had a word for everything—that when you’re in love your location determined you. Corollary: when love dumped you, your location turned to shit.

You didn’t have to die to find yourself in hell. After her parting line, he wouldn’t forgive her even if she dragged her blood-drenched body across a bed of razors.

Below him, another piano had been rolled onto Little Richard’s stage. The household keyboard. Odysseas was delivering a counter-rhythm—jackhammer staccato.

What would Rebecca say?

On the night he’d slept out the curfew on her sofa, he’d shared her space, breathed her air, and stirred to the same whispers. At daybreak, he’d heard her bustle about her bathroom. The moment her bedroom door closed, he sprang into the bathroom before its cocktail of steam and perfume had time to disperse.

“Good morning, handsome,” she’d said as he entered the kitchen. “Let’s see your hand.”

Made up to go out, she wore that turquoise dress she’d had on when they’d first met. Buttons down the front. Tight belt.

In silence, she unfurled the bandage. After she’d retied it, she continued to hold his hand, warming it in hers. Inches away, scant millimeters thick, her delicate wrap concealed . . . He imagined the twists, the stretches, and folds of her skin. As if over a sculpture, he felt for her nooks, skimmed her hollows, and slipped into her crevasses. Right then, in her kitchen, he should have popped open her buttons and taken her on the floor.

He'd secure her love if he were the world's greatest pianist. The world's greatest? Hardly keyboard-banger Little Richard. If his mother let Odysseas spin Long Tall Sally again he'd storm down and smash the record player.

If he wrote and played Franz Schubert, Rebecca would toss out her hang-ups. How would she put it? "I'll let you make love to me the moment your music escapes the bondage of the instrument." Bah, not sexy enough. "Want to possess me? Your musicality must transcend the evocative." Not much better. What then? He must become a master of melody, and whip off his Grand Sonata for Four Hands (Opus 1)—why start modestly? He'd dedicate his work to Rebecca—scribble love messages over it. Then they'd fuck themselves into oblivion.

The record player finally turned in for the night.

The trellis groaned. The vine's branches shook. When the trellis banged the eaves-trough, he broke off munching. Someone was scraping on all fours along the tiles towards him. Someone too heavy to be Odysseas.

He jerked upright. "Are you running from the police?"

Stavros slipped alongside, easing a haversack from his shoulders. "So, you still come here before you sleep?"

"Are they after you?"

"Relax. I sneaked home. Hey, Odysseas plays good."

He held out the grapes. "Do you have a codename?"

Stavros raised a finger to his lips, then took a grape. "Remember the nights we played hide-and-seek before you were brave enough for the roof? When I hid here, you never found me." He untied the straps of his haversack and pulled out a bundle wrapped in newspaper.

"Want some of my mother's chicken?"

EOKA's Colonel George Grivas—"Dhigenis"—had ten thousand pounds on his head.

What would Stavros be worth? "Do you train in the mountains?"

Stavros ripped off a mouthful of chicken. "You're the family genius, dear cousin. What about 'Welcome home, *Stavro*, it's good to see you'?"

Stavros spoke as if commenting on their last round of marbles. But the words stung.

"How's Jane?" Stavros asked.

"We broke up."

"Don't you tell her she's beautiful? That you love her? Maybe she has a boyfriend who tells her he loves her. No. Better stay away. She's too complicated." Stavros laughed, put down the chicken leg, and licked his fingers. "For sure, she thinks I'm a nobody. I wouldn't know what to say to her. Does she talk dirty to you?" He reached for his hip pocket, pulled a photo from his wallet, and laid it on the tiles. "Jane took this in the Paleomylos valley," he said and snapped on his cigarette lighter.

Jane's shot had captured Stavros and Claire head-on, standing. He imagined her, knee deep in a spring meadow, peering down into the box camera's viewfinder that she'd have held waist-level while the wind swept her hair across her cheeks. His gaze skipped from the orange shimmer in the photo's gloss to Claire's Lana Turner sulk. When he saw Stavros's which-of-these-honeys-should-I-sample-first leer, his fingers tightened around the edge of a tile.

Jane had chopped off Stavros's feet, but he'd be damned if she hadn't centered the bastard with Claire pushed off to one side. If Stavros's face could be trusted, photographer Jane might as well have had her panties around her ankles. Stavros must have spent those seconds in front of the camera figuring out how he could get between Jane's legs.

He remembered Jane telling him that she'd gone 'out Myrtou way' to look at the flowers, that Stavros had 'sort of' appeared. But she never mentioned 'sort of' photographing Stavros. A

picnic planned by Claire amongst the purple anemones? One day Jane had snapped this scene. The next she'd prattled about some trivia. What had there been to hide? Stavros, of course.

He scrunched his fingernails on the tile. He should wrench it free, swipe it across Stavros's mouth. Instead, his hand darted out. But like a matador anticipating a bull, Stavros dropped the cigarette lighter and snatched the photo from his grasp.

"Kill the bitches, right?" Stavros said as he tucked the photo back into his wallet and pocketed the lighter. "But watch out. That blue fire in Jane's eyes will blister you to death."

Jane belongs to me, you bastard! She's mine. "Father says the British are protecting us from the Turks." No. That's not what he wanted to say. "I want to do something for Cyprus." There. He'd spat it out.

"You're angry," Stavros said.

Was that triumph in Stavros's voice? But there was no back-pedaling. In March, a bomb in the prayer hall had cracked the school's piano. "I'll bomb my school."

"Tell me. Ever figured out what lies at the end of a rainbow? I always wished I could talk about clever things like you. Does Jane discuss sports? One day, I want to see Stanley Matthews kick a goal."

"A time bomb under the stage."

"Remember how we used to lie right here and stare at the stars? You were going to be an astronomer. What's it now? Engineer?"

"Stella works for EOKA."

Stavros wrapped the remains of the chicken bones back into the newspaper and stuffed the package back into the haversack. "You spend years sporting a fancy uniform to that swank English School so you can scrub grease from your fingernails?"

Jane thought like that too.

Jane. He'd better crawl back to her and grovel. He could smash down her door. Wrestle sense into her before she left. What sense? She knew he loved someone else. But what if Jane had fallen for Stavros? He would mangle the bastard's face. Then he'd strangle *her*.

Still, only one person knew he was a coward—Odysseas's rescuer. "Shut up. Have you met Dhigenis?"

Stavros raised his hand as if to hit him. "Family comes first."

"What did they do to Stella?"

"If family honor is violated . . ."

"Oh, God." Tears sprang to his eyes. "Was she raped?"

"Strike back but in a clever way. I don't try to be you. You don't try to be me."

"I'll kill someone important."

"Fucking idiot. You'll be caught and wasted. You think Aristotle would have approved a life for a life? No. Let the Japanese do kamikaze. You're Greek."

Frustrated, sobbing, he hammered Stavros's shoulder and said, "Stop tormenting me, you bastard. Just tell me what to do."

"Does a lawyer toss rocks in the street? Does a priest set a bomb under the Governor's bed? Be slick, go into politics. Remember when Kokos shot old Papanikolaou? I knew you'd been following me. I rode slowly so you could catch up. You didn't. I'd just pissed away three months in prison. For what? For denting a police car. You had plenty of time to suck up to me after they let me out. But you were ashamed to be seen with me. You know, before you figured out how brainy you were, you used to look up to me."

"I'll rig a bomb under Harry's car." Teacher Harry had suggested that a thought acted upon propelled the thinker onto the next plane. Right. He'd propel Harry to the next plane.

“Would you do something good if nobody would ever know? Could you do something bad if no one would find out? Like using a spade to slice an enemy to death?”

“Odysseas works for EOKA.”

“Hold your tongue.”

“I *will* do something.”

“You want to take the oath?”

Could Stavros—? He nodded, yes.

Stavros rose to his feet. “Get up. I’ll swear you in.”

As he rose, his heart hammered against his ribs. Would he swear the oath merely to gain Stavros’s approval? He’d be scorned forever if the truth about Odysseas’s rescue became known. Stavros was bound to come across the real rescuer.

This turn of events? Had to be Stavros’s retribution for disrespect.

“I swear in the name of the Holy Trinity . . .”

Quivering, he repeated, “I swear in the name of the Holy Trinity . . .”

When he’d finished, line by line, echoing the EOKA oath, Stavros squeezed his bandaged hand. “You are now a sworn-in member of EOKA. Your first assignment is to toss a grenade through the window of Jane’s house.”

What? At any moment, his heart would burst through his chest. Stavros had gone crazy. He licked his saliva. “But—”

Stavros clamped his arm in a vice. “No buts. You don’t get to choose your target. I say her father’s a spy. I have a grenade in my haversack. I’ll show you how to arm it. You’ll follow my orders.”

“Her father does paperwork. He’s just an accountant.”

“As you bring out the grenade, imagine that the English have just arrested *your* father and ripped out his fingernails like they did to that fag teacher from Limassol.”

The roof tipped. He started sliding into an abyss.

“The English beat me with sticks and bashed me with rifle-butts.” With one arm Stavros held him, with the other Stavros slashed him, backhand, across the face. One side, then the other, then another round. “Her father sleeps by an open window. You’ll fling the grenade into his bedroom.” Stavros slashed him again. “Are you paying attention to me?”

He tasted blood. He could duck. Roll off the roof. Would those knuckles ever stop?

“Where did Fivos hit you? Here?” Stavros hit him again.

Dear God, Stavros had cracked.

Stavros stopped pounding him and grabbed his shoulders. “Take the oath, and you’ll liquidate a policeman, a spy, or a traitor. Kill, like Karaolis, in front of witnesses, and the Governor will string you up in the execution shed, and dump you like a diseased pig into a hole in the prison yard. Your brain once impressed me. Your stupidity now terrifies me.”

He licked his lips. Blood.

Stavros raised his hand in threat. “If a comrade taps you on the shoulder, you say no. Absolutely, no.”

On the roof this September night, amid the yowls of dogs and the muffled squabbles from nearby houses, while sweat stung his eyes, and his face hurt like hell, he wondered—had Stavros implied that hanged hero, Michael Karaolis, had been stupid? Did Stavros admit to fighting amid stupid comrades?

Still in Stavros’s grip, a relative calm took hold of him—the world seemed like a better place. “That day you escaped from the police, I was with Claire and Jane. We all saw you. And Claire told Jane to keep her mouth shut. Claire’s your friend.”

For the longest while Stavros remained silent. "My house is being watched," he said at last, "and with my bosom cousins living here, this one will be too. I have to get out of here."

"What about my oath?"

Stavros waved his arm dismissively. "It's easier to hate an enemy than to love a friend. Right? Once you're an EOKA guerrilla there's no escape. You want to be a hero? Study."

Stavros hugged him, then sat down and lit a cigarette. "There's a nice breeze tonight. Go wash yourself. And get me soap, a razor, and a toothbrush. I'll take a fast shower in your garden. While you're down, ask Odysseas if he can spare his copy of *Ivanhoe*. Be quick. And bring some money."

He patted his bruised face. "What if I'm pushed to join?"

"Tell whoever to check with me."

"What will you do?"

Stavros reached out and touched him. "I'll find you, of course, and break your legs."

Would Stavros do anything, swear anything, betray anyone, just to delay him from joining EOKA? Did Stavros love him that much? What was the least painful way to break someone's legs?

Suddenly, Stavros lashed out at his shin.

He yelped.

"Now imagine what I can do with a car-jack."

Chapter 22

Something hard but not heavy rattled the verandah door and pitter-pattered down the slats.

Then silence.

Jane paused mid-sniffle and listened. Silence. Nausea. She buried her face in a soggy patch of pillow, but sleep denied its embrace. Was she lying on her elbow? Or was one of her fingers jabbing her tummy? Perhaps a rollover would help. No luck. The sheet was unyielding. Her head spun. Was it the booze? 'Don't be vague—ask for Haig'—Claire's full bottle of whiskey stood handy on the bedside table for frequent sips—straight up. This was how Claire spent her time here, boozing, making love to Stavros.

She willed herself back into her dream, her favorite dream.

*

Jane soared over the rooftops into Sir Trevor Trumpet's end-of-summer garden cocktail party. Hosted by Lady Lavinia under intertwined vines, sleeping serpents poised to uncoil, to whiplash those deadly British Civil Servants. Officers in uniform and gents in tuxedos argued the plusses of their first-class passage to Britain for the summer and the latest cricket scores from Lord's. Florid ladies in colonial dowdy one-upped each other with tales of their most mah-vellous side trips to Nice or Florence. A sprinkling of Chrysler-Dodge nouveau riche set off by a dash of Rover-Jaguar snooty. Beefy men with shapely escorts arrived in black Mercedes-Benz's—token Cypriot bourgeoisie. Five o'clock shadow hobnobbed with sun-seared tomato.

You are what you drive. Who had said that? Overhead she swooshed as high-heeled, perfume-trailing Claire steered a tray-bearing waiter reminiscent of Stavros towards the garden gate. There, two dour Cypriot policemen in khaki shorts and long socks stood guard. To hostess Lavinia's dismay, Claire offered them champagne. Back Claire wobbled, a glass of bubbly in high-thrust hand, and surrendered her plunging décolletage to a gaggle of jolly old chaps. The dapper brushed against her. The old sports wheezed. A windbag lassoed her. What a bore.

Where was Stavros? How she craved him.

But there stood Harry Lawrell—Chris's English teacher—to entertain with a reading. Words. Words. And wiggles. In a diary that rotted with a creepy-crawly alongside Claire's nail-clippers. Claire's revolting diary plastered with acronyms and a-muddle with o's and x's—right into October. Secret codes. The outline of a small heart followed two words penciled into a date in August, two simple words separated by a comma: 'Chris, starkers.'

Oh, when had two words ever hurt so?

A flash. Ecstasy. An electrical blackout. Was that Stavros's head up her dress? The heat, that fire. She squeezed her legs.

There was Stavros, arms spread out, sailing high above her in a pitch-dark heaven, peeping into her house through the open roof. She bobbed upwards, joined his flight path, reached out to touch him, but he floated away, a balloon on surf. She couldn't follow—her ankles were clamped. She tried to wrench them free, to kick, but the trap tightened.

She breast-stroked to remain aloft with him but her legs weighed her down. Abruptly she sank, but instead of drowning, surprise—she breathed freely, and fluttered in slow motion through the darkness to the verandah door of Claire's bedroom. She peeked in, and saw herself sprawled on her tummy in Claire's bed, rocking slowly. Her head rested sideways on the pillow. She looked back at herself. She was alone.

She willed Stavros to be with her. There he was, aloft but descending from the uncertain void like a feather. He floated over a wall, out of sight. She was losing control. She struggled to wake up.

*

Awake again? She heard that spattering and trickling.

Silence.

Not rain—this was the summer drought. Someone was tossing sand at the verandah door. I am awake, she thought.

Meowing cats vied for attention—strays the Simmons had unwittingly adopted the first time she placed fish scraps outside the kitchen door. Claws ripped wood. Felines hissed. Were they fighting over turf or over dinner? She heard the snap of a branch and the rustle of leaves as if someone had plucked a pomegranate from the tree. Something heavy whacked the ground. Something rolled. A clonk. A clatter. A cat's wail, indignant.

Then silence.

She held her breath, listening, muffling small snuffles against the pillow. She lay motionless, conscious of her nakedness under the sheet. Her right leg poked out, the other was twisted, caught in a knot. Her head, her underarms, were damp. Her knickers had been clammy—she'd kicked those off earlier.

The September chill snaked through the slats in the door, slid along the floor, and licked the sweat from her leg. She tucked her hand between her thighs and shivered.

“Psst,” a voice said.

It was a voice from her dream. She needn't be frightened.

But her temples throbbed, her eyeballs stung, and the ghastly taste of booze lingered. She didn't want to go for water, though—she'd have to unlock the bedroom door. Her dad might grab Claire's diary and the negative. Have another hairy fit. Instead, she could venture over the verandah wall, quench her thirst at the garden tap. Naked. But that would be naughty. She'd have to put on those gummy knickers. And, her palate would flare up the moment she flopped back into bed. How could Claire stand this Haig stuff?

She sucked her lips, sponged them with her tongue.

“Psst,” insisted the voice.

“Psst,” she said and tightened her legs around her hand.

The verandah door hinges squeaked. A bolt scraped the floor. She sensed the moonlight through her closed eyelids. She heard a smash. Howls. Desert jackals? No. Just dogs roaming the streets while the curfew restricted Greek boys to their homes.

Indefinable echoes, words of argument. More howls. A shout.

Was she still dreaming? No. She was awake. She reached for the bottle and took a mouthful. Horrid stuff.

A fingernail rasped the slats. “It's me.”

She opened an eye and peeked out. The moon's rays spread an apron of light across the floor. Funny, she could see light in her own dream.

Who was 'it's me'?

She should have cried out—woken up the household—but she didn't. Stavros's voice seemed natural, like that long-awaited predawn breeze in this torrid night, it soothed her. The pounding in her temples receded. The moonlight spilled over her leg. But its brilliance stung, the room turned upside down, and her tummy felt sick. She gripped the sheet and clamped her eyelids. She yearned to touch that voice.

A bump, and the bed's legs complained, the mattress rocked, the bedsprings twanged. A hand teased the sheet that clung to her waist.

She smelled something sweet. She struggled to remain awake . . .

*

. . . but found herself sucked into another dream, an unwanted recurrent dream where she ran away from home during the night. She skirted the house with a suitcase in hand—a large one stuffed with her belongings, yet it floated along beside her like a toy boat in the tub. Through her bedroom window, she watched two naked figures squirming in her bed.

That sweet smell, again. Figs?

Was it her dead mother, or Claire? The man—he father!—lifted his head. He'd sensed her presence. But she couldn't identify the woman—the woman's head was turned away. His look said 'Should I continue? Or should I run after you, fetch you back?' The woman's head turned. It was that horrid girl. Chris's girl. But she didn't have eyes, just hideous sockets.

Jane thrashed her legs, struggled to wake up.

*

"Are you awake?" he said.

A fleshy fruit—fresh, sickly fragrant—was pressed against her lips. She whimpered.

"Holy Mother," Stavros said.

She bit into the fig—instant medicine for her parched mouth—and grabbed him. His wrist. God, it felt hard. Her heart raced as if it were trying to escape her body.

"Holy Mother," Stavros said massaging her back. "But why are you crying?"

As her mind drifted, someone whispered (was it herself?), “Stavros. There’s a curfew. What are you *doing* here?”

It hadn’t been her father, or even Chris lying with that naked girl. It had been Stavros. Not Stavros. Please, not Stavros too.

“Jane,” Stavros said. “Jane.”

He pulled, but she held tight. “They’ll lock you up if the police catch you,” she said. “Did you bomb Sir Trevor’s party last night?”

“Wake up, wake up, you’re speaking nonsense. Who’s Trevor?”

She craved for this to be a dream, so she could submit, to permit herself to make love. “Shh,” she said. “Not so loud. You’ll wake me up.”

“I must go.”

She redoubled her grip. “No.”

“What do you want?”

She broke into quiet sobs. A fist clad in barbed wire was shredding her stomach. “I want you to stay, and tell me I’m beautiful.”

“What about Claire?”

She stopped sobbing. “I hate her.”

“What’s wrong? I know you and Christakis—”

“—Don’t you like me, Stavros?” She hooked her nails into his arm. “I want you to stay. Sleep with me.”

“No.”

“Then I’ll scream the house down and my father will break down the door.”

“Shh. Stop.”

“Love me, like you do with Claire.”

“I don't love Claire.”

Still holding him with all her strength, she yanked herself onto her side, and explored his face. She found his lips, and trailed a finger along the base of his nose, a finger that she'd jammed most of the night between her legs. “Kiss me,” she whispered.

“No. Please.”

She wet her finger. “I want you to kiss me,” she said pushing her finger into his mouth.

After the longest minute of her life, he leaned forwards. They kissed.

“All over,” she whispered and let go of him.

He put his hand on her hip. “Is the door locked?”

“Mmm.”

He ran his hand along her thigh.

“I'm caught in the sheet,” she whispered.

Chapter 23

It was October 31, 1956. Three days after *Ochi Day*, national holiday of Greece, the day in 1940 when Metaxas had said “No” to Mussolini.

A goat path sprinkled with droppings led to a sloping ledge at the top of the cliff beyond the caves of Kalopetria. From a point of vantage, village idiot or guerrilla alike could spot anyone who approached Kalopetria's cluster of white matchbox dwellings among the emerald cypresses—or enjoy the view of the coast.

Stavros sat on the roots of an olive tree. His Sten gun propped in a crotch of the tree, he reclined against one of its four trunks and listened to the radio. Barely two months had elapsed since he'd made love to Jane in Claire's bed.

Eyes shut, he imagined himself in an endless epic, the audience packed with students, those flashily dressed know-it-alls. Arms outstretched, swooning beauties vied for him—Errol Flynn swinging from a rope, sword in mouth, gun in hand, single-handedly beating back hordes of red-faced adversaries dressed in British uniforms. For stoning a police car, he'd spent three months in the Central Prison with fellow fighters—“detainees,” as the English called them. He'd been cursed, prodded, kicked. Whacked with canes. Bashed by rifle-butts. He'd been close by when *koumparoi* Demtriou and Karaolis were hanged.

He'd grown up with hand-me-downs, and still enjoyed that tattered copy of the Illustrated Classic *Ivanhoe* lying beside him. He wanted to read real books, but understanding books

without pictures wouldn't make "Pericles" a man. EOKA made him a man. Perhaps some day someone would write a book about him. A real book, the kind Christakis read.

In June, a go-between had handed his sister Stella a bundle of EOKA leaflets signed "Dhigenis." From her bicycle, Stella had tossed the leaflets onto people's front steps. An English patrol caught her and took turns giving her a pat-down. They checked her body. All of it. They smacked her and punched her. They twisted her arms behind her back, lifted her off her feet, and some motherfucker rammed his gun up her skirt.

He arrived home to his mother's wails of *mana mou*, *Panayia mou*. "If EOKA won't handle this," he'd vowed to Stella, "I'll handle it myself. I'll kill them all."

His mother fell to the floor and clung to his pants. "*Stavrouthi mou*, my baby, the English are executing *everyone*. Even if they only catch you holding a gun, you'll be hanged."

"I'll kill them all," he said.

Next day, nose-to-nose, she'd looked him in the eyes and in front of his father said, "I implore you, don't go. But if you join the national struggle and you betray a comrade, even under the cruelest torture, you must never return to my house. You will not be my son."

The radio blared, ". . . The Suez crisis intensified today when British and French forces launched massive air strikes on Egypt. They joined the offensive mounted by Israeli troops two days ago. The action by Britain and France follows yesterday's ultimatum, which was rejected by Egypt's strongman Gamal Abdel Nasser. Meanwhile, in the Hungarian uprising, . . ."

The bastards thought they owned the world. While the Canal distracted them, EOKA would hit their bases. The English army shipped off to Africa? Good. EOKA would strike fear into those that stayed behind. Their choice—go back to where they came from or die in Cyprus.

During the summer, he had trained in the Troödos Mountains under "Dhigenis," Cypriot-born Colonel Grivas. Proudly, because EOKA's pyramid restricted contact with the leader to a

select few, and Grivas favored intellectuals from good families—Cypriots who'd studied in Greece. He'd learned to make explosive charges and set time pencils. He blew up petrol dumps, electrical transformers, and power stations. He stole dynamite, planted mines, and set booby traps. The Archbishop's oratory cemented purpose, while Grivas's buzzwords and broadcasts from Athens fueled his devotion. He lived for the next opportunity for revenge. But he had an advantage over the English. He was willing to die.

He accepted Grivas's dictum that the enemy didn't always wear a uniform. After all, Grivas had led the famous Organization X (Greek letter 'chi') in Greece. Grivas supposedly resisted the Nazis. What troubled him were rumors that the career soldier, again propped up by the British, had slaughtered Greek communists in the Greek guerrilla war.

Now, backed by Archbishop Makarios, Colonel Grivas waged terror, and doubtless provided Egypt intelligence about the British bases in Cyprus. Christian Greeks in bed with Moslems—EOKA had no quarrel with Arabs, just with the Turkish lackeys of the English.

Stavros had never been to Greece. Or England. Manchester United, Division One champion—a team he must one day see in action.

“Ooweeyoo . . .” Crackles and pops. The signal was fading. He twiddled the radio's tuning knob. Like shutting the front door against a storm, the knob shushed the hiss “. . . rockin' all the—ooweeyoo—ain't nothin' but a . . .” Elvis Presley. The daily quota from the Forces Broadcasting Service—“Hound Dog” and crackles.

He read the name on the box and punched the ‘Akkord.’

“Turn it off.”

He hit the switch. A mustachioed, inky-eyed bugger loomed over him—Bambos Ioakim, EOKA area leader, codename “Hermes.”

Bambos spat at a goat, wiped his mouth with the back of his hand, and waved a piece of paper. “Dispatch from *Archehos* Grivas. A traitor is to be liquidated and you are to carry it out. I’ll be there to make sure you do it right.”

“When? Where?”

“Tomorrow. Nicosia General—”

“The hospital?”

“Part of the plan—our Black November campaign.”

Bambos had joined EOKA after failing a first year at Athens University. Inspired by reporter Nicos Georghiadis—alias Nicos Sampson—who arranged a killing and scooped pictures of it to the *Times of Cyprus*, shooting civilians merely titillated him. Liquidating a traitor brought on an erection. After their first mission together, in front of their comrades, Bambos tried to jerk off against his buttocks. An elbow to the solar plexus dislodged him.

Had they lived in Greece from ‘44 to ‘49 they’d have fought for opposite sides. He’d have served *Kapetan* Markos and earned his own *nom de guerre*. But, instead of enjoying life, he’d now be in hiding in Russia, or dead.

But the hospital? In broad daylight? A couple of hundred meters from Wolseley Barracks, Army Headquarters, where he once worked? Such executions were condemned, even by the Greeks. The Archbishop himself, from his exile in the Seychelles, denounced them—surely for form. He gestured at the radio. “Why not strike the English while their minds are on Egypt?”

“The *Archehos* has declared liquidation of traitors as essential to our sacred struggle. This is a righteous opportunity to exercise a national duty.”

“Who is it?”

“Hadjipavlou.”

According to the radio, a couple of days ago, while emerging from his law office, Stelios Hadjipavlou had been shot. "We already dealt with him."

"Obviously, he survived."

Right wing versus left wing. Like in soccer, right-wingers backed Apoel, left-wingers backed Omonia. Or perhaps a personal score being settled under the pretext of disposing of a traitor. There were "traitors" enough. They sprang up like cockroaches in an outhouse.

Bambos held out a photograph. "The prick identified people, plans, and hiding places. That paid for his new Chrysler."

A creased black-and-white photo—three men, three women in party attire. Standing. Smiling. Claire. Centered, in a low-cut dress. One arm held a wineglass in apparent toast to the photographer. The other she'd draped over a man's shoulders—obviously Hadjipavlou. From the look on his face, the lawyer was enjoying more than just her arm. Also in the picture, Claire's husband. The third man, on Hadjipavlou's other side, towered over the group. Familiar. Two dark women, one pretty, the other with stately hips . . . Which one was Hadjipavlou's wife?

"The tall guy next to Hadjipavlou? Alistair McKay, Hadjipavlou's contact. Speaks Greek. His time will come. The fat whore is Hadjipavlou's wife. The other whore is Armenian, Zaira Bebekian. She's got shape. Shape is all that matters in a whore, don't you think? She works for the Cyprus Broadcasting Service. Can you tell from those faces who fucks who?" Bambos whisked away the photo. "You know the other English?"

The bastard pretended he knew everyone by name except Claire and Reggie. "Simmons. They used to live in Ayios Pavlos. They're harmless."

"They'll be checked. If they get in the way—" Bambos's finger clicked an imaginary trigger. "My cock hardens every time I look at these cunts. You know the English one?"

He shrugged but felt sweat building on his brow. His wallet, the photograph, the one Jane had taken of him and Claire. Had Claire offered it to him out of fondness or to purge it from her set? Regardless, it would have to be destroyed.

“Hadjipavlou is still being treated,” Bambos said. “Our insider says the hospital may relocate him. We must finish him off before he leaves.”

“We can root him out any time.”

“Now we know exactly where he is.” Bambos puffed himself up. “I volunteered. And I offered you, because you know that area well.”

There'd be crowds. Women. Children. Cripples. His friends. Maybe his own mother. “Half the mother-fucking British Army is barracked across the park.”

“A riot will divert the police at the Paphos Gate station. Students will block the barracks.”

He would never admit weakness to Bambos. “Our inside man—?”

“—Will direct us. At the ward, guns will be handed us by EOKA girls.”

“Stella?”

“Of course. She's the—”

“Watch your mouth!”

“—best.”

As an EOKA courier, Stella not only carried messages between Grivas, district and cell leaders, she delivered weapons to assassination rendezvous, usually in a bag carried by hand, or concealed under her skirt. She repaid the English every time she moved a gun.

“EOKA fighters will monitor the crossroads by the bridge and at the museum. On our escape, they will warn us of roadblocks.” Bambos lit a cigarette stub. “Andreas will drive.”

A plaintiff meow. A black kitten was perched on the tree. For a few seconds, kitty seemed content to claw the branch. Another meow and it launched itself onto Bambos's head.

"Fuck the—" Bambos spat out his cigarette and ducked. The kitten slipped off his head and down the back of his neck. He tried to swipe it off.

The kitty wailed.

Bambos ripped it away and swung it at the tree. "Want to play with me, do you?"

The kitten's fur spat dust like a beaten carpet. A snap of its neck cut off the whimper. The next half-dozen slaps against the tree reduced kitty to a pelt that dangled from Bambos's fist. Bambos swung the carcass like a slingshot and pitched it at a goat.

Bambos once vowed he'd fuck Stella—that whore, as he'd referred to her before he realized whose sister she was.

Unfinished business, Bambos. Unfinished business.

According to gossip, Bambos had emptied a shotgun into his father's face after catching him in bed with one of his sisters. Indignant rage? Apparently not. A jealous rage. The family swore that an unknown trespasser had murdered Bambos's father.

Stavros lit a cigarette. "So, then, we'll have a few hours to reconnoiter the hospital."

"Those foreigners must understand they're never safe. Anywhere." Bambos pulled out the photo and studied it. "Maybe, when we burst in, they'll all be huddled around the traitor's bed. Make it really easy for you."

Chapter 24

In balaclava masks, toting Sten guns, Stavros, tracked by Bambos, stormed into the ward. He counted: one, two, three beds along on the left-hand side—according to the insider's instructions. A man in a white gown blocked the bedside. His back to the door, the man was talking to two women, one chubby—Hadjipavlou's wife—the other probably a nurse.

Stavros cast aside a medical cart. The man in white spun around. Bambos floored him. Hadjipavlou's visitors fell apart. Gun ready, Stavros wavered at the bed and stared at Hadjipavlou, bandaged, immobile. The traitor's eyes, gleaming black discs, screamed back in horror.

He fired a burst into Hadjipavlou's face. The traitor's head split open. Blood and brains splattered the wall, the floor, the wife. Pigswill. Women shrieked. For a moment, it seemed that the slop might backslash onto him.

He shut his eyes. He wasn't usually so close.

Bambos yanked him away.

Yelling, "Murderers, murderers," the doctor scrambled to his feet and lunged to block their exit. Bambos hurled the doctor into the bystanders.

As they dived through the doorway, someone slammed the door at him. His ankle, God. He stumbled and his gun snagged his mask. He freed the gun. The mask ripped.

"Out of the way," Bambos kept repeating. "Move, move."

In the corridor, they cut through the people. A tall man, red-haired, lifted a camera. Bambos slammed his gun across the man's arm, kept running. In moments, they reached the hospital entrance. Their maroon Ford Zodiac was belching blue smoke. Andreas, dripping sweat, clung to the steering wheel like a shipwreck survivor to a lifeboat.

Bambos jumped into the front seat, Stavros the back. They slammed the doors.

The motor coughed. English rubbish. He clenched his teeth. He'd strangle Andreas if the engine stalled—they'd spent all day tuning it. But they lurched forwards, tires wailing, as Andreas caught a crest of power.

An Army Land Rover. Approaching.

Out of the corner of his eye, two men in uniform—Harding's auxiliary police. Turks. They'd obviously grasped the situation but held back—martyrdom could wait for a better day. Turkish cowards. But the Turks must have spotted their masters. The Land Rover. No choice. The Turks shuffled toward the Ford. Restrained bravado.

Bambos pounded the dashboard with his machine gun and snarled, "Run them down." His gun hammered. Glass shattered.

Andreas swerved to avoid the Land Rover. Stavros braced. They slammed into a Turk. Slowing, the car threatened to stall as it thumped over the body, but the tires kept rolling. A thud and the tires screeched against the road.

Stavros peered back. The Land Rover had avoided the crowd and crashed into a line of street-vendor carts. The other Turk had dived headfirst into a parked truck. Bambos finished him off.

Then Bambos yelled, "Fuck your Christ," and fired through the rear window.

At the bridge an EOKA scout waved them west across the Pedieos River.

Stavros crouched into his seat and shut his eyes. The wind tore through the broken windscreen, glass showered him like confetti. Any moment now, his bowels would burst. His face. The Black November campaign had begun and they'd seen his face.

He tightened his grip on his gun.

Chapter 25

Up in Kalopetria, time passed pleasantly in Mikis's *kafeneion*. Toothless, mustachioed geezers tossed dice and hammered *tavli* boards with well-worn pieces. The mukhtar and village elders held forth amid the haze of cigarette smoke to peasants dressed in pleated baggy *vrakas*. On a shelf on a once whitewashed wall of the *kafeneion* sat a little radio. A frayed cord connected it to the lamp fixture that sprouted from the ceiling, a meter of dangling wire serving as antenna. On the opposite wall hung a creased black-and-white poster of Archbishop Makarios—an unpinned corner curling upward like a dried leaf. While the archbishop scowled, the radio blurted out Hellenic melodies.

The newspapers. The radio. Stavros knew what the British papers shouted. “Hospital Murders: Cypriot Bestiality,” “Hospital Atrocity: Three Dead,” “Nicosia Hospital Bloodbath.”

Turks took to the streets, protesting the deaths of their constables, smashing Greek-owned shops, setting fires. The Governor rejected appeals for deferments of the planned executions of EOKA fighters. The protests at the Nicosia Central Prison could be heard at the nearby Ledra Palace Hotel, no doubt interrupting small-talk over cocktails on notions of decency, morality, and the Cyprus question. A general strike was declared. Cyprus shut down for days.

The colonialists found a fresh opportunity to revile Colonel Grivas. Holed up somewhere in a secret cellar of a sympathizer's home, how would Grivas respond? Right now, Grivas must be jotting down more notes for his memoirs.

It was justified, moral, Stavros repeated to himself. Hadjipavlou had been a traitor. But those brains, that red porridge clinging to the hospital's wall still lingered.

He'd been recognized. But mysteriously, the police copies of his identity card photo and thumbprints had disappeared. And, word had it, when the authorities arrived at his home all pictures of him had vanished. "If you betray a comrade, even under the cruelest torture," his mother had said, "you must never return to my house." He would never see her again, except in secret. Not until EOKA won the struggle. Not until the British had been booted off Cyprus and Turks and traitors had paid for siding with them. Minimum.

The street had nicknamed him "Tiger." A label to taunt the foreign masters and their lackeys. The Organization had renamed him "Achilleas." Five thousand pounds, the price placed on his "terrorist" head. Enough for an informant to set himself up in the taxi business. One hooded Greek with a lust for cash could bring him down.

No matter whether he was involved or not, he'd now be blamed for other deeds. He needed to avoid popular areas by day, remain in hiding, but he couldn't avoid the Greek community altogether. After another spell in Father Panaretos's dank cellar, an unscheduled, and unwise visit to Kalopetria's *kafeneion* provided relief.

That was where he met Elena.

*

Elena glanced at the hodge-podge of weather-beaten humanity that attended Father Panaretos's service. Peasants in what passed for their Sunday best. Across the village square, that filthy *kafeneion* that a self-respecting moth wouldn't be caught in, didn't welcome a good half of this congregation. A woman could cook in the household, labor in the field and pray in the church.

She could stand beside her husband, wash his underwear and service his smelly cock in his bed. But she couldn't sit beside him in Mikis's miserable male sanctuary and drink coffee.

It wasn't to challenge tradition that Elena appeared in Kalopetria on a warm Sunday morning in November. Sokratis had played cards all night with cronies she couldn't abide and had harassed her awake at dawn. Fortunately, he hadn't managed to sustain his erection. She needed an escape, to daydream, perhaps even to offer a prayer.

Today, however, daydreaming about that muscle-bound young man she'd just spotted, sprawled in Mikis's coffee shop, took precedence over prayer. Church service over, she filed along with the devout and bade Father Panaretos *adio sas* at the church door. Huh. That homosexual, throwing a lady that extra twinkle to appear normal.

Well, there he was, basking in the long shadow of the square, as at home in the acknowledgement of passersby as was the church dome in the sun's glow. He'd turned his chair back-to-front, his boots hooked around the legs, his arms braced on the chair-back.

She noticed that he'd pushed his chair further into the square. His lips formed a silent whistle, obviously designed to catch her eye. In the remote possibility she hadn't noticed him, he swaggered to his feet, moved forward two steps and bowed.

It was *she* who'd kindled the boy's desire, not these dumpy, black-clad village women. *Her* gait. *Her* curves. Curves that her new Chanel-style suit wouldn't conceal.

"Who is he?" she asked taxi-driver Nikos, as old Nikos carved a honking gully through the Sunday throng. Thank God, Sokratis's loyal hack, Dimitris, had his day off. She couldn't have admitted such interest to him.

"I don't know him, madam."

"Was that the man they call Tiger?"

"Please don't ask me such questions."

“Then I’ll ask Father Panaretos.”

“Excuse me, madam, the punishment for betrayal is death.” He honked at a pack of dogs.
“Even for priests.”

A priest gunned down in his church? It happened.

Once they’d left the village, she relaxed back into her seat, opened her handbag and pulled out her compact. Snap. A peek at one side of her face, a peek at the other, and a lift of the chin. And, of course, that essential pout. Yes, she was still a fascinating woman. And experienced. Young men appreciated experience.

She’d perfected her skills for soliciting an occasional lover from whom else, but Sokratis. She followed his three maxims of all delicate transactions: use intermediaries, shield yourself from rejection, and practice deniability. A man’s infidelity was tolerated, more often than not by his spouse, certainly by other men—but only when their own wives weren’t involved. And Sokratis still frequented cabarets for fresh talent. After all, that was how he’d made *her* acquaintance, his once desirable Elena.

Quiescence, ciao, ciao, or should she say, bye-bye. Madness lived. She’d heard of the man they called Tiger, the man who could shut Cyprus down.

“*Nikolaki mou*, arrange it,” she said. “I will meet him tomorrow at three.”

Chapter 26

Alistair McKay looked out of the window of Café Viennois towards the Metaxas Square approach to Ledra Street. He turned back to Zaira, busy spooning the whipped cream overflowing her cup of *Kafe mit Schlag*. “One night he has a bullet removed,” he said. “Next day his brains are spattered like a ruddy Jackson Pollock.”

Zaira put down her spoon and reached for his hand. “I’m frightened, Alistair. Those terrorists might have identified you.”

He glanced at his cast. *He’d* identified one of *them*, the one whose mask had ripped. Claire’s lover. He knew, even before the newspapers splashed it on their front pages. Stavros Ikonis. Months ago, he’d seen Claire and Ikonis, minutes apart, come and go from Gitty’s shop. Politically innocent? Who knew? Perhaps he should have told Reggie. He’d put sidekick Blotchet on the case. For a while, to keep tabs on Ikonis, all Blotchet had to do was to keep tabs on Claire. That was, until her fling seemed to have ended. Maybe Ikonis had suspected the tail. Maybe Blotchet had mucked up.

She turned to the window. “Look. Those children on bicycles? I’m sure they’re following me.”

She was fishing. “If they want me,” he said, “all they have to do is follow news events. I’m bound to be there. This time, with my new camera. In Cyprus, a six-foot Scot with red hair stands out like a fox in a chicken coop.”

When they left Café Viennois, they headed to Ledra Street.

Jock m' boy, tying the knot isn't for you. Yet, this Armenian beauty could charm anyone. His mother would love her.

He licked her ear.

"Not in the street," she said with a shiver. "I'm still a Cypriot."

"I don't care."

The State Express 555 cigarette advertisement loomed from its rooftop scaffold across the street. A well-placed stick of dynamite up there . . . "The weather's fantastic, like midsummer in Scotland, and it's your birthday."

As they turned left, Zaira squeezed his arm.

It infuriated him that he'd recognized killer Stavros at the hospital and that he'd likely be remembered in turn. He'd locked sight with the fanatic while the second piece of shit smashed his arm. A right balls-up. His cover in tatters. If those terrorists knew—if Zaira knew—he'd been point man on the Hadjipavlou assignment . . . Pretty soon he'd have to leave Cyprus, cool down, report to Whitehall. Onward. A new mission. He'd told Zaira about leaving, but couldn't tell her for how long. He'd spill it to her later, after her birthday, and assure her he'd be back for her. Or send for her. Bring her home. He scanned the street and the tops of the buildings, casually so that she wouldn't be alarmed. He felt undressed without a gun, but his flimsy flannels and shirt offered scant concealment. Besides, she'd ask why a photojournalist needed a weapon. Those rag-tags had merged with the crowds. Gone. He wouldn't need his gun today.

"There's this onyx cameo in Gulbenkian's," he said. "It reminds me of you."

"You spoil me shamelessly."

They window-shopped their way along Ledra Street, joining the stream of one-way traffic that crawled towards the center of Nicosia. He flicked glances in all directions. As they

neared Gulbenkian's jewelry shop, he spotted Claire across the street, at the entrance to Gitty's boutique. Blotchet had better be on the beat this time. What was Claire up to?

He turned back to Zaira, who'd started to peer into Gulbenkian's window. "You go inside," he said. "I'll follow you in a moment." He tried to look sheepish. "Aye, a fag."

"I'll wait with you," Zaira said.

He was onto his third puff when Claire emerged from Gitty's with a parcel. How'd an old blimp like Reggie ever land that bitch? Drat. She'd spotted him. Where the devil was Blotchet? He'd told him to stick to her like shit to a blanket.

Claire carved a swath through the traffic with outstretched hand and reached out as if to touch him. "What *have* you done to your arm?"

Your fucking boyfriend did it, he wanted to say. "I was unlucky enough to be in the way when EOKA killed Stelios Hadjipavlou."

She flinched and pulled back her hand. "Frightfully sorry." She let her words hang for a moment as if thinking of what to say next, then reached for his shoulder. "Poor Stelios, butchered in hospital by those cowards. Dreadful."

She actually seemed sincere. Perhaps she'd ditched her lover-boy after all. If she hadn't, she'd better. If Ikonis the Tiger tried to see her one last time, they'd bag him. Shove him in the zoo. Rip out his claws.

She reached out again, cupped her hand over his shoulder, but turned to Zaira. "Aren't you nervous here in town, luv?" She glanced at him for a moment and dropped her hand. "Do bring her to our new place in Limassol. Or come alone, luv. I'm so envious of your shiny hair, your musical name, and this highland charmer here."

Although she appeared tired she couldn't seem to resist a peek at her reflection in Gulbenkian's window. A moment to take stock of how her bra pushed out her dress or just to compare her hairdo with Zaira's. Probably both.

"Must rush to Spinney's and fetch Jane," Claire said. "This little street, the whole of Nicosia if you ask me, gives me the willies. What with curfews, shootings, and that Mason-Dixon wall of barbed wire down there, I don't come here much any more. Cheerio."

They watched her surge against the one-way rumble of traffic towards Metaxas Square. Wolf-whistles marked her wake. As she squeezed between a taxi and a cyclist, the taxi-driver's arm managed to skim her hips.

They turned back to the watchmaker's window.

MI would be questioning her before the day was over. Blotchet had better be on her tail. But Blotchet couldn't trail her and have Gitty's entrance under surveillance at the same time. What if Ikonis swaggered out that door? He'd have to abandon Zaira, get word to HQ, and follow the beggar. Not on Zaira's birthday, though. They didn't pay him enough for that. Blotchet had better see to it—set the bait (Claire) and reel Stavros in.

Good thing he'd kept his powder dry. He might yet have to oversee her and her boyfriend's interrogation.

He tried to focus on the display of cameos. He let go of Zaira's hand and shaded his eyes against the reflections in the glass window. He saw the sparkle of Ara Gulbenkian's gold tooth. Why wasn't Ara smiling, beckoning them in? Ara looked ill. Instantly he knew. A second glint in Ara's window flashed into the corner of his eye. Inches away, a pistol leveled at his head.

The arm that held the gun was attached to a masked man. Jesus, they were quick. One moment peace, the next, havoc. He ducked. At the same time, his hand shot back to where he imagined Zaira's shoulder would be, to drag her to the ground. He missed, grabbed a handful of

her dress and the strap of her handbag. She lost her balance, resisted his pull. Her dress shredded but she remained upright. He fell.

Two pistol shots.

As the shots echoed between the shop-fronts, pain. His knee and his bad arm had taken his weight. He lay sprawled. The gunman had missed him, thank God. He spun over, looked for Zaira. She was teetering. The bullets had opened a gash in her face. She collapsed. Her face disappeared under a flurry of hair as her head whacked the ground.

That thump. Oh God. As he scratched his way towards her he heard yells and heels and boots on the asphalt. Cockney voices. Help had arrived. Soldiers. He heard the crackle of rifle fire. As he heaved himself across Zaira's body, he thought he heard the gunman return fire. Pistol shots. "An ambulance," he shouted, "get an ambulance." He looked up, but snapped his head back down. The sky was raining roof tiles. Bottles. Stones. Bouncing off cars, skittering across the asphalt. Something hammered his back and cut into his legs. Rifles fired. Now a lull. He braced himself. The buggers on the bloody rooftops. Those boys. They'd be taking aim. Here they come again.

As the staccato of glass, rock and knife-edged clay pounded him, he screamed.

Beneath him, Zaira lay still.

Chapter 27

The blue-and-white checkered tables in Nicosia's Taverna Kypros sat empty as usual. A bird frolicked in a cage, while a cat watched.

Sokratis rose to greet his lunch date. Tardy by five minutes. Not bad. One minute late would have betrayed eagerness. "Welcome, my dear," he said.

Claire placed her handbag on the table, looked over at the cat, and rubbed her hands. "Brrr. It was nippy out there this morning—I'm not dressed for November."

No kidding. She sported a wisteria-colored dress befitting a September garden party. Contour-clinging, semi-transparent silk. Pity the first deluge of the season hadn't yet arrived and tested its load on her body while she dashed from her car to his table. Anyway, the cat didn't object to her attire. So why should he? He snapped his fingers at Loizos. He'd ordered the proprietor not to gawk, to respond only to command, and not to embarrass him by slobbering over his guest. "White wine—French. Your best." He ushered her into a chair. "This Cyprus stuff—it's like vinegar, but improving, they say."

She pulled a packet of Craven A's from her handbag and placed it on the table.

He'd been looking forward to meeting her ever since her "Why not, Reggie?" when he'd propositioned her husband to work for him. And Yannakis didn't have to be marshaled into landing this delectable import—she'd landed in his net of her own volition.

“One day,” he said, “we’ll have the finest claret . . . Did you know I ship wines and spirits everywhere? I’ll send a case to your family for Christmas.”

She twirled a cigarette between her fingers. “Actually,” she said as Loizos returned with a bottle of Chablis and wiped off the summer dust, “could I trouble you for a red?”

A posh accent, a little too posh—the butler’s daughter, tops. He gave her a blank look. “Of course.”

He flicked his gaze at Loizos, who swiveled and headed back to the kitchen. Had that been a trace of mirth on Loizos’s lips? He turned back to Claire. She appeared drawn, more somber than he remembered her from the Ledra Palace ballroom. Daylight’s revenge on her complexion? Perhaps. Ah, cigarette in mouth. He obliged her and lit his own. As she pulled out her cigarette to exhale, her hand shook. Her deportment didn’t speak of a housebound wife’s weekday blues. It spoke of anxiety.

He would remain detached, casual—a must for opening an interrogation. “I’m sorry to hear about your friends on Ledra Street.”

She shivered. “I left them just moments earlier.”

Second rule. Benchmark the truth by seeding the discussion with questions the answers to which you already know. “What was the name of that unfortunate young woman?”

“Zaira. You met her at the Ledra Palace.”

Of course he remembered the Sunday, the afternoon as well as the evening. Elena had insisted on being taken to the dinner-dance. Where better in Nicosia than a ballroom whose walls depicted gondoliers and Venice in the moonlight? Elena had pressed her case by smashing dishes. Expensive ones.

As he tested the Bordeaux that Loizos had placed before him, he wondered whether Claire's arsenal also included dish-smashing. Rule number three—hint that her secret was out anyway. "Rumor has it that the Englishman was the target."

She frowned behind a cloud of cigarette smoke. "Who cares? You Cypriots randomly shoot people in the back anyway. Women included."

"Take heed, Claire. Mr. Alistair McKay will surely be struck again."

"And that poor Stelios."

He could hardly explain that Hadjipavlou, apparently culpable of dipping a greedy mitt into the British purse, also leaned politically too far left of center. That in today's politics, right-wing Hellenism tipped the balance of prudence for Greek Cypriots. And that when clandestine initiatives required a payoff, a Hellenist should better be caught giving than receiving. "Yes," he said, "dreadful. Hadjipavlou was a good lawyer, with a dear wife."

She alternated between cigarette and wine.

She sought a favor, certainly. Maybe she'd tried but couldn't deliver him her NAAFI husband. Perhaps she wanted the dullard executed—with his EOKA contacts an easy matter to arrange. Clean. Arms length. Reggie could be the victim of one of those "random" shootings in the back, if he hadn't already pissed himself into extinction.

Perhaps a merchant had cheated her. That, Yannakis could handle. Perhaps an official needed a bribe. Yes, she needed money—women wanted either romance or money. Always.

She pressed her wineglass to her lips. "I need money."

To give her Reggie a nudge? "May I ask what for?"

"Does it matter?"

Most surely, dear lady, if it smacks of disadvantage to yours truly. "Why can't you get the funds from your worthy husband?"

“I need money for an abortion.”

“I see.” He rattled his bracelet. A gold bracelet that *dangled* from the wrist bespoke the owner's wealth—that he could afford those extra links. Well, she'd disclosed this much without a struggle. And he could think of several ways she could earn sufficient funds for an abortion, ordering Loizos to lock up and get lost for an hour being a start. “And he's unaware of—”

“—And I want to keep it that way.”

Right. She had a husband with a near-lethal lack of imagination. But one, nevertheless, who had contacts in the British Empire. Over a beer or whatever or wherever, Reggie and Claire could ferret out and cultivate the hungriest NAAFI decision-makers. Take time. Close the deals. Claire's role—exercise any required imagination. The arrangement? For starters, a line of credit in Reggie's name.

Exclusive supplier to the British forces stationed in the Middle East? That rang well. “*Sheftalia*,” he said to Loizos, without relinquishing eye contact. “Two orders—”

“Just a salad for me,” she said.

“It's the best *sheftalia* in Nicosia and he makes it with his own hands.”

She turned up her nose. “That stuff wrapped in sheep's gut? I'll stick with a salad.”

“*Mia salata*,” he said to Loizos.

“And don't flood it with oil,” she said.

Loizos didn't blink. “*Amesos*—right away, madam.”

Gifts fueled deals. Expected by subordinates, by partners, by rivals even. Required by officials. Demanded by lovers. “An abortion can be arranged.”

“Not in Cyprus. Israel.”

He smiled. “My physician is a good friend. I've arranged many favors for him.”

“No strings, mind you.”

No strings? She had to be joking. “My dear, life swarms with strings which we spawn like tadpoles.”

“Is that your”—she paused—“delicate way of proposing sex with me?”

Strings that spawn? Damn it. Awkward English. “This abortion is for you?”

She glanced around. The only eavesdroppers were the bird and the cat, and they had more compelling issues to focus upon. “For my stepdaughter.”

“And Reggie—?”

“He’s Catholic, for Christ’s sake. Besides, Jane’s unstable.”

He jiggled his bracelet. “And you cannot look after . . .?”

“Out of the question.”

He sipped from his glass. “Jane was a virgin? The boy, Greek?” He sighed. “Ah, to be young again. Does the boy know about her condition?”

“Never. She shuns *all* boys.”

He leaned back and whistled. “The candidates.” He paused. “Are they of good family?”

She nodded.

He placed the glass back on the table. “So, for you and Jane—I hope to meet her one day, even if she’s only half as charming as you—flight tickets. Destination Tel Aviv. A few days, is that all you’ll need?”

“Yes.”

“But what if I can persuade you to have her deliver the baby—”

“—It would ruin her. Not to mention Reggie going off the deep end.”

“A family I have in mind, a fine family with ample resources, will adopt a baby of impeccable heritage”

“God help me—”

“We Greeks have a strong tradition under such circumstances. We’ll spirit her off to a village in the mountains. Full discretion.”

He felt distress from deep in his belly, something he thought he’d long grown out of—stomach butterflies. Elena would have a baby after all. So would he. “Who is the likely father? Before you answer, you should know that for me to find out is a simple matter.”

“Christakis Ikonis”—she hesitated as if reconsidering—“mind you, at just about the right time, she met your godson. Calls him *Hercule*. Quite swept her off her feet.”

It was his turn to be stung by surprise. *His* Irakles a candidate? Perhaps Claire or that stepdaughter of hers had met Irakles through Olympia. Doubtless, some bloody charitable event. Did Olympia have a part in this proposal for an out-of-country abortion? Implausible. Olympia wouldn’t countenance an abortion, less so if her son *had* knocked up the girl. *And* she’d have been in touch by now. If Irakles bore responsibility, for sure Olympia didn’t know.

Claire stubbed out her cigarette, picked up her fork and speared a tomato.

Smooth bitch, shamelessly prospecting her way into his life. She’d connived this abortion stuff knowing he wouldn’t go for it, slipped in Irakles’s name. “This Christakis. Is he related to Stavros Ikonis, the EOKA man who is said to have executed Hadjipavlou?”

She stopped cold, abruptly on the verge of tears. Real tears. She took a hankie from her handbag and dabbed at her face. “I was flabbergasted.”

Good. He’d trumped her. “They say that when the authorities came to his home all pictures of him had disappeared. His identity card photo on file was of poor quality. Even that had disappeared.” Clearly an inside job—EOKA reached deep into police ranks. “Tell me, did you know Stavros, the man nicknamed Tiger, or perhaps, would your Jane have known him?”

Chapter 28

“The Germans knew how to handle those scum-of-the-earth Christ killers,” Bambos said.

“Communist motherfuckers and Jews. I’d round up what’s left of them and finish the job.”

“*Arhegos* Grivas is for sure anticommunist,” Andreas said. “But he’s also anti-German. Doesn’t he call Governor Harding an English Hitler?”

And, Stavros thought, as he trudged along, Colonel Grivas called on the British soldiers to disobey their officers, to stop implementing the abominable methods of Hitler and Mussolini. But a thought burned inside him—that during the War the Germans had supplied Grivas with weapons to kill fellow Greeks, communist Greeks.

This had been a rainless autumn. The masters of Cyprus had replaced their governor. Truce followed strike, rhetoric explained reprisal, peace plan followed riot, allegation led to denial. All politics. Inevitably, ambush and sabotage invited arrest and torture. And hooded traitors still betrayed EOKA comrades—not all Greeks were ready to die for freedom.

Tasos spat out his cigarette stub. “Every watchmaker is Armenian. They say they’re worse than Jews.”

“The reward for Grivas is ten thousand pounds,” Andreas said. “The poster says he has a Hitler-like moustache, and the picture shows it. Is it true?”

“Propaganda,” Stavros said.

He recalled paradise, the perennial streams of Troödos's Solea and Marathassa valleys, whose lower reaches were filled with poplars and orchards. Paradise. And remote. Where he'd first met Grivas. Ten thousand pounds? No, the English would never catch the Cypriot hero with the beret and goat-herder's moustache, even if they offered ten times ten thousand.

Threading single file along the goat-track, the six guerrillas crested the Pentadaktylos range above Bellapais—Bambos in front, then Fivos, Andreas, Tasos, and Stavros. Kokos led the donkey at the back. The donkey's load creaked—picks and shovels so that Bambos, Fivos, and Kokos could dig a hideout after the group split; jugs, straw sleeping mats, and wooden boards; and fuses, detonators, and dynamite pilfered from a mine, plus a land-mine and a small cannon, both homemade. The men carried machine guns, rifles, and hand grenades—some also homemade, Stavros thought with pride—the rest looted from a police armory.

A stone. Stavros teased it along the track and booted it into the void.

“Armenians are Christian,” Kokos said. “Aren't they?”

Kokos proved more useful sexually servicing would-be guerrillas huddled in dank caves for endless daylight hours than in combat. Fortunately, Kokos had failed to kill old Papanikolaou. But Bambos wouldn't fail to shoot his load into Kokos's arse that night. Poor Kokos. Same age as cousin Odysseas, Kokos would break early under torture. Bambos would have to kill him.

Stomach butterflies spiked before combat, but Stavros had learned to mask them. Wine helped. When Tasos broke step to snort out his nostrils, he elbowed him along. “Don't you ever wash, you bastard? You stink like a pig.”

“*Re Andrea*, keep moving,” Tasos said. “There's a stone in my boot. My foot hurts when you slow down.”

“Mine would hurt when I sped up,” Andreas said.

The donkey was wise to be silent.

He used to announce himself at Claire's house by tossing pebbles at her verandah door. If she'd want him to leave she'd shout, "Vamoose, you bloody strays." The night he'd spent with Jane in Claire's bed, Jane's father must have been at home. And Claire? Toss a grenade into Reggie's bedroom, he'd baited Christakis with earlier that evening. That night of all nights, if Claire had been with her Reggie, she'd have copped it too.

The first time he'd filled Jane, he'd worried—she might still have screamed the house down. He'd filled her again. When she went limp, he left her bed, put on his pants. She'd seemed confused, as if something had drained away. What did a virgin expect on her first night? It was done and couldn't be undone.

"Talk me to sleep," she'd said rolling onto her side away from him. But about what? He knelt on the floor, put his arm on her shoulder, and asked if she'd read *Ivanhoe*. "I'm your Lady Rowena," she murmured. Moments later, she dropped off, muttering, "Claire will go berserk."

A cloudy dusk blanketed their trek through the brown landscape. The tinkle of sheep bells faded as flocks converged on their villages. Far below, sparse traffic blinked in the Mesaoria plain. He was but an ant struggling up a sand hill. He pushed himself to remember Elena—her flesh, her perfume, her bed. But Jane wasn't easily dismissed. He loved her, the way a nice boy like Christakis could never understand.

They'd refresh at a shepherd's rest on the upper reaches of the Pentadaktylos near Buffavento Castle. They'd dine on bread, olives, *halloumi* and *kaskavalli*, and okes of wine. Many okes. Well, he could dream.

Hadjipavlou's execution hadn't turned into the debacle he'd feared. Whether that act alone would have turned Claire against him he might never know. After his deflowering of Jane, Claire had refused to see him.

“We do a final job together,” Bambos said. “Then we separate.”

Another ambush. Someone's unlucky night.

*

As the Land Rover juddered over a ridge, pain blazed up Alistair's spine and into his gammy arm. At least it dampened his thoughts of Zaira's death.

“Cut the juice, Ed,” Spike said. “These friggin' rocks are scrunchin' me bollocks.”

Edwin chuckled. “This ruddy nest of dog tracks hardly pricks the landscape. It's hard to tell a riverbed from a road.”

Alistair patted his camera bag. “Main thing is, I got some good shots today.”

“We're in a friggin' stream,” Spike said.

“Just watch for those edges,” Alistair said. “This bloody landscape is terraced.” He glanced over his shoulder at Phillipos, their eight-year-old passenger, who perched opposite Spike on the bench over a wheel-well. “You okay there, laddie? Chin up.”

“Yes, sir, okay, sir,” Phillipos said.

The kid had started to cheer up, and looked as if he wouldn't forget to gloat to his sister about his jeep ride with the English soldiers. His mean sister, he'd explained, had made him run away during his family's outing to Buffavento Castle. His parents had flagged them down, begged them find their son. So, okay. God knew, goodwill was necessary in Cyprus. They'd caught up with Phillipos and coaxed him on board. Moments later their Land Rover belly-flopped off the bank of a stream onto a mound of rocks. More time killed. For sure that family would violate tonight's curfew.

“What's your sister's name?” Alistair asked in Greek.

“Xenia, sir.”

“One of me mates got wasted on Murder Mile,” Spike said, “like I ‘eard your fiancée was, sir. If you ask me—”

“—Spike,” Edwin said, “an eight-year-old runaway hardly counts as an EOKA sympathizer.”

“We friggin’ got stuck back there looking for the friggin’ brat,” Spike said. “Now we’re friggin’ searching for his friggin’ folks.”

“Makes sense,” Alistair said, “that the lad’s family wait where they last saw him. If we don’t find them there we’ll drop the kid off at Ayios Chrysostomos Monastery.”

“If I may be permitted, sir,” Edwin said, “Those foreign names roll off your tongue well.”

As their bone-rattler heaved over stones the size of footballs and weaved around segments of mountainside washed out by winter storms, he imagined Buffavento Castle cutting into the evening sky hundreds of feet above them, a crow’s nest from which he’d shot surveillance photos with his new telephoto lens.

Lieutenant Edwin Brackett, old school tie—top drawer—in the driver’s seat tonight. Now lording it over working-class, National Serviceman Spike Meager. Spike (probably twenty-one) was a London Teddy boy, hair shorn for call up. He’d arrived in Cyprus as things heated up—thrust into a conflict, usually at the wrong end of “stone-frowin’ wogs”—counting the hours to his discharge.

Brackett and Meager. His escorts. On Her Majesty’s Service.

Apparently, Spike had boasted to having “frigged wiv’ mah rifle”—by accident, of course—“of a right bit of Cypriot cracklin’.”

Likely, that was Stella Ikonis, Stavros’s sister, who’d spat in his face when he came across her just after the patrol had finished with her.

*

As Mehmet yanked the van into a higher gear, Fulya felt for his ledger, which was jammed on the seat under her behind. She dislodged it and let it slip to the floor between her shoes. She glanced at him. He usually cleared the passenger seat before she jumped in. She wrestled with the crank of her window and rolled it up.

Her thoughts drifted to Irakles's letter, deep inside her satchel, sandwiched between slices of her music like a pearl in an oyster. She closed her eyes, imagined opening his letter, falling in love with his handwriting. She hugged the satchel as she replayed Chris's wacky entrance at Miss Ouzanian's in the remaining moments of her lesson. Miss Ouzanian had opened her mouth as if to castigate him but changed it to a sigh as Fulya sprang to her feet, grabbed the letter he'd thrust at her and kissed his cheek. As he backed away, he flung Miss Ouzanian a look—a look that seemed like a 'Let me be clear, Miss Ouzanian, this had to be done, somehow.' Whereupon, Miss Ouzanian turned her attention back to the piano and, as if nothing had happened, resumed annotating the music with an interpretation of the composer's passion.

With her eyes focused on the side of Mehmet's face, she fumbled inside her satchel. The pencil case, her diary, . . . the letter—thick, not the first letter she'd ever received from a boy, just the first she'd ever wanted to receive. Would she get to read it before they arrived home?

Mehmet stopped for petrol.

The instant his door-handle creaked, she stole the envelope out of her satchel and let it rest in her lap. She looked at its blue, semitransparent face, bordered by blue stripes. She turned it over. It was unmarked except for a printed 'airmail' and, centered on the front, the letter F handwritten calligraphy-style in blue ink. She ran her fingers over its crackly surface. Then, peeking up to make sure she was unobserved, she lifted it to her nose. She groped in her satchel for her nail file and slit the flap. Within the sheets she found a pencil sketch. One portrayed a young man. The inscription read "Self-Portrait, *Iraklé* '56." She stroked the sheet. On the other

side was a picture of a young woman, lips shut but with a wisp of a smile. She tightened her grip on the sheet in surprise. It was her portrait.

The letter was in English.

Her eyes struggled against the evening gloom to make out the words.

“Dear Fulya, This is my hundredth letter to you, but it’s the one you’ll see first. I wrote ninety in my head—the next nine I tore up. I hope you like my drawing. It’s from memory, and may be a bit off.”

The handwriting was firm, legible, with a forward slant; each page numbered; top right-hand corner; both sides used. She glanced up. Mehmet was arguing with a station attendant.

“My brain was a blancmange (you know, a kind of custard) until I heard from Chris that I could write to you (I do envy him getting to see you every week). It’s the first time I felt sorry to leave Cyprus. Traveling deck class meant I couldn’t get to the ship’s bow to watch porpoises race ahead of the ship. Instead, I plonked myself at the stern, faced east and thought about you.”

As she turned the sheet over, she heard a bang. Mehmet, please don’t come back yet.

“I wanted to send you a note from Genoa before boarding my train, a postcard. But where would I address it? What would I say?”

A car horn blared.

Irakles joined all his letters, not like Greeks who printed separate characters even when writing English . . . Where was she? “I once dreamt that . . .” No. She’d skipped a paragraph.

“I barely made out your face in your shop (as I said, the drawing won’t be accurate) but you hit me like a lightning bolt of joy. I felt off course, like a film with a new story spliced in, halfway. Only, I don’t know what that second story will be. Or its ending.

“My night was pretty miserable. I felt like I’d lost you before I even knew you. Do you know, you appear to me when it’s dark? And we talk. I have this incredible feeling that we can

learn lots of things from each other. By the way, I still want to know the difference between a polonaise and a nocturne. But only from you.”

She raised the sheet for a second to her lips and shut her eyes.

“I once dreamt that we drifted away together in a chocolate-filled barge. (God, this sounds pathetic, doesn't it?) Do you have funny little wrinkles around your eyes when you smile? I bet—”

She heard the twist of the door-handle and crammed the letter into her satchel.

“There's a riot,” Mehmet said. “We can't go to Omorphita so I'll take you home. But we must take a detour. The Kyrenia road is blocked.”

Her father had warned Mehmet not to put her at risk. Mehmet would obey. There'd been dozens of EOKA attacks during what people called Black November.

A detour, though. Perhaps Mehmet was transporting something illegal. Perhaps he worked for Volkan, the Turkish answer to EOKA. Perhaps, in one of those smelly vegetable boxes behind his seat, Mehmet packed a gun.

Chapter 29

Spike punched Edwin's shoulder-blades. "Don't let's get lost in me last week in uniform, mate. I'll be doin' a ton-up on the Sutton Bypass in a fortnight."

More likely he'd drag an old woman into a dark alley in Brixton, threaten her with a razor, and prance off with her purse.

"Lucky bugger," Edwin said. "They're sending me to Aden."

"Another friggin' wog-crammed 'ell-'ole," Spike said.

"You served in Palestine, didn't you, sir," Edwin said. "I mean, during the War."

"That was after. During the War, I served in Greece as liaison officer with the Resistance." And, Alistair wanted to add, by being stationed in Palestine he'd missed being tainted by Grivas's scummy work killing communists for the British.

"We should 'a been at base hours ago," Spike said. "No friggin' twilight in this place."

The bullets that preceded the hail of rubble from the Ledra Street rooftops had snuffed his future with Zaira. Good old Blotchet, though. Moments later, Blotchet had wrestled some photographer scooping the carnage. The slimeball photographer must have had advance notice and didn't hang around. Probably a buddy of killer Nicos Sampson.

But EOKA had targeted *him* that day outside Gulbenkian's.

Laid up in hospital, he'd missed Zaira's funeral. When (twice or was it thrice?) divorced Harry Lawrell eventually showed up at his bedside, Harry volunteered to fix him up with Zaira's

friend. A piano teacher, 'ice-lady' Harry called her. "Look on the bright side, old boy," Harry had said. "Thaw out that pianoforte lollypop and she'll be your slave for life. Rebecca. Ice-cream cold, old boy, but isn't ice-cream delicious when it melts in your mouth? I'll fix you up with her."

Teacher Harry had two problems that pocket-money from the Governor to keep tabs on local boys and to develop Greek-language propaganda couldn't solve. A moonlighting dick and an extracurricular mouth. Harry would be sorted out soon enough, if not by a Greek thug, then by an Armenian hot-blood's husband.

*

Darkness was complete as Mehmet and Fulya left Nicosia and headed towards Kythrea. Mehmet broke his uncommon silence once to ask her the time and to check his own watch. At Mia Milea they left the whoosh of the tree-lined asphalt. The van swayed and hopped along the dirt towards the Kyrenia Mountains, towards Koutsovendis.

"The mountains are so steep and lonely," she said. "Please turn back."

"The curfew will keep the Greeks indoors. My sign's painted out. Nobody will know who we are."

"Then why don't we go the usual way?"

But Mehmet stayed silent. The flat grit turned to stony hillocks, sheer ups and downs. Mostly up. They stopped on a crest. At last, a little peace from the jolts and jerks. Mehmet unloaded a box and disappeared. Could she take a quick peek at Irakles's letter? No time. Her brother was already returning. She wondered why of all days he would choose this one to delay their drive home. But she dare not ask again. He'd lie. Under the new emergency regulations, there was only one penalty for possessing a firearm, even for Turks. Death.

Hadn't she overheard her father say that any person who consorted—what *did* consort mean?—with a person carrying a weapon also faced death?

She closed her eyes, feigned sleep, and tried to block the discomfort of their onward drive. What would happen when Mehmet found out about her and Irakles? Mehmet would be livid—order her not to see him. To see Irakles she'd have to lie. To her father, to everyone. It wasn't fair—no one minded Greek boys with *English* girls.

Chris's Jane wasn't just pretty. That day in the car, she'd looked so awfully fierce too. In England, Irakles would have his pick of pretty girls—sexy blondes in tight turtle-necks, just like in films. Her stomach knotted. Was it jealousy or the smell of petrol that had brought on her nausea?

In September, Chris had missed piano because of a cut to his hand. In October, Miss Ouzanian's erratic changes of schedule had frustrated any meeting. Perhaps Miss Ouzanian had been trying to keep her away from Chris. This month, the dusk-to-dawn curfew for Greek boys in response to Black November had also worked against them. She'd noticed, though, that Chris tried to cross paths with her outside his appointed class time. But Mehmet's vigilance had thwarted them. She remembered her glow when, standing by the roadside, Chris had held up an envelope as her van rattled past. Finally, today, Chris had burst into Miss Ouzanian's studio . . .

Why *did* engines creeping uphill have to sound like dogs in distress? And why did wheels slip and make stones ping?

Her legs ached—her satchel was jammed between her ankles, its flap undone so that, should they make another stop, she could sneak out Irakles's letter. She'd hardly finished a single one of its mass of pages. But the night was so dark. She vowed to spend the rest of it reading and rereading them.

I felt like I'd lost you; polonaise, nocturne; to drift away in a chocolate-filled barge (oh, that's not pathetic, Irakles, it's wonderful!); a bolt of joy, . . . Why did traveling deck class mean you wouldn't see porpoises race the ship? Did big fish really race ships? What was 'deck class' anyway? Do you have funny little wrinkles when you smile? I bet—, he wrote. Bet what? I bet you *do* or I bet you *don't*?

She pulled her pony-tail over her shoulder and brushed its end against her cheek. Please be loyal, Irakles.

*

The guerrillas picked out a culvert on the track between the villages of Vouno and Koutsovendis.

They placed and armed enough dynamite—in Bambos's opinion—to blow up a tank, then they retreated behind a crest, twenty meters away, overlooking the culvert. Partially unburdened, the donkey stood by like a statue. Stavros relieved himself. He undid his boots, sat on the ground, and leaned against his haversack. It might be sunrise before a British army convoy crossed this culvert. The sky was moonless, clouded. Good. Even a half moon on a clear night might as well have been daylight. He lit a cigarette.

He heard a tiff between Kokos and Fivos. Moments later Kokos crawled beside him.

"The devil," Stavros said. "Fivos too?"

When sworn in to EOKA, Kokos had put his age at seventeen—said he'd lost his identity card.

Stavros reached into his haversack and brought out a bundle wrapped in a handkerchief. A fresh *koulouri* and cracked green olives. He offered them to Kokos. The taste would comfort, like the slices of wet bread topped with sugar—*vrechtō*—that Kokos would have enjoyed at

home. He, like Kokos, came from a family that could barely afford school uniforms for their children—unlike smartly dressed Christakis and Odysseas.

He glanced at the luminous hands of his watch, the Certina that Elena had given him. (An Omega would attract attention, she'd said. Too flashy.) "Swiss movement, water-resistant," the watch promised. His last water-resistant junk ground to a halt the day after a rainfall. What had he offered Elena? His half of his snapshot with Claire. Claire's part he still kept in his wallet. Why not? It reminded him of Jane.

Dhigenis ordered the execution of guerrillas who violated a woman in a house of hospitality. Surely English women didn't count. Would Elena?

Andreas, now on lookout, swatted the air with his hat. "Tasos brought flies with him again."

"Fuck your mother," Tasos said as he shook the debris from a boot. "It's the donkey shit you're sitting on."

"Lights," Andreas said. "Two vehicles, far apart, approaching from the east."

"It's too early for a convoy," Bambos said.

"The one in front has stopped," Andreas said.

Tasos leaped up. "The second motor has stopped, lights out, five hundred meters."

Kokos hiccupped, emptied the crumbs from the handkerchief, and handed it back to Stavros.

One by one, they clambered to their feet.

*

Alistair cradled his cast against his chest as they jerked and bottomed in the lesions of washed-out rivulets. Good thing he didn't have to carry those bloody lenses. More hammering, then the Land Rover's jittery beams settled on a track.

"Nicosia's on our left," Spike said. "That means we left the brat's folks somewhere behind us."

"Right." Edwin lurched the Land Rover over a culvert hump. "We'll find a spot where we can swing back."

"Sir," Phillipos said, "my father and mother are in the other direction." The boy turned his head and pointed up the mountainside.

"I say, lads," Alistair said, "Let me off to pee. I'll catch you after you turn around."

"I'd rather wait for you beyond that next culvert, sir," Edwin said. "Just in case."

"Anyone else to pee?" Alistair asked. "Phillipos, do you have to go to the toilet?"

*

"We're not alone on this road," Mehmet said as they rounded a bend and the lights of Vouno flashed into view. "They've stopped. I'm going to switch off my lamps and stop too."

*

"Now!" roared Bambos.

After a heartbeat, the mountainside lit up and thundered. Rocks, concrete, and metal. Everywhere. Seconds later, a reverberating clatter, and the upside-down vehicle burst into flame.

A wheel, spinning slowly.

*

Fly unbuttoned, Alistair was peeing and watching the taillights of the Land Rover blink. Then the road blew up and he flung himself into the ditch.

*

“Get out, Fulya,” Mehmet whispered. “Hide. Hide well. I’ll stay in the van in case someone comes. If I back away, don’t worry. They won’t look for you. They’ll think I’m alone.”

“No,” she said. “You must come too.”

“I’ll be back. Go.”

She grabbed her satchel and opened her door.

“Careful,” he said. “It’s steep.”

Too late. She leaped from the van and found herself plunging into emptiness. She landed in a bush that tore at her free hand. She wobbled and leaned into her satchel as she ripped through thorns and gravel and hammered her backside against rocks.

When her feet came to a stop, she fumbled for the bag and yanked it towards her.

Empty.

As she rested her head against the bank, her backside, her hands and elbows began to smart. And loose sheets of paper fluttered around her.

*

“*Zeto e EOKA.*” The guerrillas punched the sky with fists and guns.

As the echoes gave way to the howls from far-away dogs and to the crackle of the fire, Stavros watched the crater, mesmerized.

“What happened to the other motor?” Fivos asked.

“They must have stopped or turned back,” Andreas said.

Bambos swiveled on his heels. "Enough for one night. Time to split up."

The others started to obey.

"Wait," Stavros said. "Listen."

Cries, over the crackle and howls—cries for help.

"We've no time for this," Bambos said. He laid down his gun, reached for a grenade, armed it and hurled it at the cries.

A screech.

Bambos spat. "Fuck his Christ, doesn't he know how to die?"

"Wait," Stavros said. "I'm taking a look."

"I order you not to," Bambos said.

"*Re, Koko*, come. Light your torch and come with me."

"*Koko*," Bambos said. "Stay here."

Sten gun tight in his hands, Stavros advanced down the hillside. He peeked back. Kokos was limping. Fear made Kokos limp. Or perhaps the shit in his pants had loosened and was running down his leg.

"Keep up."

The tangle of metal, limbs, and flesh splattered an area as wide as he could see. He took in what was left of two corpses—one small—at the lip of the crater. Holy Mother of God, a child.

But the screams had come from some guy lying on his back. Blobs of flesh. Blackened. Yes, Bambos's grenade had done a good job.

"Hold that torch still," Stavros said.

Tongues of fire, hissing, spitting.. Bits of the dead child. A hand. Burning rubber, burning oil, burning flesh. The light still wavered—Kokos must be swinging the torch or

backing away. To blur the detail, he squinted. Right, the screamer had no arms. It might be hours before anyone came by

Wrestling the bleakness in his stomach, Stavros took aim.

*

“Why did you do that?” Bambos shouted

“There was a child in that jeep,” Kokos said.

“Fuck his communist mother,” Bambos said.

“You think he was English?” Tasos asked.

“*Stavro*, I outrank you,” Bambos yelled. “I will report your disobedience to Dhigenis.”

“He was going to die anyway,” Stavros said.

“Who?” Tasos asked. “The child?”

“The child was already dead.”

“Dhigenis will be pleased to hear about this,” Bambos said. “Your tender hearts. You’re all so delicate.”

Whereupon Stavros rammed himself and his Sten gun against Bambos. “Shut up. Shut up. Shut up!” But comrades were watching—this tussle had to look effortless. Neither must give in, neither he nor Bambos—not tonight, anyway—and neither could afford to lose his balance.

“Enough, enough.” Andreas and Tasos tried to wedge themselves between the fighters.

“Bury the communist brat,” Bambos said.

What had Stavros proved? That he could manipulate a fourteen-year-old wimp to side with him? That he, so-called Tiger, could look after himself, could finish off an armless torso, could saturate a wimp’s pants with shit? Kokos would suffer more than what a single night of

sobbing could ever cure. He'd made sure of it. Old Papanikolaou's grandsons would be avenged tonight. Bambos would see to it. One way or another, but Bambos's way.

Yeah. Bury the communist brat.

Chapter 30

“My world is crumbling,” Chris heard Rebecca say in her lovely Armenian-accented English. He pressed against the wall beneath the window of her studio. Her world crumbling? She had to be lamenting the killing of her friend Zaira. He waited for Fulya’s reply.

“I’m devastated.” Rebecca. Still speaking.

He cocked an ear and held his breath. His cheeks, pricked by the December evening chill, heated up as if sprayed by steam. Fulya should be playing, fingering the piano. Or perhaps she wasn’t at that moment in the studio. Surely Rebecca hadn’t rescheduled again. His mind flashed through their last encounter. He’d burst into the studio in the middle of Fulya’s lesson. He remembered Fulya’s joy—and her lips on his cheek—at receiving Irakles’s letter.

While shadows of the trees thrown by passing headlights raced along the wall beside him, he stretched towards the opening in the shutters. Telephone at her ear, Rebecca stood with her back to him. Her hair, which she was combing with her fingers, shimmered in the orange lamplight. He fell back into a crouch and tried to relax. He’d come to catch Fulya in case she had a letter for Irakles. She must have gone to the bathroom and Rebecca was using the opportunity to make a telephone call. But hadn’t Fulya been absent for too long?

The rip of tires and the knock of worn-out engines had never seemed so oppressive. Frogs, concealed in the pitch dark, were wasting their dank love calls. If Rebecca’s house were

any closer to Ayios Pavlos Street he wouldn't hear her at all—every motorcycle in Cyprus was racing the curfew deadline, revving through each gear at full throttle just to annoy him.

“That's right,” Rebecca said. “Stavros Ikonis again. I'd like to skewer him onto a missile and address it to Makarios.”

He slipped back to the ground. What people agreed on—some with awe, some with regret—was that Stavros had shot a Greek—the hospital-bed execution. Since then Stavros had been linked with other events. That's who killed Zaira Bebekian in Ledra Street, people said. Rebecca believed it. Stavros was rumored to have carried out an attack in the Kyrenia Mountains. But the spot was far from the Nicosia-Kyrenia road, which Fulya and Mehmet should have taken. The road Fulya *should* have taken home. A horrible taste rose to his mouth. He imagined himself pinning Stavros's neck to the ground, pounding his head with a rock . . .

A band of cats materialized in the gloom. For a moment, he seemed to be drifting towards them. The garden started spinning.

“I should have allowed her to audition for Dr. Wiseman,” Rebecca said. “She'd have been in London at the Royal College of Music by now. Instead, . . . It's too traumatic. Failing an audition can ruin a candidate's future. Or perhaps I just can't bear to lose her.”

He hated Stavros. He hated the person on the other end of the line. He hated himself.

“I'll wake up one day, pushing forty, still doing what I'm doing”—the cats were moving, he was stationary—“while he'll be at the pinnacle of his career.” She laughed. “Stop guessing. I won't tell you who it is.”

He looked at his watch. Five-thirty. Long past Fulya's lesson. He shook his watch. He'd violate the curfew and have to spend the night under Rebecca's window. Around his feet, the cats purred. A gust. Sand whipped his face. The first eagerly awaited rain had fallen on the last day of November. Not enough. It was December now and dust still coated the shrubs.

A white cat with a black head rolled on the ground. It sat, stuck one hind paw into the air, and licked it. When it straightened out and gazed at him, the dark band across its face reminded him of the Mask of Zorro.

“He did, but they broke up. Stop. I don’t know . . .”

The buzz of racing mopeds—curfew violators, surely—drowned her voice. He hopped to a squat and craned his neck to the windowsill. Light from the window streamed over the cats. He tapped the ground with his fist and flicked pebbles in their direction. Leaves crackled as the cats scattered into the shrubs. Moments later, with the Zorro cat at its head, the pack reassembled as if awaiting fresh instructions.

He bared his teeth and pursed his lips. A silent hiss.

Zorro arched his tail, blazed green eyes, and hissed back.

He’d heard Rebecca laugh. Bottom line, Fulya must be okay.

“I confess I’ve led him on, tormented him”—could she be talking about *him*?—“Now I’m in a cement cell, and he holds the key.”

He blinked against the grit under his eyelids. The air smelled of rain, those early drops of the season that barely touched the ground but turned its mantle of dust into an aromatic paste—a hint of mud, wet leaves, and next year’s spring flowers.

“What? Yes . . . like a cannibal wants red meat. I know. But every man under eighty wants to sleep with me, including my piano tuner—make that a hundred.”

Zorro had become agitated. Why was that damned cat pacing like a leopard?

“I switched to a woman. I had to escape that Greek monster who wanted to cure what he claimed was a depression by massaging my vagina.”

Fur flashed. For a second, Zorro swung like a trapeze artist from paws dug into the lip of the windowsill. Its hind legs whirled then Zorro hurtled into the house.

“Oops, a cat just flew in. Can you hold? No? Until next week, then.”

He froze against the wall. The shutters rattled. They snapped shut. Locked.

He'd missed piano in September because of his hand, further mangled during the beating Stavros had given him. When his lessons resumed, Rebecca complained of a packed schedule, of too many students, of the dusk-to-dawn curfew for boys. On short notice, she'd stuff him into odd afternoon slots. That's why he broke into Fulya's lesson to hand over Irakles's letter.

As he scraped his backside down the wall he reminded himself that, barely an hour after storming the studio to catch Fulya, he and Rebecca *had* shared a sexual moment. Not the head-to-toe, skin-to-skin, lying-down-in-bed kind, for—as always—there were at least two layers of clothing between them as they sat side-by-side at the piano. Her fingers had latched onto his wrist. He'd aimed vaguely for a shoulder. She deflected him. Then she rubbed the fabric of her neckline with one hand and, with her other, pressed his hand into her lap. Her gaze never wavered from the sheet entitled 'Frederic Chopin, Valse.'

“Not now,” she'd said after his tension had dissolved. “Not during a lesson.” She adjusted her clothing as she rose to her feet and steered him to the door.

Of course, he mustn't ejaculate during a lesson. He'd anyway resolved to end his musical career—compared with Fulya he was light years behind.

They still hadn't started on chess. They had yet to share tea. She blamed her calendar.

He heard a woman's shriek. Rebecca's shriek.

He leapt to his feet and streaked between the trees. He grabbed at a handful of cypress branches, swung himself around the corner, stumbled, stubbed a toe. He yanked the handle of the back door. Locked. He banged. No answer. He grabbed a broom, shattered the pane, and shoved his hand through the door. The key. A twist, and he flung open the door.

Rebecca was in her kitchen, standing in a puddle. An electrical wire dangled from overhead. An ironing board. An iron, stuck to her hand. He lunged and tore the cord from the ceiling. Crack. She snapped backward. Dust and plaster. Blinded, he plunged in her direction. He dragged her to her bedroom, hoisted her into bed, rolled her onto her back, checked her pulse. Steady. He picked up a sheet, untangled it, and spread it over her.

Holding her hand, he sat beside her and glanced around. The door faced a shuttered window. Her divan-style bed stood lengthways along the wall. Opposite, a dressing table, a wardrobe. Not much legroom. Filled with her smell, a woman's room, the first he'd been in other than his mother's. Still holding her, he sank to the floor and buried his face in her pillow.

A few minutes later—any longer and he'd have sought help—she whispered, “Please, turn off the lamp.”

He rose and flipped the switch. “I kept checking your heartbeat.” He returned to the bedside and pressed his cheek against hers. “Good thing the switch was off, though. Your bare feet—you might have got burned.”

While he'd sorted himself out on the floor, Zorro must have zipped out the back door.

She freed her hands from the sheet and touched him. “I remember a cat on the ironing board, then things went black. Did you hurt yourself?”

“I love you,” he said, a muffled croak from somewhere in his throat.

“Your face is so hot. Did you do something wicked?”

“I may have kissed you.”

She rubbed her cheek, moist with perfumed sweat, back and forth along his head. “Do your friends pressure you to join EOKA? Does Stavros? Please, God, don't give him an excuse. You come here whenever you want. I'm inviting you.” She paused. “But I'll be locking my bedroom door tonight. And that locked door will be between us. Understand?”

Push. Pull. He'd bungled Jane. He would make sure he didn't lose Rebecca.

She cradled his head against her chin and ruffled his hair. His nose, tight against her dress, breathed her scent while his lips puckered at the fabric. Her breath tickled his ear.

"You saved me," she said.

"It's only an electric shock." He'd seen his mother often enough in a similar predicament, although never unconscious. She'd survived.

Rebecca rolled her head away from him. "Did you hear about Fulya's ordeal?"

"No, what happened?"

"She had a lucky escape—just bruises and shock. She spent a night clinging to a hillside." She paused. "Your cousin is to blame. I'm sure he killed Zaira too."

He eased his head along her shoulder and kissed her hair away from her ear. No earrings. As his lips touched her skin and explored her neck, she shivered. "I get shocks all the time," he whispered not letting his mouth lose contact with her.

"What are you doing?"

"I wanted to feel your neck."

"Your conclusion?"

The tip of his tongue skimmed her neck. "I'd like to do it again."

"Are you making love to me?"

At any moment she'd call a halt. She must. "Never hold an electric iron bare-foot on wet tiles," he said. "The circuit is still live even when the switch is off—depending on the wiring."

"My father was a tailor. He warmed his iron on a bed of charcoal. He died of cancer."

His eyes had adjusted to the dark, to her shape under the sheet. He was in Ava Gardner's bedroom. Ava Gardner minus dimple. Ava Gardner minus makeup in a sleeveless dress half-covered by a sheet. She could have got up by then, made tea, put Schubert on her record player,

anything. If he stretched he could explore, well, as far as her toes. He pushed his free hand from her belly to where he thought her knee would be. He reached her thigh. He found her knee.

She wriggled her leg from his grasp, rolled over, and faced the wall. “Whatever you’re thinking, Chris, there is a moral stricture on our relationship.”

Was that it? “I came to tell you that I’m done with piano. I don’t plan on being a concert pianist. I need time for schoolwork.”

“I don’t teach recreational piano. If only I did. If only you practiced more.” She rolled back to face him. “You’re gentle, but strong. One day you’ll be the centerpiece of great discoveries.” She reached for his shoulder. “Has a girl hurt you? Once a sphinx hijacks your heart, you’ll never be rid of her memory.”

“Jane’s not like that.”

“Ah, Jane—your *philenada*—dark and beautiful, is she not? Your type. I remind you of her, that’s why you can’t stay away from me. Now, if you could make me laugh, really laugh—”
—If only he were older, just three years.

“Jane, catholic and deceitful.”

Catholic? What did she mean? Had she met Jane?

He’d overheard Harry Lawrell remark that, unlike a man, every woman was petrified that the love of her life would wake up one day and see her as she really was—crinkled, saggy, disgusting. Every minute with Rebecca felt like balancing on a bed of marbles. She heightened and dampened his desire—all at once. He slipped her hand from his shoulder and held it. She didn’t resist. He wanted to tell her she was beautiful.

She ruffled his hair. Rough, distancing.

“It’s what happened to you, long ago,” he said and kept her hand pressed against his face.

“Ah, such insight. Whenever there’s a crisis, we inch closer. I see a leitmotif developing.”

“I don’t understand.”

She laughed. “Beware. I latch on to lovers. Mind you, I promise never to get you to fix anything. Scientists don’t fix things, do they? They invent crazy things—like electric irons that kill. How did you happen by? Your lesson is tomorrow.”

Dare he ask if Harry’s “Miss O” had latched onto Harry? Harry would latch onto her in a jiffy. What was it about Harry that was so detestable? “I wanted to listen to Fulya.”

She pressed him to her chest. “Are you passing love letters to Fulya?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Are you writing them?”

“No.”

“Are you in love with Fulya too?”

“She’s not my type. She’s . . .”

“Uncomplicated? I know. Fulya’s straightforward, hides nothing, never puts herself on the same level as the music. She understands that a lesser genius than the composer doesn’t use the composition as a vehicle to display his own prowess.”

“Her boyfriend, Irakles, is Greek. He’s at school in England.”

“Rich Greeks. Dangerous. He’d better be stronger than his fortune. Yes. You’d never get mixed up in this otherwise, right? I’m depending on it because we both love Fulya.”

“Let’s play chess,” he said.

“Not yet.”

“When?”

“Later. First, you will show me exactly how you kissed me while I was unconscious.”

Chapter 31

Stavros edged onto an elbow and looked at Elena. She was slumped on her tummy, her pink negligee pulled tight over her hips. By now, the roadside puddles near his home in Ayios Dhometios would have sprouted those January morning ice-crusts, as thick as his hand, as brittle as glass. Who'd wake up early enough to beat the sun and demolish them? Trample the ice with oversized Wellington boots that held frozen toes poking from yesterday's torn socks? Or brandish the biggest chunk? Skim it under a passing car? No more. Boys chucked lumps of ice. Men chucked grenades.

If people measured wealth by the height of their ceiling, he came from a poor family. He wanted to be rich. But how? Sleeping in the bed of a rich man's wife?

He wanted to be a mechanic. But his father had urged him to become a forester. A noble profession, his father had said. On those long-gone Sunday dawns during the hunting season, when, shotgun on shoulder, he'd struggled behind his father through needles and cones along the copper-colored trails of the Troödos Mountains; or while they breakfasted among ferns under a giant tree, as the sun-warmed scent from the pine floor buffeted the pockets of night air deeper into the valley. Then, he'd wanted nothing more.

EOKA pressured families to pull their sons out of that center of British propaganda, the English School. Dhigenis might yet order him to recruit Christakis. And Odysseas might convince Christakis to join the cause. There had to be a better way to keep Christakis clear of

the Organization than breaking his legs. He'd argue that Christakis could better turn his English skills against the English. After all, his brother had enlisted. Shouldn't every mother be entitled to hold onto at least one of her sons? The Organization would surely agree.

He looked back at Elena. Her flesh lay still.

After that interlude outdoors to permit a surprise conjugal visit by Sokratis, he'd managed to doze. "If he sees you in the orchard he'll assume you're the new gardener," Elena had explained at the start of what she called their rendezvous. "He doesn't bother with domestic matters. Pouring a cognac is his most strenuous winter activity. Truly."

He had an hour to ponder whether Sokratis would stay the night or return to Nicosia. An hour crouching in icy mud, in his underwear—service hardly to be expected during daylight hours from a gardener, let alone at night—but a period, to his surprise, that kept his erection firm while Sokratis, on the other side of the villa wall, mustered the energy to claim a husband's rights. Elena lived her belief that loudness and frequent changes in pitch during a fuck signified intensity of love.

He'd vowed to learn from what she referred to as her diplomacy. Diplomacy, however, that could hardly make a difference to a betrayed husband set on revenge—a husband whose own factories likely housed an EOKA cell, with killers on the payroll.

He and Sokratis, he reckoned, had climaxed at about the same time that night.

After satisfying Sokratis, she'd act endearing, refer to him as *Stavraki* and explain that wives are trained to do their duty.

Wives were trained to be faithful too.

While rubbing his hands against the chill, he recognized her cries of ecstasy. When the candle-flicker on the bedroom ceiling signified that Sokratis had left, he punished her by enduring another wintry hour before returning to her bed. And he resisted her appeasement fuck.

“It means nothing to us, *agape mou*,” she said. “Our beautiful romance offers you a private beach, food, and wild sex. Don’t I live up to your fantasies, *Stavraki mou*?”

Her orgasms following her conjugal bout had surely been faked—she’d screamed anyhow. (Their seclusion, fortunately even from the housekeeper’s quarters by the gate, ensured privacy.) His orgasms weren’t faked. His death wouldn’t be faked either.

He stepped out of the bed.

When he returned from the bathroom, towel around his waist, he found Elena hysterical.

She held up a photo. “What’s this, you bastard?”

“Are you spying on me?”

“I wash your stinking clothes—something I never do for myself. Look at my reward.”

“So don’t wash them.”

She clasped the photo to her breast and began to wail. “Don’t you love me?”

“How did you find it, if you weren’t spying?”

“You want me to put your pants into the wash with your wallet inside?”

“I come here to fuck you,” he yelled, “not to visit a laundry.”

She recoiled. “How can you say something ugly like that?”

He put his arms around her. “A mistake. I love you.” He stroked her back and repeated his words.

“You do?” she said looking up at him.

“Of course.”

“And you have not been with this woman in the picture?”

“On my word—” He held up his right hand.

“—Then what is her picture doing in your wallet?” The hurt look returned.

What if she figured out that the background to this photo matched the background to the one he'd given her? Two parts of the same print. Perhaps it was time to confess to knowing Claire. That relationship was dead anyway. It made sense. And it might stop Elena's whining. "Do you know her?" he asked.

"Of course, she's Claire Simmons. We met lots of times at Gitty's, our *corsetière*."

Only God knew why he never bumped into Elena at Maison Gitty. He'd met Claire there enough times. "She's mixed up with British Intelligence and Cypriot traitors."

A blunder. A blunder he at once regretted.

She reached for the towel at his waist and pulled it to her face. "I don't believe you."

"Yes"—no turning back—"she hobnobs with traitors. We have her and her husband under surveillance. EOKA business. Official." A good story, after all.

"You mean she is to be shot?"

He looked at her. "Since the Arabs threw them out of Suez, the English have relocated their Middle East Headquarters here. They don't intend to leave Cyprus."

"Don't talk to me about politics," she said. "Or those awful things people say you've done. All I care about is peace." She quieted down but her face remained clouded. "You can't harm her. You mustn't."

If she realized even a trifle of his exploits, she'd be the first to slit Claire's throat.

Chapter 32

The morning ice on the puddles had melted but a storm developed later that day. After school, Chris walked to Rebecca's house for tea—and “petits fours”—between her music classes.

She slammed the door against the wind and grabbed his gloveless hands. “Your fingers are frozen and how red your face is.” She cupped his chilled cheeks in her hands for a few moments, warmed her hands in her armpits and pressed them back against his cheeks.

Heaven.

“How's your schoolwork?”

Shutters rattled on their hinges. The wind whistled through keyholes and window cracks making the paraffin heater's arabesque-glow jitter on the ceiling. He leaned forward to catch the scent of her fingers, moist with the rainwater that dripped from his hair.

For more than an hour, he traced a finger over the chessboard to explain why he kept winning in the opening moves. Whenever he looked up, he saw the flicker of candlelight in her pupils. Her autumn eyes, softened by Schubert's *Serenade* and wine, had opened to him, and he could taste her lips even when she wasn't looking at him.

She'd never think of him again as child, pedantic, A+, whatever. He wouldn't be her label. He'd be her friend. He'd be her lover.

Back home, now bundled in an overcoat, scarf and gloves, he lay on the roof, a chilly pre-dinner hideaway, to watch balls of fleece rolling through the rain-washed sky. He was

certain that answers to his life lurked in the mulberry whorls of the clouds. The bouquet of dinner from Kleio's kitchen curled around the eaves and sneaked into his nose. Windows shut against the chill dulled the neighbors' voices but his brother's keyboard boogie jabbed his chest—"pa-pa d'liou-dadoo, pa-pa d'liou-dadoo, pa-pa d'liou-dadoo, . . ."

He prayed for Fulya. And for Stavros.

Stavros had warned him against EOKA, perhaps because of Odysseas. Did his brother paint slogans on walls, carry guns, kill? None in the family dared ask.

His last spell with Jane burrowed like a flesh-eating worm through his mind. A cloud, backlit by the sinking sun, beamed her smile, but the smile he once loved seemed toxic. She and Claire had probably dug themselves into the distant Episkopi garrison, safe behind a curtain of British barbed wire.

Two sisters now lived in her old house, pimply, blonde rag-dolls—probably laundered once a month along with their clothes.

"We'll play chess as long as your progress at school is at least equal to your past achievement," Rebecca had said. A muse who promised her protégée accessibility conditional on a satisfactory school report. A goddess who could dwell for hours on obscurities like Schubert's score for *Rosamunde, Princess of Cyprus*.

Teachers. How many classical Greek-speaking English teachers were there like Harry Lawrell? Harry, novelist, poet, pornographer. He had to get hold of *Heliopolis*. Harry's first book in the trilogy, loosely biographical, they said, was banned in England. What did loosely biographical mean? That only the juicy bits were fiction? Yet Harry was allowed to teach boys. A shallow cover for a spy. Good thing Harry didn't teach girls.

Don't trust Harry, he wished he could tell Rebecca, stay away from him.

“You must die for your art,” Harry once said. “Don’t hydroplane life. Plough into it and lay it bare. A well-crafted boat leaves little wake but it gets you where you want to go.”

Plough in, leaving little wake? He’d irritated Harry by raising his hand to point out the illogicality of Harry’s remarks. Not for the first time. He once asked Harry for an explanation of a verse of All Things Bright and Beautiful,

“The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
He made them, high or lowly,
And ordered their estate.”

Harry just laughed. Arrogant Brit.

Whatever Harry might be up to, at least the bigot didn’t jiggle his cock in front of his male students. Would he have in Plato’s time?

Chapter 33

Irini's talent for gratifying Sokratis cemented her tenure as confidential secretary. She obliged him through minute attention to her choice of underwear, bought with an allowance he allocated for that purpose. Tight corsets irritated him.

Today, telephone in one hand, while groping beneath her dress with his other, Sokratis was negotiating a deal. "I don't deny it, Mr. Gildenzweck, but Americans too are fueling Cypriot nationalism."

Irini unfurled his hand. At any moment, the canteen-man might burst through the unlocked door with their coffee.

Sokratis stroked his lips and the base of his nose with his freed index finger and inhaled its scent as if savoring a fine cigar. "My dear friend, I refer to the feelings of Greek Cypriots towards Greece and by Turkish Cypriots towards Turkey. The cold war paranoia feeds Cypriot right-wingers. Anticommunism draws Church support, which in turn inspires our Greeks to push for union with Greece. Indeed, it's a paradox, Britain fueling the blaze it seeks to extinguish."

He cupped his palm over the mouthpiece and signaled her. "Cognac."

"Of course," he continued into the telephone, "none of the players can stomach Turkey's military might. Until next time, then. Shalom, or *yasas* as we say in Cyprus." He replaced the receiver.

She placed the silver tray on his desk and decanted the Courvoisier.

He clapped. “As always, the Jew’s come through. He supplies Israel. I supply the Arabs. What? Only one glass? Come here, *angelouthi mou*.”

This time he examined her knickers. “Plain pink? Not even hot pink?”

Nicosia had run out of styles as well as colors.

He ran a finger of his free hand over an envelope on the desk. “ ‘Mr. Mavropoulos. Private’?” He turned it over.

“Delivered this morning,” she said.

He slit open the envelope, unfolded and stared at the single sheet for five seconds, then put it back into the envelope. A momentary flicker and he swiveled in his chair and faced the window.

She left.

His attentiveness, complemented by perfumes and jewelry, had once moved her. That Yannakis had procured the gifts didn’t matter—then. Once, it even seemed romantic. Yes, she’d prevail. The letter was well timed.

Her intercom buzzed. “Ask *Dimitri* to come to my office,” he said.

*

When Irini was certain that Dimitris was unlikely to bounce back with his usual follow-up query, she returned to her boss’s office. She locked the door behind her and slipped off her underwear. With her back to him and palms outstretched, she spread-eagled herself against the wall like a suspect in a security forces roundup.

He was rougher than usual that day.

*

Just outside Geunyeli, the Turkish village that straddled the main road to Kyrenia, Dimitris stopped at a roadblock. Red-faced paratroopers were emptying a green Cyprus Transport Corporation bus. At gunpoint, they herded the passengers to the side of the bus, lined them up and ordered them to stretch their arms above their heads.

Dimitris stepped out of his car. "What this time?" he asked the driver ahead of him.

"Someone waved a Greek flag. Now they'll comb through every scrap of luggage and we'll be stuck here longer than usual."

"Strange—if they find guns on you they put you in jail. If you hand them in at the police station, they pay you for them. Have you seen the price list for guns in the newspaper?"

He'd planned to stop for coffee and a smoke at the midpoint in the half-hour drive from Nicosia to Kyrenia. The *kentron* was sure to have someone to whom he could show off the two-seater XK 140. It passed the time, just like a British roadblock, but the company was more pleasant. His salary was assured no matter how long the delay.

"Look," he said. "They're pushing those boys into the field."

The man spat. "They made them take off their shoes. The Turks will stone them."

Yes, in comparison, keeping watch on Elena wouldn't be a challenge. Thank God.

*

A few days later, Dimitris faced his boss.

"Well?" Sokratis raised his eyebrows but continued to flip sheets of paper on his desk, making an occasional mark with his pen.

"Your lady . . . Your lady received a man—"

Sokratis looked up. "Go on, *Dimitri*. Do you have to frustrate me?"

“Sorry, *kyrie*. I watched your estate late in the afternoon. I sat by the roadside.”

Dimitris wiped his lips as if to take away a bad taste. “I recognized Stavros Ikonis.”

He'd been convinced that Elena was screwing her driver. Or the driver's son. Or the gardener's son. Or anyone's son. But not Stavros Ikonis, EOKA hero and—if speculations were accurate—likely father of the baby he intended to adopt. “How long did he stay?”

“I had to leave by midnight, *Kyrie Sokrati*. My mother, you know. But I came back before sunrise. I took only a short nap. My mother is feeling well. You're so generous—”

“—On with the story, *Dimitri*.”

“I saw *Kyrios Ikonis* leave your estate at sunrise. He headed for Kalopetria.” Dimitris coughed. “*Kyrios Ikonis* arrived in dusty clothes and dirty shoes . . .”

“Well?”

“He left in the morning looking fresh and clean.”

Fresh and clean. The bitch never touched her own laundry until she was ready to wear it. “So, go, find out about our famous Mr. Tiger's movements. Everything. But discretion, *Dimitri*, absolute discretion.”

Under the glare, Dimitris blinked. “Definitely. I don't want trouble with EOKA.

Sokratis twirled his pen with both hands. “If questioned, you are to leave me out of this matter. Understand? What you do has nothing to do with me. Repeat that, *Dimitri*.”

“Repeat what, *kyrie*?” Dimitris grimaced—a sign that life's complications were fully taxing his mental powers.

“Repeat that what you are doing has nothing to do with me.”

“What I am doing has nothing to do with *Kyrios Sokratis*.” A moment's thought. “Then why am I doing it, *kyrie*? If someone asks?”

“You are doing this because you want to do it, not because I asked you. You are operating under mistaken loyalty.”

*

Dimitris watched ragamuffins kick the tires on the parked Jaguar.

With a hideous rasp, Mikis cleared his throat, spat into a handkerchief and crumpled it to wipe his mouth. “Few foreigners find their way into Kalopetria. Those that do have the air let out of their tires.”

Dimitris glanced at the plate Mikis had set down—the plate Mikis had just polished with that handkerchief. “Business is slow?”

“Fast enough for me.” Mikis trembled as if cold. “Confidentially, EOKA partisans show up because it’s easy to identify strangers long before they enter our village. Father Panaretos, our new *papa*, is very understanding.” Leaning forwards, one hand on a chair-back for support, Mikis said, “Don’t tell anyone. But Tiger has been here.”

“You don’t say.”

“I serve him coffee and *galatouboureko*.” Mikis pulled down the rolled-up cuffs of his shirt and, still shivering, struggled to put on his coat. “Tiger likes his coffee *metrio*.”

He had promised to report everything. But would the boss be interested in the sugar requirements for Stavros’s coffee?

Chapter 34

Through the early morning cackle of chicken feathers, Kalopetria cell-leader Father Panaretos, “Angelos,” marched across the square. Not only his tall hat but also the ripple of the folds of his black robe seemed to accentuate his height.

Stavros raised his hand to his forehead in salute. “*Yasas, Papa Panarete.*”

“*Kalimera, Stavro,*” Father Panaretos said. “I see you survived another night under the stars. My spare bed and Maroulla’s cooking await you.”

“Thank God for gloves, and you and *Kyria* Maroulla for your hospitality.”

Panaretos twirled strands of his beard in his fingers and beckoned with a sideways nod. “You look like fifteen hours of sleep will solve your immediate problems, but first follow me.”

Panaretos led him to the table under the big fig tree, out of sight of the square and the coffee shop. When they had seated themselves, Panaretos said, “*Stavro*, it grieves me to hear the stories they tell about you.” Panaretos paused. “The innocent are too often among the victims.”

“The hospital?” He scanned Panaretos’s eyes. “That’s last year’s news.”

“There’s a lot of money on your head. EOKA members are betrayed, even by those close to the leadership. Five thousand pounds. Irresistible—with a free passage to England where the greatest danger is dying of boredom. In this connection, I’m particularly worried about the stability of Fivos. It’s rumored it was he who slit Kokos’s throat.”

Right after the ambush. He'd expected Bambos to carry out the execution himself—a wimp like Kokos didn't cross Bambos and live. Bambos must have ordered the killing as a way of keeping Fivos on the hook.

Wimps, lunatics, scum. The lot of them. Him included.

"Fivos brags you're his friend," Panaretos said. "But he models himself on Bambos."

He sensed a crack in that priestly tone, one that betrayed some unsettled issue with Bambos. "What's Fivos doing here, anyway?"

"Hadjipavlou's killing won't rest. The Church had to issue its regret that the sanctity of a hospital had been violated. British leaflets dropped from planes questioned what EOKA offers us. Nothing but a bad name for all Cypriots, they say, and ruination for our children."

"People get in the way."

Panaretos frowned. "As well, our Fivos continues to fall foul of the Turks. He can't stay clear of one of their girls, a talented pianist. When I chance through Pano Vounaki I stop outside her house to hear her play. She has brothers—"

"—Who'll castrate the bastard soon enough, if I don't do it myself." He tightened his lips. "About the hospital, there was no choice."

"In the name of God, *Stavro*, you always have a choice."

He mustn't express indecision or trash Bambos before Father Panaretos, no matter how much he hated him. Better a little stock rhetoric and move on. "I'm sorry, Father, a revolutionary does not choose which missions are palatable. Colonel Grivas says there will be no mercy to traitors. Turkish dogs got in the way."

"You mustn't refer to human beings as dogs."

"They're barbarians from Asia who raped Greek women."

“Then there is Phillipos Charalambous. Tragic. The child is known to have died in that ambush at Ayios Chrysostomos Monastery, yet his body was never found.”

“How could we know their jeep was carrying a Greek child?” He spat into the dirt. Some mystery soldier somehow survived the ambush and claimed that the brat’s body had been carted off. “It wasn’t my idea to bury the body.”

“Orders? From Bambos Ioakim? He was district leader then. We must let the parents know where the body is, to give them comfort.”

“Bambos is not the only one to give orders.”

“Be careful of Bambos.” Panaretos put a finger to his temple to hint his belief that Bambos was crazy.

One day, he’d uncover the connection—Panaretos never offered *Bambos* his spare bed. Bambos referred to Panaretos by his birth name, Panayotis. That was rude. Monks were *poustides*, craving to be penetrated like dogs. Was this priest a *pousti* too?

“I can help you with repentance.” Panaretos combed his beard with his fingernails. “Meanwhile, I have a mission for you.” Panaretos leaned close. “I want you to transport certain artifacts to Kykko on Friday. The English are snooping and the village Turks are restless. Kalopetria is no longer safe.”

“Church artifacts?”

“They may be of use in our struggle.”

They rose and walked to the public side of the church, where Andreas and Tasos were storytelling to barefoot kids, letting the kids handle their pistols.

He followed the Father through olive and carob trees to a site dumped with cartons, tins and tires, overgrown with weeds, among boulders, acacias, and prickly pears. The aroma of the

airless space at the mountainside, the flies, and the decomposing excrement testified to its use as a latrine. Obscured by a bamboo thicket, in a cleft of the mountain, they came to a cave.

Once inside, Panaretos pulled a torch from under his robe and flashed it at a spot on the floor. "Buried in a few centimeters of soil is a crowbar." Panaretos drew a circle in the sand with the beam. "Dig here. The chests are metal, smaller than you might imagine, but heavy. Tonight, we move the boxes into the church. On Friday, day after tomorrow, you will drive to Troödos. I'll provide a truck. Stop about half a mile on the road to Kykko Monastery, at the turnoff for Milikouri village. There's a safe area bordered by ravines for you to stop. At midnight. Stay in the truck, engine running."

He followed Panaretos into the sunlight that filtered through the thicket of bamboo. "We're proceeding to that region anyway. Andreas and Tasos won't ask questions."

"Go alone. Let them off to proceed on foot to Kykko, or wherever they have to go."

He nodded a why-not. "I'm to wait at midnight?"

"Someone will be there. If something goes wrong, hide the cargo. Tell no one, not even me, where you hid it, until the danger blows away."

"How can we get through the military roadblocks? The English are looking for me."

Father Panaretos winked. "Manure, *Stavro*, manure."

Chapter 35

Freshly-shaven Dimitris, nattily dressed and conscious of it, was Mikis's only customer that morning. He started on his coffee, one eye glancing at the cup's broken lip, the other at the rusty Bedford parked alongside the *kafeneion*.

A man worked on the truck's engine. His scruffy companion went from tracing a finger along the cracks in the windshield to fondling the bulb-socket that dangled from a smashed headlight. He'd already kicked the tires.

"*Yasas*," Dimitris said.

A grease-blackened face looked up from the engine. The man drew near, plonked himself into the closest chair, and wiped an oily rag across his brow.

Information cost. Even if the information came from a fellow who stank like a fish carcass. He reached into his pocket, brought out a yellow packet and unwrapped the cellophane. He teased out a cigarette and offered it to Fishy.

"State Express." Fishy spat as if to clear his palate for a treat. "Very good."

"Are you *palikaria* going somewhere?"

Fishy tapped each end of the cigarette on the table. "*Taso*," he shouted to his companion who'd now taken to rolling the truck's lightning conductor—the chain tail—under a shoe. "The water level is low. Fill it."

Better sacrifice the rest. He slid the packet towards Fishy and held out his own cigarette so that Fishy could light up. “What are you carrying?”

“Old books, icons, manuscripts. Who knows? We’re leaving tomorrow. I’m Andreas.”

“I’m Dimitris Anaxagoras from Ayios Dhometios.”

Fishy Andreas exhaled. “You usually ride a motorcycle. An AJS.”

Dimitris angled his neck to avoid the smoke. “I work for *Kyrios* Sokratis Mavropoulos. I’m his chauffeur.”

Andreas pointed to the car. “I like the color.”

So did the ragamuffins. Young arms reached through the car’s rolled-down windows. Snotty fingers prodded the dashboard, jabbed at the steering wheel, and pumped the horn.

“British racing green. Six cylinders. It goes to one hundred and forty miles per hour.”

“You drive that fast?”

“Only in my dreams.”

Andreas pushed out his lips and kissed the air while rasping the stubble on his face with his fingers. “Tell me. You’ve seen her naked. Mavropoulos’s wife. Right?”

Dimitris looked around. Tasos and Mikis, and the mob by the car were otherwise occupied. Good. He exhaled a cloud of smoke, hoping it would obscure his face.

Andreas leaned towards him. “Come on.” The man’s stubble must be itching—he was scratching it like a dog for fleas.

Dimitris pressed himself back in his seat to avoid Andreas’s breath. “I don’t usually go into the house.”

“What about behind the orange grove, on their beach?”

“I’ve seen her in a bathing suit.”

“She must take it off—”

The chatter from village lads had grown louder. Stavros had arrived. The man who dared fuck his boss's wife.

Mikis rushed a tray, coffee, and water, to a table. "Your coffee, Tiger."

"This is Dimitris," Andreas said. "Arse and tits all day. What a life."

Stavros scowled. "*Andrea. Taso.* I'll see you tomorrow. We leave midday."

Andreas jumped to attention and saluted. "*Malista, kapetanio.*"

*

The Jaguar caught up with Stavros on his downhill march from Kalopetria. Dimitris greeted him and offered him a lift. On his way to a night with Elena, it seemed indecent to accept transportation in her husband's car. Within the hour, for sure, Dimitris would be reporting back to the boss. It was time to ditch Elena.

But he wouldn't duck out in front of Sokratis's lapdog. He accepted the offer—his first ride in an XK 140.

As the tires swished and the wind rushed, Dimitris poked a button in the dashboard.

A radio. And a speedometer that boasted a hundred and forty. Stavros ran his finger along the handbrake bar and rubbed his seat. Leather. Red. A plush goal for renewed aspirations. A two-seater Jaguar, he promised himself. If he lived.

They'd soon gobbled up the remaining few hundred meters to the coastal road. At the junction, Dimitris stabbed the brakes.

Ahead, some kids were hogging the road. They'd moved on from smashing street lamps and wounding dogs. This time, two cyclists, rosy-cheeked children, as English as jam on white toast, were serving as their target practice. One of the cyclists managed to flee. The other fell.

A vision of Father Panaretos flashed to mind. "Drop me here," he said. "I'll walk."

As Dimitris carved a path through the gang to drive away, the boys chanted, "*E-no-sis*. E-O-KA. *E-no-sis*. E-O-KA."

The stubble on their shaved heads glistened as threateningly as the saliva on their lips. One of them raised a slingshot.

Stavros grabbed him. "Enough, you bastards."

The jeering stopped, the action died. Extinguish a would-be leader and his group was bound to dissolve. Holding the defiant one by the arm, Stavros turned to the English boy, who lay curled-up and whimpering by the ditch. The boy's head and legs were splashed with blood-soaked grit.

"MA-KA-RI-OS," someone said.

Stavros thrust a finger at him. "Shut up."

"They're English."

Stavros swung his arm in a menacing arc. "Get out of here, you bastards."

He yanked the boy to his feet, then he picked up the bike and straightened its handlebars. "Do you have far to go?" he said.

The boy shook his head.

While the boy wobbled along the road towards Kyrenia, Stavros flicked his gaze at the gang—all hands had to remain still until the victim was out of range.

During the fuss, traffic had slowed, except for a nearby white van that had stopped, engine running. Now the Austin A40 delivery van eased alongside. The door opened. Leaning across a girl, the driver asked, "Do you need a ride?"

The driver and his pretty, dark-haired passenger seemed familiar. The girl averted her eyes—good girl. He was about to make his way to the back when she pressed herself away from her door and said, "You can squeeze in through here."

He squatted behind the front seats, jammed in by boxes, cartons, baskets. The interior reeked of motor oil, detergent, and over-ripe vegetables. And there were flies, swarms of flies.

“You can drop me anywhere in Kyrenia,” he said as the van started to roll. “Those books, *Despinis*. Are you a music teacher?”

“Just a student,” the girl said half turning her head. But she still didn't look at him.

“I have pianist cousins, good players. Where are you from?”

“From Pano Vounaki,” the driver said. “I am Mehmet Özal and this is my sister Fulya.”

Of course, Miss Turkish Talent from Pano Vounaki. The girl Panaretos had mentioned. Next time he ventured close to her village, he'd make a side trip to listen in on her. Fivos might be scum, but he had taste.

“Turks,” he said. “I saw you before. Your van used to have a sign.”

“Özal Brothers,” Mehmet said. “We painted it out to avoid trouble.”

Pianist cousins. A stupid show-off admission to these Turks, one that could establish his identity. If Fulya knew Christakis and Odysseas she was wise to remain silent.

The van caught up with the cyclist he'd rescued. “He's fine. Just a little blood.”

Mehmet gave the boy a wide berth and pointed to an iron bar behind his seat. “I was ready to help you.”

Panaretos was right to fret about Fivos falling out with the Pano Vounaki Turks. Pity *any* man who got tangled up with *this* pretty girl, let alone a throat-slashing piece of shit.

*

“He's EOKA,” Mehmet said to Fulya after they'd dropped their Greek passenger. “No one else would have dared confront those boys.”

Fulya shivered. “He’s definitely Christakis’s cousin. And I’ve seen him in Ayios Pavlos. That was Stavros Ikonis.”

Mehmet whistled. “Good thing you didn’t let on to knowing his cousins.”

Fulya thought back to November. The night Mehmet took a circuitous route to escape a mob—and had delivered something secret to a lonely hilltop—when they’d almost been sucked into the sky by the biggest blast she could ever have imagined. The night she surrendered most of Irakles’s first letter to wind and darkness, before she’d had time to read more than a couple of lines. “Mehmet, do you think he was the leader of that ambush? We could have died.”

Mehmet wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. “They say Stavros Ikonis is a high-up in EOKA in the Kyrenia District. So keep your mouth shut, Fulya. Not a word about today. We have family.”

*

Dimitris stood before his boss to deliver his report.

“I already know everything,” Sokratis said.

Dimitris, as he’d done so many times before, opened his eyes wide. “You do?”

“I do, *Dimitri*. You should not have got involved. Regardless, you will follow Ikonis and his men on their route to Kykko Monastery.”

Chapter 36

Although early in the day, cars and army trucks were already parked at Five-Mile Beach. This roadside strip of sand, shielded by its little offshore island, begged drivers to slow down, to ogle female flesh. Today's crop certainly included newcomers—those acclimatized to Cyprus summers found April too cool for swimming. Now, two years into the guerrilla campaign against British rule, armed soldiers stood guard.

Still, Stavros had decided on this less traveled route via Lapithos—westward through groves of olives and carobs—with its hopefully fewer roadblocks than the alternative through Nicosia. As Andreas rumbled their manure-laden Bedford along this brief pleasure-strip, and Tasos prattled his predictable crap, Stavros tore his eyes landward, to refocus elsewhere—on the Kyrenia range to the south, on many bitter nights among those high-altitude rocks, on his last night at the Petrino villa, on Elena.

On anything but Jane.

He awoke today—Friday—to cool sea air and a cherry glow in the window, and glanced at Elena beside him. Still naked under the sheet, her breathing seemed synchronized with the sea—now with the hiss of spray, then with the swell. He hauled himself from her bed and snatched his underwear from the chair. And yes, his pistol still hung where he'd left it. Main thing, he was still alive.

Elena yawned, her eyes barely open. “So soon, my darling. Do you have to go so soon?”

“I told you. I have a mission.”

She rubbed her eyes. “That tone. That tone in your voice. It terrifies me.”

“It’s my job.”

“I have such a premonition of emptiness and doom.”

“You always have premonitions, Elena, but things turn out fine. You’ll see. I’ll be back again soon enough to fuck you.”

“What a *horrible* thing to say. I shower you with glamour, with ecstasy. Why can’t you be more romantic?”

Some romance—one that destined him for death. “Your husband knows about us.”

“He never mentions it. I swear.” Her hands motioned him towards her. “Come, kiss booboo good-bye.”

He submitted to her embrace. She wrapped him like a mummy in a brew of scents and fleshy caresses, normally irresistible, now stifling. He pulled away and stepped into his underwear.

She leaned towards him and fluttered her fingers as if to coax him back into her arms.

“When are you returning, *agape mou*?”

He dressed quickly and reached for his holster. “I don’t know.” He really didn’t.

She stretched out on her bed, propped herself on an elbow, and caressed her hip—either her final shot at delay or to ensure he’d remember what awaited him on his return.

“I *do* hate guns,” she said.

He’d have to kill her Sokratis. Death to the mogul. Perhaps that’s what Elena wanted—widowhood.

“Tell me,” he said to Andreas. “The driver of Sokratis Mavropoulos. Dimitris. What’s he been asking?”

To dampen the backlash, Andreas leaned on the steering wheel. Still, it hammered his wrists and rattled his watch. He crunched into a lower gear to take the upward curve away from Five-Mile Beach, then reached for the packet on the dashboard and offered a round of cigarettes. “I told him nothing he didn’t already know.”

Anyway, the priest chose well. The Bedford’s condition complemented their rags—they’d even slopped pig slime on themselves. Main thing, Andreas and Tasos believed they were moving icons for safekeeping—not unusual. Their guns and the boxes, wrapped individually in jute, sat under as big a mound of farmyard shit as the truck would handle.

When the road angled away from the shore, the Zephyros hotel-restaurant came into view. The beach, tucked under a bluff, he couldn’t see, but he imagined the bathers between the clumps of seaweed and remembered his one night there. First on a cushion of seaweed, then in Claire’s bed. His only night ever in a hotel room. His only blonde.

After Cyprus joined Greece, he would run a joint like Zephyros. The artifacts. What would they fetch? He must pry open the boxes. “Our priest says Fivos is harassing some Turkish girl.”

“Fulya Özal,” Tasos said. “She laid a curse on Fivos, years ago.”

The village of Lapithos far behind, the truck swayed through the declining crags of the Kyrenia range at its western end and rattled into Myrtou. Stavros shut his eyes. He remembered his Sunday afternoon, last year in March, in the nearby Paleomylos valley, by the village of Kambyli. It that gusty afternoon, while Jane was scouring the hillside for orchids, stepmother Claire stood waiting for him at the rim of the valley. “Keep an eye out for her,” Claire said as she lassoed him with her arms and they rolled into a thicket of poppies. When they came to rest, Claire opened her perpetually suntanned legs, and he entered her and arched his back and watched Jane stoop into and out of the long grasses. After her first orgasm, Claire calmed

enough to say, “Stop looking at her, you sod.” He was still inside her when Jane surprised him with a, “Look what I found.” Waving a bunch of anemones high over her head, Jane stood ten meters below the grassy ridge where he and Claire lay and locked him in her deep-sea eyes. He tried to be motionless, restrain himself, but Claire’s thrusting intensified. “Keep moving. Don’t stop now.” Flowers lowered, Jane held back—surely for the shortest moment—while he ripped himself free of Claire, wrenched on his trousers, and jumped to his feet. And Claire spread her dress over her knees and straightened her sweater but remained on her back. Jane ascended the ridge. When all three of them could see each other, Jane cradled the bouquet against her chest and drew close. “Aren’t they just super,” she said softly and handed him the flowers.

“Isn’t it just marvelous that Stavros happened by,” Claire had chirped from the matted weeds. You remember him, don’t you, dear?” And she calmly picked herself up and smoothed her sodden, grass-and-poppy-soiled dress. “Tiresome stains. I do hope they wash off.”

If Jane had ever referred to that incident later, he didn’t hear about it from Claire. Jane, the girl he once thought innocent as an orchid—

The Bedford rumbled south, down through the pine-treed foothills towards the fertile floor that separated the Kyrenia and Troödos Mountains. Morphou Bay shimmered to their right. The bluish domes of Mount Olympus, with its green collar of pines—at their pace, hours ahead. Bald tires hummed on the asphalt—a high-pitched song interlacing with the axle-whine. Frayed, useless multicolored wires flapped from the dashboard. Wheels spat gravel when, to allow room for oncoming vehicles, they lurched off the paved center and jack-hammered across the border of cobbles onto the dirt shoulder. Half-off the asphalt, Andreas held the Bedford to its new track as long as possible. Still, he managed to slam them from pothole to pothole, if not hard enough to weld spines to seat-springs, certainly hard enough to crunch badly tucked-away testicles.

“You should’ve got your mother to fix the buttons on your fly,” Andreas said to Tasos.

“You’ll burn your cock with that gunk the moment you start playing with yourself.”

“If I had a wife,” Tasos said, “I’d ask *her* to sew back the buttons—”

“—She’d burn your cock in her frying pan,” Andreas said, “if you jerk off.”

“If I had a wife,” Tasos said, “I wouldn’t need to jerk off.”

“Those boxes are heavy,” Andreas said.

“Old books are as heavy as rocks,” Stavros said.

“We’re risking our lives for books?” Tasos asked.

For what indeed? Only *he* knew that Father Panaretos served the EOKA cause. With a finger to his lips, he said, “Our oath. Remember? We do not without authority reveal secrets to co-fighters. Our mission is secret.”

The road sliced through miles of orange and grapefruit trees, the fragrance of their blossoms overwhelmed by the truck’s stench. They zigzagged through Morphou, and pushed onward to Xeros. Spurious glints finally materialized into the inevitable checkpoint, marked by painted oil drums, festooned with rusted barbed wire, a barrier handily located next to a military camp. As they squealed to a halt, Stavros held his breath. The next minute would determine whether he’d drink coffee at their scheduled rest-stop or dangle from a English skewer.

While fellow short-back-and-sides warriors poked bayonets into the manure, a sergeant poked a freshly shaved pink face into the truck.

“Good morning, Mister English,” Andreas said in a heavy, bumpkin accent.

Tasos flashed his nicotine-stained teeth and said, “Hav-ar-you.”

Clutching the doorframe, Stavros pretended to be in the throes of a hangover. He should have had a bottle in his hand. Next time.

The sergeant held his nose. “Where you lads headed?”

“Pedhoulas, sir,” Andreas said.

“Wot-shu-got?”

“Shit, sir. For apple trees.”

The sergeant pointed. “Wot’s wrong wiv‘im?”

“He”—Andreas leaned in a chummy manner towards the sergeant and outlined a circle on his forehead—“crazy man. Drink *mucho zivania*.”

“Tell them to piss off,” an officer in a parked Land Rover called out.

The sergeant waved them away as if brushing vermin from his face. “Stinkin’ gypsies.” His tomato-face commander, presumably, was ready to give chase to uncooperative but better-dressed Cypriots. No wonder the British hadn’t captured Dhigenis.

As the truck started to roll, Tasos gave them the finger, disguised as a friendly wave. “Fuck the pretty boys, sent to Cyprus to die for nothing.”

“Did you fart again, you bastard, or is that shit ripening in the sun?” Andreas said to Tasos. When they reached their safe cruising speed of thirty miles per hour, he broke into, “*Besame, besame mucho . . .*”

Stavros shut his eyes. God should have provided him with earflaps too. Into the second line of the Mexican hit, Andreas lost his battle with the steering wheel. The truck’s tires squirmed off the asphalt. After tram-lining for twenty meters, churning gravel and streaming manure, the truck fishtailed back onto the asphalt. Beyond the Cyprus Mines Corporation works, the road forked from Xeros into the Troödos foothills. Nearing Lefka, the final splinter dropped out of the side mirror. “Fucker.” Andreas banged the dashboard. “There goes what little I could see behind us.”

“Imperialist rubbish,” Stavros said.

When military vehicles droned by, he slumped, tried to appear asleep. His Browning, normally on his hip, now languished under the dung.

Approaching the watering hole of Kalopanayiotis, Andreas poked his head out of the window. "Time to disperse those motherfuckers behind us—let them savor sweeter air." And he jerked them to a halt.

Stavros looked at his watch. Time indeed to relax under the leafy awning of Taverna Apollonia, to think about scrounging dinner. Here, the usual whiskered geezers in boots and *vrakas* hogged the seats, two at a time—one to sit on, the other to lean against. Stretching out each cup of coffee as long as possible, the shameless freeloaders jiggled worry-beads, smacked pieces against backgammon boards and gawked at the traffic.

Nikos, the EOKA taxi-driver, walked over. "Tiger," he said. "What's with the manure?"

"*Yasoo, Niko*," Stavros said. "Tell Number Three, tomorrow, usual place. And bring us fresh clothes from the fearless woman. My regards to her."

Nikos coughed, loosened the phlegm in his throat, and spat it out. "Watch out for the English."

"You smoke too much."

"You youngsters"—mopping the froth from his mouth—"What do you know?"

"I know. I climb mountains all day long while you sit in your taxi and smoke."

"In your job," Nikos said, "you'll die before me."

As Nikos moved away, an unwelcome object came to sight—Sokratis's driver, wearing motorbike goggles, bending over a motorcycle. Stavros walked over. One wrong answer, just one, and this *pousti* wouldn't live to see the next sunrise. "Are you on my tail?"

Dimitris whipped around. "*Ochi*—no, *Kyrie Stavro*. Just visiting relatives on my day off." He patted his motorcycle. "I'm riding my prize possession."

Stavros slashed a finger across his neck. "Do you know what we do with informers?"

"Listen, I heard about activity in the mountains." Dimitris shrank away and held up his hands. "I simply beg you—watch out."

This creep was sticking his neck out. Sokratis had surely ordered him to keep his distance. So why feign this accidental meeting? "Explain," he said.

Spittle bubbled at the corners of Dimitris's mouth. "The English are searching for something. You know, one of those operations they give those fancy names to. I was told to tell you to hide your cargo."

"What cargo?" He grabbed Dimitris's collar and cocked his fist.

"*Ochi, koumpare,*" Dimitris whispered and licked his lips. "Whatever you have—just hide it. Please."

Andreas returned from the latrine, still buttoning his fly. "If its not our racing-driver friend. Now showing off his AJS." Andreas slapped Dimitris on the back. "Yesterday, he bragged about seeing the ripe tits of Sokratis's wife."

Stavros released Dimitris and lashed the back of his hand across Andreas's mouth. Andreas doubled over and spat blood. "Back to the truck," Stavros said.

An Army convoy was rumbling by, on a slow ascent into the mountains. Dimitris mopped his brow. "They're always looking for something near Kykko."

Of course, monasteries provided sanctuary. And Colonel Grivas, his men divided into independent bands, headquartered nearby. But this Dimitris cocksucker was right about one thing. The boxes could surely be delivered later. "If I see you or your prize possession anywhere near me again, I'll toss both of you over the nearest cliff."

Deep shadow had descended upon the orchards in the terraced mountain valleys when they resumed their journey. Stavros drove.

Andreas patted his now puffy lips. "Why did you have to hit me so hard?"

"We have a change of plan."

The day had started too well—they hadn't been asked for identity cards at the roadblock. What about Elena's premonitions? Had she overheard Sokratis talk to Dimitris? Why had Panaretos asked him to head to Kykko, richest monastery in Cyprus? To boost the Church's coffers with more treasure? Kykko, isolated, was close to one of Grivas's hideouts. Why not deliver the cargo directly to the monastery? Father Panaretos hadn't disclosed the final destination, but the instructions in case of danger were clear. This smacked of Bambos Ioakim eliminating competition. No, it had to be Sokratis. Sokratis knew about Elena. He'd informed the British. This was personal. This was revenge.

For the next half-hour, engine howling, the Bedford groaned up the single-lane road beyond Kalopanayiotis towards Pedhoulas. Unable to negotiate the hairpins in a single sweep, Stavros often halted to reverse, to downshift into first gear or wave faster vehicles by. They could have taken a different route but the whole world seemed to know of their destination—spies were sprouting like wild asparagus.

Just below Pedhoulas, they forked towards Kykko and traced a lacy contour around mountain folds and ravines. When the day's last spurt of sunlight flared rainbows in the cracks of the oily windshield, they left the road, and clattered over rocks and pine needles along an unmarked forestry track. Once he'd signaled a halt, they waited for the forest to regain its composure, to ensure they were alone. Guns were forbidden by law—there'd be no hunters. The altitude wasn't friendly to wild mushrooms, capers, and asparagus—there'd be no pickers. Fire fighters might drive by. But they'd need a forest fire, and the summer drought was months away. Anyway, darkness was imminent.

He cocked an ear and gauged the ruffles of sound against the background swish of the wind through the pines. Menace? He'd hunted these mountains since childhood. If it scrunched he'd hear it, if it slithered he'd taste it, if it dangled, he'd whiff it.

In the apricot sky, black crows still soared—scavengers poised for their final lunges of the day. All normal. They removed and hauled the boxes up a gravelly zigzag incline, some thirty meters, and placed them in a hollow he'd slid into one night while separated from one of Grivas's bands. Obscured by a pine thicket, this hunter's shelter offered an emergency hideout for a guerrilla on the run. It lacked a tell-tale lip, so a sheet of corrugated iron sprinkled with grit, stones, and pine-debris blended the site with the landscape.

He squatted, spooned up loose earth, and brushed off the dregs of black manure from his arms. "We wait till full darkness. Then we'll check if the road to Kykko is clear."

"Can we contact anyone?" Tasos asked.

He sniffed his hands. He spat into them, rubbed them together, and scraped them on the ground. He sniffed again. Still smelly. "No contacts. We'll verify that the road is clear all the way and recover our cargo later." He rose to his feet. "Let's eat."

Yawns triumphed as they devoured their meal of bread chunks, oven-baked lamb and vegetables, courtesy of Taverna Apollonia. Between mouthfuls, Tasos flicked his gaze from one companion to the other. Andreas munched sullenly.

Silky air spilled through every nook of the forest. Oceans of it. Leaves sighed, abrading branches croaked, boughs groaned—a restless, never-repeating melody. And an inky ceiling closed in. The British would shoot to kill if they recognized him—Stavros, Cyprus's most elusive killer. He shut his eyes and remembered the incendiary martyrdom of Grigoris Afxentiou, national hero. Would Greeks also commemorate *his* life if tragedy befell their Tiger? So, where to hide? He couldn't return home. Yes, he'd be at the Kykko rendezvous, but without

the boxes. He must continue with some semblance of their mission. But not alone. He no longer trusted anyone. Andreas and Tasos knew the boxes' location. If he died tonight they'd have to die with him.

He saw a flash, a snapshot of himself kneeling in front of his mother, his hands clasped in prayer, trying to explain the reasons for betraying his EOKA comrades. "I implore you, don't go," his mother said. "But if you join the national struggle and you betray a comrade, even under the cruelest torture, you must never return to my house. You will not be my son."

If captured, what if he were choked by water (a British favorite), had glass jabbed under his fingernails, or had his genitals wrenched off by a Turk?

*

The truck clunked along the jittery path plotted by its lone headlight like a dog straining against its leash. Dirt-saturated sweat glued his clothes to his body, matted his hair, and streaked down his face. While Andreas and Tasos continued to oblige him with their silence, he strained his mind to thoughts of a bath, a bed, and sex, in that order.

At the Milikouri turnoff, he slowed the Bedford to a jiggling, exhaust-sputtering idle. The drop-off point appeared deserted. Still, he should have stopped the engine, they should have got out, explored on foot—in this stillness of the forest, he could have smelled danger, but onward their truck crawled, around the blind bend and uphill towards the monastery, less than a mile away. He felt numb. There still was no other traffic on the road.

Suddenly, the windshield sparkled, the fissures flashed white. His eyes snapped shut. Hand to forehead, he strained open an eye through parted fingers. Haloed silhouettes sprouted from the road. The truck, his men, were caught in a blazing corridor of light. Now, coming into

focus, soldiers stretched from mountainside to ravine. Guns. Behind the squad, armored cars.

Two soldiers on the ground—Bren-gun mounts. Hell! A British barricade—government troops.

He punched the brake, pounded the steering wheel. “Someone *betrayed* us.”

Like a broken movie projector beaming the first frame onto a screen, nothing happened.

But a film suspended in this position would burst into flame, in seconds.

Tasos slumped. “They let us through roadblocks before,” he wailed from beneath the dashboard. “Talk to them.”

He clenched the steering wheel. “The bastards are waiting. For *us*.”

“It can’t be,” Andreas said. “Look, no one’s moving. It’s okay.”

Over a loud hailer, a voice boomed, “We know who you are. Surrender immediately or we will shoot. Switch off your engine. Now!”

Tasos grabbed Stavros’s legs and squealed, “I don’t want to die!”

The loud hailer screeched. “Surrender! Now!”

No surrender. He slammed the truck into reverse, jerked the accelerator into the floor. “Stay down! Down, down, down!”

The mountainside erupted—muzzles flashed. The Bren guns roared. Trees slashed. Rocks hammered. The windshield shattered.

Gaining momentum, hurtling rearward, he wrenched the steering wheel, a sharp circle, the sharpest possible; he must head back into the mountainside. Granite on one side, an abyss on the other, a wall of bullets in front, a barricade behind—for sure.

Andreas shouted, “There’s no room to turn,” and lurched across Tasos to wrest the wheel from Stavros. “The cliff!”

Stavros looked back. Lights! Enemy trucks were spilling into their escape route. He tried to lift his foot from the accelerator. Jammed. Tasos was wedged between the wheel and his

legs. Feet chocked, muscles bursting, he pummeled Andreas with his elbow. Move, *Andrea*, move. Off the steering wheel, you bastard!

Bullets ripped through steel, tore rubber, and gouged flesh. But he felt nothing. Andreas, trapped by the spokes of the steering wheel, collapsed on him. Whack! Eyes shut. A tickle, and fluid dribbled down his neck, down his arm.

The truck wallowed, throwing him forwards. A front wheel, in a hole. No, not a hole, the wheel was gyrating over the abyss. He screamed at his arm, heave! “Fuck your Christ, *Andrea*, get off the wheel!”

Relentless, the strafing continued. The second wheel slipped over the edge. The truck yawed and began to topple, headfirst, a downward rush. The vibrations stopped, a smooth fall, no jouncing, no jiggling, he sailed free, his body weightless, his head spinning. Slam! Oh, oh. A hammer. All around. Metal grinding, metal shrieking. Descent broken, truck slowing, falling apart. A rock? A tree? His door tore open—his weight excruciating—and he nose-dived into the void. Flames, explosions, echoes.

Mother, I'm coming home.

Chapter 37

Sokratis didn't yell at Dimitris. He never yelled. To Dimitris, equanimity would be torture.

Head bowed, Dimitris clasped his hands as if praying. "I learned on good authority that there were troops near Kykko. I warned *Kyrios Stavros*. And, according to your orders, I followed them until they turned off the main road. The evening was very still. When they'd switched off the engine, they would have heard my AJS for miles. *Kyrios Stavros* already threatened me with horrible consequences."

Poor Dimitris, irrelevant Dimitris. "I asked you to keep an eye on them, not engage in idle conversation."

"But I thought—"

His composure turned to ice. "Confine your thoughts to your sick mother, *Dimitri*. Leave the rest of your thinking to me."

"After they left the road—"

"*Entaxi, Dimitri*. I understood the first time. Don't snivel."

Dimitris pulled out a handkerchief and wiped his forehead. "When they returned to the main road, I followed them until I heard the guns. The explosion started a forest fire. This morning, a monk told me EOKA had removed three mutilated bodies during the night so that the British wouldn't find them."

Mutilated bodies. Excellent. “Doubtless, this very moment, the reverend fathers are planning a secret funeral. There will be riots.” His factory workers would be out too. Stavros enjoyed the sympathy of communists. “Is there any evidence of where they actually stopped?”

“I drove along that track until I reached an impassable stretch. Manure droppings marked their entire route. They camouflaged wherever they might have rested.”

“Clever to the end. Remember, *Dimitri*, a strip-tease dancer is not rewarded for her ability to tie shoe-laces.”

*

While Panaretos leaned forward, elbows on knees, and ignored the cup that beckoned from Elena's tea service, Sokratis reclined and smoked and listened to the clip-clops of Elena's slippers. The patter stopped just outside the living room. Elena was eavesdropping.

“So,” he said, “your boxes have vanished into thin air. Poof.”

Panaretos jerked back and downed a slug of cognac. “The British killed them.”

“Stavros?”—he glanced at the doorway—“For sure—dead!”

A gasp and a pair of feet shuffled away. The hall toilet-door banged shut.

“She liked him,” he said.

Yes, by way of Beirut, an anonymous message sent to reporter Alistair McKay's residence had promised delivery at Kykko of a tiger's stripes, et cetera, et cetera.

The toilet flushed and Elena scurried past the living-room doorway, her face in her hands.

“The British used enough fire-power to pierce a tank,” he said. “On the remote chance anyone survived, the five-hundred-foot drop would have finished them.” He let his voice pursue her down the corridor into her bedroom. “My information, Father, is that there will be a surprise requiem in Nicosia at four this afternoon. After a decent period, we can let it be known that the

artifacts were in their truck. We will make discreet arrangements, have the area searched, appear as if we're trying."

"I still have hope," Panaretos said. "The boxes have survived for centuries."

He refilled Panaretos's glass. "But we know, you and I, they are in safe-keeping, intact."

Panaretos cast his eyes to the floor. "*Kyrie Sokrati*, I have a confession to make."

The priest was starting to whine like Dimitris. "A confession."

"The artifacts aren't safe."

Sokratis tightened the grip on his glass. "We agreed they were to remain in Kalopetria, that we'd use decoys on that truck."

Panaretos leveled his eyes. "God is my witness, I changed my mind without consulting you. I thought it best for the artifacts to head straight to the monastery. I changed the time for the rendezvous and arranged for monks to pick up the cargo. The artifacts were on that truck. All is lost."

Chapter 38

Fulya's finger—a finger Irakles hadn't seen since last summer, a finger whose hand had penned exquisite letters and sealed heaps of envelopes—traced a spiral in the sand. “My father once took me to the Nicosia airport,” she said, “and I saw all those pretty stewardesses dressed up in uniforms. For years, I wanted to become a stewardess.”

“I'd want to be a captain,” Irakles said. “Better still, I'd like to own the airline.”

Here, beside the busy asphalt, they sat facing the gentle swell, the July sunbathers, and the bucket-and-spade-wielding toddlers. Their rendezvous at Five-Mile Beach, a fifteen-minute bike ride from the spot he'd suggested last year, had been planned for months.

He wore black trunks and sunglasses, she a pale-green dress and matching head-scarf. She kept her hands busy, smoothing the sand between them; fondling the knotted ends of her scarf, or tucking back wisps of hair. She stole glances at him, he realized, when she thought he wasn't staring at her. “We were invited to a party at the Dome Hotel,” she said, “and I went to their grand piano and just started to play. I was eight. It didn't occur to me that you had to *learn* how to play. Then the whole village collected money—Greeks too.” A tear shimmered on a lower eyelid. “We got a piano. It's secondhand and dreadfully out of tune, but I love it dearly.”

He pulled a handkerchief out of his satchel and handed it to her.

“Now the Greeks want us dead,” she said.

He recalled his first swimming lesson in England—his first time in a pool with a roof, his first time on the ten-meter platform. Below, between his skinny knees, far away, the thick blue stripe wavered and slithered like a snake. Icy chlorine stung his eyes. He was five days from home, five days from his mother. A new climate, a new school, the same old bullies. He wanted to creep back to the handrail and cry. But he'd thumbed his nose at the bullies. He dived.

He tightened the grip on his knees. "Turks side with the English and insist on *Taksim*—partition." She was still crying. "At least it's quiet now that the British have freed Archbishop Makarios." Damn it, he was sounding like his own grandfather.

"Miss Ouzanian thinks I can become a concert pianist," she said.

His stomach, which had turned down Elena's fried *halloumi* and toast in favor of bitter coffee, still refused to loosen its knot. Writing to Fulya had been easier. "Great. Then you can join me in England. How's Chris doing?"

She brightened and handed back his handkerchief. "Well, he's stopped piano . . ."

"If I didn't drag him out of his house, he'd waste the summer trying to discover the next prime number, or something equally unrewarding like solving Fermat's Last Theorem."

She looked bewildered. "I think he has a crush on Miss Ouzanian."

"He has a girlfriend." He couldn't add he'd written Jane, in answer to a letter from her.

"An English girl. Her mother almost ran us over once. Chris had just told me you wanted to stay in touch and I was so happy. Weeks went by before I got your first letter."

She seemed in no hurry to undress for a swim. "I'm hot," he said. "Want to go in?"

"You go."

He took off his sunglasses, jumped to his feet, and joggled his legs. "If I'd known you'd stay with our things I'd have brought my new Bolex."

"What's that?"

“A cine camera.” He darted across the sand, dodging waders, and executed a Johnny Weissmuller dive into the clear shallows. He skimmed the sandy bottom with his chest until he thought his lungs would burst, then shot to the surface. She was on her feet, shielding her eyes, peering out to sea. He waved. She waved back and settled down on the sand.

Dozens of letters and plans and hopes that had defied the English frost like the first daffodil of spring. All seemed to have wilted under the Cyprus sun. Thank God she didn't want him to explain Fermat's Last Theorem. He thrust hard towards the far side of the tiny Golden Rock Island, where the surf crashed over the rocks. All he could hear was the hiss of seawater as it streamed past his head.

Twenty minutes later he flopped down beside her. She stared at him for a long time and turned away. “You were out of my sight for ten whole minutes. You did that on purpose, disappearing under water, then swimming where I couldn't see you. Don't *ever* do that again.”

This he might have expected from his mother—a female response, no doubt. “I still remember my first time. I was eight, like you and the piano, and I panicked, drifting out of sight of people. Sorry, I should've warned you. I do it to overcome fear.”

“Fear? I had a mind to disappear too. *Then* you'd be frightened.”

“I *am* scared, Fulya.” About today, about the rest of the day, about everything.

She reached for his hand. “I know,” she said soft as jasmine in a warm breeze.

“I love your hand,” he said. “On the piano, don't your fingers have to span—?”

“Ful-ya!”—a voice from the road.

She slipped her hand from his and squinted into the sun. “Mehmet,” she said. “I told him where we'd be. ‘Only if I can check up on you’ he said.”

He flicked his forehead in salute. Mehmet ignored him and gestured with his eyebrows in a manner only his sister might decipher. Fulya seemed to plead with her eyes. Mehmet scowled, swung around, and left.

“He’s angry,” she said, “because Greek stones cracked his windshield. Kalopetria kids.”

“I heard there’s treasure there. I want to find it and film the discovery.”

“I’ve seen men up there, with binoculars. Kalopetria is an EOKA hideout.” She scanned the growing crowd of sunbathers and the British troops patrolling the beach and leaned forward. “*You* can escape to England. My family has to live here.”

“Who knows you’re with me?”

“Only Mehmet. If my father knew, he’d lock me up. If my other brothers knew—”

“I thought Kemal Atatürk emancipated Turkish women.” She’d avoided even a handshake after she stepped off her bicycle.

She altered her position in the sand. He completed the move so that they ended face-to-face, hugging their knees. She ploughed her heels forward until their toes touched.

“Your scarf hides your hair, Fulya.”

She looked away. “Mehmet will do anything I want if he thinks I’m safe.”

“I love your wiggly toes. You should learn to play the piano with them.”

She pulled her skirt a notch above her shins and tickled the soles of his feet. “Don’t laugh, Irakles. I’ve never done this before. Take off those sunglasses.”

Her fluid gestures reminded him of something. Of course, a Degas ballerina. He surprised himself with the thought that he could never return to Five-Mile Beach, a place he’d come to for years, without her. He removed his glasses.

She pulled her feet back and tucked them under her dress. “Do you know it’s exactly three hundred and twenty days since we first met and this is only our second meeting?”

“You’re sweet.”

She smiled, not at him, but at his feet. “I marked my calendar.”

“Where d’you keep my letters?”

“They’re hidden in a box. Except your first, which I lost in that EOKA ambush. When I saw myself in your lovely drawing, I got scared. Now it’s gone.”

“I wrote hundreds of drafts of my first letter to you, most of them in my head. I tossed them all into the sea before we reached Genoa.”

“I would have loved to see them.”

“Tormented isn’t how I want you to think of me. I knew your answer about seeing me before I even finished my question. I showed up anyway, and the second hand of my watch dragged and dragged. Three things came down the road from Pano Vounaki during the next hour: an old man on a donkey, a bus, and a white van.”

She blushed. “I saw you. The white van was Mehmet and me.”

“Tell me about your mother,” he said.

“Mother died when I was born. I’m the youngest, Serhan’s the oldest. He’s a shepherd. Ulu runs our grocery.”

“Your father?”

“Used to be the village policeman, now he carves wood. He tried to stop a runaway truck from rolling over a Greek child. The truck ran over him instead. It was during a celebration at the Dome Hotel to honor him when we discovered I could play the piano.”

“You wrote that to me in a midnight shade of blue ink on a yellow sheet.”

She pressed her feet against his. “Would you have come back if we hadn’t met?”

“I might have stayed on in London a bit longer. My friend Dante lets me use his studio. We painted murals in a Greek restaurant. The owner now lets us eat there free, anytime.”

“Just for painting his walls?”

“He’d have gone bankrupt. Over a couple of Saturdays, as well as the murals, I helped him with his taxes, redesigned his sign, and rewrote the menu. I sketched the layout, Dante did the rest. We used Dante’s girlfriend as the model for Aphrodite.”

She wiggled her toes against his soles. “Don’t look at me like that.”

“Like what?”

She blushed and whispered, “Like you think I’m beautiful.”

He tried to tease her feet apart, to wedge one of his feet between hers, but she resisted.

When she broke the silence, she whispered, “You mustn’t breathe a word to anyone, not even Christakis, but Mehmet and I met Stavros Ikonis, his cousin. He broke up a group of Greeks tormenting some English boys. We gave him a lift. Next day, the English killed him.”

“You believe the stories?”

“My brothers blame him for that ambush. So does Miss Ouzanian. *And* she thinks he killed her friend. Think of it. Christakis’s cousin.”

They had to get away from all this death-talk.

As if to encourage him to look at her anew, she leaned back with her elbows in the sand and rubbed her ankle along his foot. “England is dismal in winter, isn’t it?” she said.

“And as safe as custard with lumps. The John Bulls smother everything with custard. I love London theaters, though.” He craved to tell her about the dank Saturdays visiting Soho—his favorite place. About his buddy Neophytos, once a meat’n-three-veg loser, who now shaved and donned a fresh shirt daily. How his and Dante’s leggy, X-rated Boticelli knock-off allowed Neophytos to double his prices. Better wait, and test Fulya’s humor. So he talked about the cricket matches he’d played in—not a sport Cypriots warmed to. “Mind you, it’s slow. For quick results I like nothing better than boxing.”

She opened her legs, just enough to curl her feet around his, to rub ankles. “I wrote you—remember?—about the bad things I do. About my eight- and twelve-bar blues?”

“Yes.”

She giggled. “Miss Ouzanian pretends to be horrified. She doesn't want me to develop poor posture and bad finger habits. She says.”

He chuckled. “I don't know about finger habits but I love what you're doing at this very moment. No, don't slouch, throw your head up again. Into the sky. Straight up. That's right.”

She held her pose for moment, then looked back at him, confused.

“I'm dying to hear you play the piano,” he said. “Your teacher—”

“—Miss Ouzanian is in Europe.”

“So let's go to the Dome Hotel and use *their* piano. I play table tennis there all the time. I say, do you see music in color? The initial attack in Blueberry Hill is deep purple. Don't you think?” He turned and peeked at the sea. “Fulya, would you swim if people weren't watching?”

She continued to stroke his feet. “I can't swim.”

“My godfather's house has its own beach. I'll teach you.”

She sat up and touched her cheek.

“Elena will love you,” he said.

For a second, she stared over his shoulder. She jerked towards him, grabbed his sunglasses from the sand, and shoved them over her eyes. What had startled her? Trying to sound calm, he said, “You know why I look at you as if I think you're beautiful?”

She dropped her head and whispered, “Let me catch my breath, sweetheart.”

Had she recognized someone in the parade of Cypriot braggarts at the waterline? Had someone harassed her? He should jump to his feet and shout, who is it? Instead, he turned back, studied her covered head and face, and said, “You *are* beautiful.”

Chapter 39

Zacharias had agonized all the way from Nicosia. Who'd summoned him to Kykko and why? Wasn't the monastery closed to the public, even barred to its Right Reverend Abbot? Perhaps he'd offended a cleric. He'd told Kleio that he was visiting a village teacher. He would, on his drive back. He looked around. Under the eyes of British soldiers in a Land Rover, monks bustled about with rakes and hoes.

You'll meet a bearded man wearing a brown jacket and brown pants, the message had said. The jacket will be loose over the shoulders. From a distance, the man who shuffled towards him looked like a monk on his day off from serving God. But the open-necked shirt, the oversize jacket with sleeves that flopped empty, and the equally oversized pants were crumpled as if the man had slept in them.

As Zacharias closed in, the man stopped, took his cigarette out of his mouth, and said, "How was your year, uncle? How are Christakis and Odysseas?"

"Stavros?" The name hissed through his lips like steam from a pressure cooker. "Your death . . ."

Stavros smiled. "Faked by the brothers at Kykko."

He rushed forward and embraced his nephew. "But your funeral?"

"EOKA comrades found me and carried me to the monastery. By the time the British looked for us, coffins were on the way to Nicosia."

“Whose body?”

“Officially, a corpse from a car accident.” Stavros waved him to be seated. “My guess? An English deserter.” Stavros leaned against a tree. “Or maybe a Turk who looked twice at someone’s sister. Cigarette?”

Zacharias sat on a wall at the edge of the ravine, his back to the purple-blue expanse of sky and mountain. He lit the cigarette and listened to the pine needles breathe. God forbid, instead of this reunion with his nephew, this might have been a meeting with one of his own sons. He recalled the racket months ago between Christakis and Stavros on the roof of their house, and asking Christakis about his red face and swollen lip. Just Stavros showing off tactics for self-defense, Christakis had said.

“Time was short,” Stavros said. “The British don’t permit proper funerals.”

He turned. The monks and soldiers were out of earshot. “It wasn’t until after the requiem, when mourners headed to the center of Nicosia that the British realized whose deaths were being honored. Everyone was sure you were among the three corpses. The crowd brandished your picture.”

Stavros laughed. “Greek flags and my likeness suddenly appear from nowhere. A riot would have started if the English had touched those coffins.”

As Stavros asked for news about his mother, Zacharias’s agitation abated. “Do you have a room here? It’s been months. Have your wounds healed?”

Stavros glanced towards the Land Rover, put a finger to his lips, and lifted his pants. Knots and scars glistened red. Those legs wouldn’t be strutting the beaches any more.

“We must let your mother know you’re alive.”

“Soon. In secret. Now listen, I must tell you something. Something that may have landed me in this situation.”

Zacharias threw up his arms. "If this is about bombs, I don't want to know about it."

"There's no one else I can trust."

He leapt to his feet, ready to cover his ears. "No."

"Don't share this, even with my father." Stavros hesitated. "The priest of Kalopetria is somehow involved. We should have delivered some artifacts here to Kykko. We didn't."

The British seemed to be dozing in their Land Rover, but a reverend abbot might leap through the monastery's doors at any moment. "Enough."

"Sit down, uncle." Stavros held out his cigarette packet. "I drew a map *on the inside* of this packet. Don't take a peek. Hide the packet. If I die, you may pass it on to Christakis or go with it to Archbishop Makarios. No one else."

This was a revolutionary with a price on his head. Being his uncle was dangerous enough. Dear God. "Last September, what were you and Christakis arguing about on my roof?"

Stavros grabbed his arm. "I made sure he'd stay clear of EOKA. As *you* must."

He stuffed Stavros's packet into a pocket. The beach-bum might have displayed a vein of moral fiber then—putting family ahead of community—but was now well into nullifying it by confessing to diverting something that sounded like loot. "Please, no more about the artifacts."

"Beware of unscrupulous Greeks, and don't trust Father Panaretos."

"Who is Father Panaretos?"

"I'm free now to find out who betrayed me." Stavros clenched his fist.

With bombings at Christakis's school, rioting at Odysseas's, and in perpetual anticipation of a late-night rap on their door, Kleio wouldn't fall asleep unless and until the boys were at home and in bed. His parents had fled Smyrna. After this clandestine meeting, his family might have to flee Cyprus too. He reached for a cigarette. "Are you returning to EOKA?"

"The English never found my body. Or my arm."

Stavros had used the same hand to flip on the lighter, to hold onto the cigarette, and to grab his arm. The sleeves of Stavros's jacket flapped in the wind. The jacket will be loose over the shoulders, the message had said.

Oh, hell. A wooziness clawed his stomach.

"I can still whittle wood," Stavros said, "as long as I clamp the piece between my feet. So, I can still make things. And I can still shoot."

Zacharias inhaled a lungful of smoke and exhaled and said, "My God, my God."

Chapter 40

Stavros hobbled from the crossroads of Prodhromos along the road that meandered towards Platres. He stopped where he usually did, on the precipice side, where he'd kicked boot-sized footrests into the lip of the cliff. He brushed his spot clear of stones and broken glass, sank to his knees, and maneuvered his backside to the ground. No hands. Didn't need them. Well, he could pretend. He rested a car-width from the honking asphalt, where pine-green army Land Rovers dueled with emerald-green buses for the paved center of the blind bend. Here, a few hundred easy meters from the crossroads, the mountains fell open like an amphitheater. Rooftops, farmyards, and apple orchards cascaded into a valley crisscrossed by water channels and tracks. Using his binoculars only a few seconds at a time, he could check the goings-on, not only of most of Prodhromos—at five thousand feet Cyprus's highest habitation—but the farmhouse some hundred and fifty meters away, where Jane had been secluded for the past few weeks.

Darling Jane. He could and did wait hours for a glimpse of her strolling around the yard holding her belly, or kneeling, nose level, at the rosebush. At least in the mornings he had shade. Imagine, two years ago, he'd offered that baby-skinned schoolgirl with mouthwatering tits to cousin Christakis. Sunstroke or lust for her stepmother's sweeties had fucked up his brain.

Perhaps it was the EOKA ceasefire, perhaps his state. He'd been assigned the new codename "Nemesis" but, "You are to blend into the landscape like a lizard to stone," Nikos, his

contact, had said. Even Nikos's taxi bore an EOKA codename—"Blackie." Blackie saw more action than Nemesis.

His beard had grown since April and he couldn't get used to the itch. Was it that carbolic soap or had lice found a home? He scratched his neck and looked at his hand. Where did that crud under his fingernails come from? He must find a way to pick his nails other than with his teeth. He reached into his pants for a cigarette and his lighter.

Even under her village girl's shawl and drab dress over swollen belly, Jane lit up Thanos's backyard. The high-altitude July sun seared hot, but she'd cover herself from head to toe. She hummed to herself by day as she scribbled into a pad of paper, her host Thanos the farmer had told him. She cried at night, like a child for her mother.

But neither Claire nor Reggie appeared to have visited her.

A Cypriot girl would expect to meet a suitor only under the eyes of a chaperone. The suitor expected a dowry. Promise of a warm pussy wasn't enough. You took away my arm, oh Lord. Why don't you take away its pain too?

Daily, trailed by two dogs, Thanos led his long-eared donkey on delivery errands along the network of village tracks. He wore a handkerchief on his head and wound his arms around a shepherd's staff on his shoulders. The first time the dogs, the donkey, and Thanos trekked by him, he held out a cigarette. "Who's her sponsor?"

The old man dropped his staff and crouched, with a fit of choking.

"She plans to put the baby up for adoption? Right?"

"I know nothing."

"Who will adopt?"

"I know nothing."

"Do you know who I am?"

Thanos pulled the handkerchief off his head and wiped his face. "No."

"Do you want to be on my list?"

Archehos Grivas had ordered a ceasefire if the British took steps to release Archbishop Makarios from exile. Governor Harding, in response, relaxed restrictions on Greek Cypriots. As the summer of 1957 started, a tense peace held. But, to be ready for reprisals when the ceasefire ended, EOKA was drafting a list of traitors.

"Doctor Michaelides arranges for everything," Thanos said.

Sokratis's doctor. In June, while delivering a bundle of fighters' clothes to Thanos's for washing, taxi-man Nikos had bumped into Michaelides. "Tell me something I don't know."

"She speaks Greek," Thanos said. "And she helps my wife and even tries to milk my cow. She insists, however, on what she calls proper toilet paper." He cleared his nose with a snort. "Never use it myself—it disintegrates in your hands just when you need it most."

Early on, he'd plucked a handful of fresh pine needles and told Thanos to teach her how to loop them into a necklace. He once carved a heart out of pine bark and ordered the baffled Thanos go home and deliver it to her, along with a sack of laundry for his wife. When Thanos handed her the heart in the backyard, she swung around and scanned the mountainside.

Dog yowls and he-haws echoed through the high-altitude amphitheater. Cocks crooned late into the morning, as they always did, but still no sign of her.

"I'm sworn to report breaches of conduct," Nikos had said.

"Agent McKay visits her."

"In an EOKA laundry?"

"I have new names for the traitors' list—Mavropoulos and his doctor."

"God forbid she's having your baby."

New names? Like the dead Stavros Ikonis. Nikos had asked if he wanted Elena to know he was alive. The same Nikos who'd chauffeured her when she'd first asked to see him. What else was there to know about Grivas's messenger-boy other than he smoked two packs a day and seemed to like him? That he had his hand in Sokratis's pocket? Nikos had driven him from Tris Elies to Kykko to meet with uncle Zacharias—only Nikos knew where he lived.

“From Kalopanayiotis it should have taken you less than an hour to reach Kykko,” Nikos had said. “You gave the bastard the slip, yet you fell into the ambush.”

“We drove off the main road to eat dinner quietly,” he'd replied.

Only two people came to see Jane, agent Alistair McKay, who brought her packages and teased her with judo moves, and Sokratis's doctor. Not Claire. Not Reggie. Little did McKay know he was visiting an EOKA laundry. McKay had survived three attacks. He wouldn't survive the fourth.

On the Cyprus marriage market, a knocked-up girl's value nose-dived. Not Jane's. Not for him. In days, perhaps hours, Jane would be whisked away and his baby would be gone. There was still time. He had to marry her before she delivered. Because of their baby, any priest would jump at marrying them, wouldn't he? Fuck parental consent. God came before parents. The priest would agree and arm-wrestle a condition. No matter that Jane was Roman Catholic, but the child would have to be brought up Orthodox.

This morning, smoke curled from the farmhouse chimney. They must be boiling water. Jane not only helped wash EOKA clothes and peg them to clotheslines, she may have actually washed *his* underwear. Why didn't she step outside, disappear under the walnut tree that shaded the irrigation reservoir, and dangle her legs in cool water?

To his right, just beyond the crossroads, the Berengaria Hotel poked its stone façade through the giant pines. He and the hotel shared a view over the tinder-dry Paphos forest of

scrub oak and pine, over mountains veined in blue. He'd gazed at that glamorous red-roofed resort from Kykko Monastery, his own recent sanctuary, miles away along switchback roads. The Berengaria had reopened for business—afternoon teas and dinner-dances. After a disinfecting scrub and a shave, they might hire him as assistant doorman. A doorman who manage one suitcase at a time? Jane would laugh her head off. He carved his heels deeper into the footholds. Stavros, a proud father, husband to an English girl like Jane? The envy of his friends? Hey, if the English lost and Cyprus united with Greece, his killer status might guarantee him a job as night watchman in a shoe factory. And if the English won, he'd be hanged.

Christakis had had her to himself for a full year. Maybe—. Never mind. Same blood. As far as he reckoned, and recalculated daily, she was giving birth to *his* baby and Elena and Sokratis would steal it—buy his flesh and blood like a roast at the butcher's.

EOKA set honey traps for Brits infatuated by Cypriot women. His situation with Jane was opposite, right? He punched his leg, above the knee, hard, very hard, but the pain returned.

In March, Afxentiou was burned alive, by petrol barrels set ablaze by bullets, some said. Others said the British doused and torched him. Newspapers had quoted Afxentiou's fiancée as being glad he'd died fighting. A month later, poor Tasos and Andreas—their bodies were found. His own death had been faked. First the streets rang with The Ballad of Grigoris Afxentiou. Now, EOKA boys and girls chanted The Ballad of Stavros Ikonis.

“He would have made a great forester,” his father had been quoted as saying.

Still no sign of old Thanos or Jane. Smoke still belched from the house.

Had Father Panaretos and Sokratis sequenced the ambush after the planned drop-off at the Milikouri turnoff? No matter. He'd get his revenge. Sokratis's motto, Elena said, was to find out what a prospective customer wanted, pre-sell the goods then scramble to find a supplier. But *he* already had a piggy bank. Jealous communists called it capital.

He must make a grab for the baby.

The British bashed the Abbot of Makhheras Monastery with a broomstick and shoved a needle into his chest. Did this happen before or after they caught up with Afxentiou? That mattered to him after his fleeting brush with his bearded host, the chubby Abbot of Kykko, the Right Reverend Abbot Chrysostomos. When the English discovered its EOKA hideouts, Governor Harding closed Kykko. Now, only a skeleton of monks and novices now lived there, without their Abbot. From his sanctuary in a monk's cell, still undiscovered by the English, he often heard the whine of British army trucks, the guffaws of the boy-soldiers, and rifle-butts hammering the monastery's doors.

He was loitering the day Abbot Chrysostomos rolled up under British escort. Right under their noses, the Abbot told him that the Brotherhood of Kykko answered God's call to cultivate the flowers of the soul, but, as Cyprus rose up against the great British Empire, it should be obvious that God's monks weren't mere bystanders. The Abbot's stare and nod, however, urged him leave immediately.

What *was* McKay's angle? Why *hadn't* Claire shown up? What if Jane was being used as bait? He raised his binoculars. Thanos was standing in his yard, white cloth in hand. The old man tied the handkerchief—their agreed-upon signal—to a fencepost.

Jane was in labor.

He looked at his watch. Seven minutes past nine o'clock. Friday, July 5, 1957.

To hell with EOKA. While Jane stayed in Cyprus, he would follow her. He'd follow her everywhere. One day, he'd marry her.

Chapter 41

Chris hitched his chair towards Irakles. “Why do you hold the pencil that way—like a brush?”

Irakles continued with rapid strokes, sketching Kalopetria's church. “Painterly—so that I can concentrate on gesture rather than detail.”

Why worry about detail? After another year in England, though, and all those letters from Fulya, Irakles did seem a bit less of an over-the-top pain. Anyway, Stavros's death hung heavy. But neither he nor Irakles seemed to have the stomach to address Stavros, to discuss whether Stavros might have been involved in Fulya's skirmish with death.

But it was hard to overlook that Fulya's own village and her father and brothers, and God knew how many sheepdogs, fellow Turks, and their illegal hunting rifles, was but an easy ten-minute sprint along the mountainside.

He looked into Mikis's *kafeneion*. A bar faced by bamboo rods, a plain sink, the usual checkered tablecloths, playing cards facedown, and ashtrays full of yesterday's stubs. He mopped his brow. “You actually asked Fulya to go to the beach with you. Wow.”

“Impulse, Chris. If you stop to think you get cold feet.”

If Irakles only knew about Rebecca, how she'd escaped the Cyprus summer (and him?) for Europe—something about a refill of culture, master classes, Vienna, etcetera. “And you had the nerve to ask her for another date,” he said.

“Fulya doesn't swim—I offered to teach her.”

Apparently satisfied with his mumbles about Jane—"She travels in the summer," he'd explained—Irakles had stopped asking about her. "Hey, when she returns," Irakles had said, "let's get together for a swim at Petrino."

Fat chance.

Bucket in hand, an elderly man in threadbare pajamas emerged from nowhere. The man sidled up to a sand-cement-mix heap—obviously left by construction workers—pilfered a bucket-full and hobbled off. Village life.

Irakles unfolded a sheet of paper. "Here's where we are," he said in English. "There's the mountainside and the network of caves. The solid lines are paths, the dotted ones are underground." He traced his pencil over the paper.

"What's so special here?" Chris said in Greek. "Every village in Cyprus claims old coins and Byzantine icons."

"English, English," Irakles said. "And not so loud."

"If *we* know about them, doesn't everybody? The stuff wouldn't just be left here."

"Who knows? Burial grounds, superstitions. Cesnola overlooked this place."

"Chess-nola?"

Irakles tucked away the plan. "American, nineteenth-century. Luigi Palma di Cesnola. His Cypriot loot bought him the directorship of the New York Metropolitan Museum of Art."

A clatter. A cigarette-smoking youth with a dustcart had trundled around the corner and stopped close by. The guy pulled a shovel from the cart and scraped at some animal droppings. Weren't street sweepers usually vacant-looking older men? This one looked fierce.

Mikis, the scrawny proprietor, shuffled out. The nineties-something man in peasant boots and heavy coat trembled from some affliction. Without removing the cigarette from his lips, he pointed at their bicycles, and said, "I hope your brakes hold going back down."

Irakles snorted. "My friend will stroll down, like he did coming up."

"Not true."

"He has my three-speed, while what I'm stuck with, as you can see, has no gears at all."

"Never used gears," Mikis said. "You need donkeys around here, not bicycles."

Irakles stuffed his art material into his satchel and rose from the chair. "A huge snake just crawled into your shop," he said in English.

What was Irakles on about? Irakles stood up, fumbled with his satchel and took out his cine camera. It whirred as he panned the church, the square, the *kafeneion*, then a close-up of a beaming Mikis, would-be film-star.

"Was there one?" Chris asked as they started across the square.

At the church, Irakles turned his camera on the chickens, the cats, the snoozing dog. "A snake? No. Just making sure Mikis couldn't have eavesdropped on us."

They found the church door locked, so they walked to the other side and planted themselves in the shade of an old fig tree.

A Bolex-Paillard H16. Doubtless a godfather's gift.

"See Kyrenia Castle?" Irakles said. "Over to the left—that's Petrino."

Petrino looked inviting—he could do with a swim. "Now, which way?"

Irakles pointed into a dilapidated garden, with pomegranates and lemon trees poking out of waist-high, dried-up weeds. "Can you detect the outline of the old monastery wall?"

As they walked in, a voice called out. "*Christaki*, tell your friend to go back to the church and you, you continue walking."

"Now, *amesos*," the man insisted.

"It's okay, go," Chris said waving Irakles away. "Go. I'll come back in a moment."

A man stepped out from behind a tree. "You don't know me?"

“Stavros!” He shivered. “You’re supposed to be dead.”

Rugged, bearded, and in village rags, Stavros had aged. No rifle or machine gun or ammunition belt—not a mustachioed *Viva Zapata!* figure minus sombrero, as Irakles would have said. Stavros picked at his teeth with the end of a sliver. A loose shirt dangled over the bulge at the hip. Around his neck he wore a handkerchief cowboy-style, a mask in an instant.

Stavros dropped the sliver, stepped forwards, and hugged him. “I *am* dead.”

Chris buried his face in Stavros’s shoulder. Stavros’s hug was strong, comforting, yet strangely lopsided. He pulled back. “What happened to your arm?”

Stavros slapped him on the back. “Cheer up. I still have one left. How are you when you don’t look so stupefied? I fight with my gun, you fight with your pen. Or else, remember?”

He remembered. He scanned his cousin’s face. Stavros, blessed with a body every boy envied, had a stump of an arm under his shirtsleeve. And what about his limp?

Stavros smiled back and stroked the scar on his forehead. “Barbed wire.” Abruptly, Stavros lashed out at Chris’s leg, but stopped short. “The car-jack. Remember?” A spit second, then, “Why aren’t you on the beach this time of day instead of struggling uphill on a bicycle?”

Heart pounding, Chris stared at the space Stavros’s right arm should have occupied and tried to imagine what remained of it. “The view. We came here for the view. Irakles invited me to his godfather’s mansion. You can see it from here.”

“It’s a palace, isn’t it?”

“And the church.”

Stavros raised his eyebrows.

“Irakles draws buildings.” He couldn’t betray Irakles, even to Stavros. “And people, you know—portraits. He’s into archaeology.”

“And he makes films,” Stavros said poker-faced. “You’re wise to be nervous, *Christaki*. Don’t sniff about. Leave.” He paused. “Whatever you and your friend are looking for isn’t here and you didn’t see me. Kalopetria has eyes and ears. I can’t guarantee his safety or yours. Stay away, as well as from Pano Vounaki. EOKA watches the entire mountainside. If someone finds you in the wrong place . . . They watched you even in Mikis’s *kafeneion*. It’s lucky I was here today. One day I’ll tell you all about it.” Stavros tugged his shirt, uncovering the bulge beneath. “My Browning automatic, Model 1935, thirteen rounds.”

“Your mother. Does she know you’re alive?”

Stavros laughed and touched his mouth. “You understand?”

Understand what? “It’s so fantastic to see you. What—?”

“I serve the Cypriot cause as an EOKA cadre. Remember and keep in mind—you’re a Greek Cypriot. The fight for union with Greece is not yet won. Finish school and go into politics. Learn from Makarios and leave the dirty work to people like me.” He put a finger to his lips. “Remember, family before country.”

A rustle of undergrowth and Stavros was gone.

Damn. He should have asked Stavros about Fulya’s night of terror.

It was obvious, he thought, as he made his way back to the church, why there were no official excavations in Kalopetria—and why none would be forthcoming. Kalopetria was an EOKA stronghold.

He found Irakles and the priest under the canopy of fig leaves. Clad in a black robe, with his hat on his head, Father Panaretos sat erect on a bench. Irakles, facing the priest, alternated between light and firm pencil strokes over his sketchbook.

“How is Stavros?” Irakles asked without looking up. “Yes, I am ashamed to say, I tricked Father Panaretos into admitting your cousin’s resurrection.”

How could the bugger have guessed? What did the priest know? Even behind his beard, the priest's Cheshire cat-like pose revealed a hint—beads of perspiration had broken out on his brow. Panaretos must be a member of EOKA too.

“It's elementary, Dr. Watson,” Irakles said. “Who else in Kalopetria would have secret business with you but not with me? Given the rumors.”

Rumors. Like him, Irakles had already arrived at a conclusion. Would they carry on with their summer adventure? Explore the caves? Obviously not.

But he didn't care. Stavros was alive!

Chapter 42

At eight-thirty on an already blistering morning, Irakles knocked on the front door of the Petrino villa. After a brief wait, he cupped his hands against the door and called out, "It's me, Irakles."

He heard a commotion from within—china smashing, muffled commands. Moments later, the heavy wooden door opened a crack. Elena clung to its edge. No makeup, bleary-eyed in a negligee.

"Oh, dear," she said, "*Please* say you're early."

"I caught an earlier bus."

"You look like you didn't manage much sleep last night."

Neither did she. But then, she didn't reach her zenith, as she put it, until the first curtain-call of the evening. She stifled a yawn. "I just can't seem to shake the clutches of Hypnos."

A door banged. She beckoned him to wait and withdrew behind the door. When she reappeared, she was wrapped in a gown. He followed her through the stone vestibule to the kitchen at the end of the passageway. The table, set for two, missed a coffee cup—its life sacrificed to haste and unforgiving tiles—hence, the brown patch on the floor.

She cleared the table. "Some breakfast? Your favorite *halloumi*—fried?"

He plonked himself on a chair. "Coffee, please."

"I'm so looking forward to meeting your amour—it'll be a thrilling day."

All night he'd obsessed about Fulya, how she'd feel about today, about meeting Elena. Surely nowhere could be safer for her than the Petrino estate (as long as neither his mother nor Sokratis showed up). And if Elena took to her, well, Elena feared no one.

As she finished pouring, something rattled, probably a shutter. She flung down the pot. "Excuse me. I must put on a face." And she skittered out of the kitchen.

A door slammed. A man's voice, muffled but gruff. He'd heard that voice before, just yesterday. Good Lord, her companion for the night had been Stavros Ikonis, someone whose resurrection he couldn't even chat about with Chris. After his it's-elementary-Dr.-Watson line in front of Father Panaretos, neither Kalopetria artifacts nor cousin Stavros could be spoken of again. Nor the gullibility of village priests. Anyway, Stavros let him leave Kalopetria. Perhaps Panaretos had vouched for him. Perhaps at this moment Elena was vouching for him too.

Stavros. Wow. The man who almost killed Fulya.

Elena's greatest vulnerability: a powerful man. In this case, a 'dead' man about whom poems circulated in school-yards and heroic songs rang out in the streets. Maybe Elena worked for EOKA.

Indulging in extravagances and mistresses, her Sokratis had already achieved the pinnacle of every Greek's dream but he would never allow his wife—his property—to be violated. If caught in flagrante delicto, resurrected EOKA hero or not, such violation justified immediate death.

Irakles drank his coffee. His apprehension had returned—not fear that disabled, but that temple-pounding alertness, that frantic hyperventilation essential at the starting line of a final race. By the time Elena appeared, he'd showered, changed, and downed three cups.

Amplly jeweled in a mandarin dress, lightly powdered, orange-lipped, she billowed vapors of Chanel No. 5 as she marched through the living room doors onto the verandah. In his

trunks and unbuttoned shirt, barefoot, he strolled behind. They made their way to the shade of a tree by the mock classical-Greek facade of the main entrance to the villa.

He buttoned up his shirt.

His first contact with Fulya probably lasted five minutes. Then, after a ton of letters, they met on a public beach. She'd made him wait a year for something he ached for even before he knew her name. Survival of the species? Darwin? He looked at his watch. Moron. This wasn't just about sexual selection. Fulya *too* had to wade through the cesspool of ethnic hatreds.

He unbuttoned his shirt and let his chest catch the breeze.

Elena jiggled her diamonds. "I haven't seen you so nervous since you were a little boy. When you were nine you showed me you could swim underwater with your eyes open. You asked me to throw coins into the sea as far as I could. Sunken treasure, you called it."

"I lost some. Remember?"

He also remembered how he'd sobbed when his mother revealed that Sokratis and not Savvas was his real father. Until then, Sokratis had been his 'godfather.' Elena knew but never touched the subject. He'd never seen her with Olympia. Elena stuck to the pretence. "Please convey my regards to your dear mother and father," she'd say, "and remind them that they are welcome at Petrino whenever they want to escape Nicosia's heat. As you are, *Irakle mou*."

Elena waved a lacy white handkerchief as Mehmet's Austin A40 delivery van crunched gravel towards them. As if ready for a speedy departure, the van entered the tiled plaza on an arc. On its side were the words Özal Bros, unevenly stenciled in black capitals, one small black character at a time. Below, the same words, painted over. When the van came to a spring-groaning, rough-idle halt, Irakles opened her door. Clutching a shopping bag, Fulya stepped out.

He raised a hand in greeting, but Mehmet's look might have been appropriate if he were dropping off his sister at a snake pit. He shrugged and shut the van door and the van left.

Elena dabbed her brow with her handkerchief, then placed her hands on Fulya's shoulders. "*Ma cherie!* A cardigan in this heat—you'll melt. It's already ninety degrees. Fortunately, I have cold lemonade waiting for you." And she ushered Fulya into the villa.

"How wonderful," Fulya said when they arrived at the verandah. She stuffed her cardigan into her shopping bag, set the bag down, and hugged one of the stone columns. "I've never seen a prettier view of the sea." She turned to look through the doorway they had walked through. "That fireplace. It looks like the entrance to a vault."

Lucretia shifted from her dog-sized Persian carpet, and slurped at Fulya's ankle.

Elena fondled her necklace. "I hope you didn't bring towels—we have *everything* here. I have bathing suits—mind you, my friends have fuller figures than you. I *do* envy that figure. *Irakle*, why didn't you bring her here before?"

"Christakis Ikonis hid her from me."

Fulya blushed. "Chris and I have the same music teacher."

"Bring along that drink," Elena said, "and I'll show you where to change."

He paced the corridor, straining to make out their words. There were raucous moments, mostly Elena's voice rising in pitch, followed by long silences. At one point, Elena dashed out of the room and called for someone on the hall telephone. At last they emerged, chattering, arm in arm like old friends. Fulya was dressed in an oversized beach-coat. Ultramarine. Of course, the Virgin Mary—Byzantine depictions.

"She told me her entire life story," Elena said. "We'll get a piano at last—for years I nagged Sokratis for one but he always says, 'Why? Nobody plays'."

"But you can't buy a piano on my behalf," Fulya said.

"Nonsense. I have just the place to put it. Right here."

A voice floated around the corner of a verandah door. "You called for me, *kyria?*"

“Stop hiding, *Dimitri*. Come here. I want you to get a piano.”

“A what, madam?” Dimitris asked as he entered.

“A piano. Are you deaf?”

“How, madam?”

“Buy one, hire one, or steal one. A great pianist will entertain us after lunch.”

Dimitris peered around the room. Claspings its fabric at her waist and neck, Fulya sealed herself into Elena's Virgin-Mary beach-coat.

“What kind?” Dimitris asked.

Elena turned to Fulya. “What's the best?”

“A Steinway, but—”

“No buts. You heard the young lady, *Dimitri*, a Steinmann.”

“Steinway,” Irakles said.

“That's right. Try the Ledra Palace Hotel. If there's no Steinway get their second best. Do not return without a piano.”

Dimitris shifted from foot to foot. “Madam, *Kyrios Sokratis* has an errand for me—”

“Cancel it.”

Dimitris knitted his brows. “I'll lose my job, madam.”

Elena waived Fulya's objections aside and said, “Erase that pitiful look. You'll definitely lose your job if you don't do as I request.”

Muttering “Stein-hooay, Stein-hooay,” Dimitris shuffled out of the room.

Elena took Fulya by the arm and led her to the stairs at the end of the verandah. “Take the umbrella, my dear. Stay out of the sun. *Irakle*, can you keep your talons off the pretty dove—*poulaki mou*—at least until I have a woman-to-woman talk with her at lunch time?”

Chapter 43

With a stab, followed by a jump to sink it securely, Irakles planted the umbrella in the sandy patch at the crotch of the pitted limestone shore. “How could choosing a swimsuit take so long?”

Aligning herself with the water's edge, Fulya settled prone under the umbrella. “She mentioned all the places she'd performed in—what she wore, where, and on what occasion.”

He lay down at right-angles to her, half in, half out of the sea, and water whooshed up his legs and cascaded over his buttocks. “Did you get a word in edgeways?”

She peered around the cove, out to sea, back at him. “Do you think she's watching us?” she whispered. She arced a leg across the sand. As she repeated the cycle, the sand's resistance uncovered her thigh. When she realized why his stare kept drifting, she smiled, covered her eyes with her hand, but continued to let the sand caress her leg. “You're so lucky to have two women who want to mother you.”

He needed a change in posture, so he stood up. “I'll have you swimming by lunch.”

She opened her eyes and pulled the coat over her leg. “I don't know why I'm doing this.”

“Here's the plan. You'll wade in towards me. First, you'll put your face into the water and blow bubbles. Then, you're going to hold your breath and let yourself sink, eyes closed of course, so you can feel how easily you float. Then I'm going to pull you towards me so you can feel the water rushing against your face. Ready?”

“I'll get sucked under.”

“You’ll have to take that coat off.”

She waved him away. Submerged to his neck, he steadied himself against the swell and held his breath as Fulya, with her back to him, slowly unbuttoned her coat. She stopped to scan the villa and the hillside. All quiet. No gardener. No Elena. No Stavros. Viewed through binoculars from an EOKA crow’s nest in Kalopetria she’d be a dot on the beach.

She glanced at him over her shoulder as if to make sure he was still close. At last, she let the beach-coat flow off her shoulders, slip down her back, and fall to the sand. She turned to face him, eyes downcast, her hands clasped together in front of a one-piece ultramarine bathing costume. Her arms pressed her breasts together.

She grabbed her bathing cap, drew close to the water and to him, and said, “*Kyria* Elena was horrified by what I’d brought”—she worked her hair under the cap—“but I just couldn’t wear that bikini she made me try on. Is this okay?”

What palette would he choose for her skin? Slabs of orange over burnt sienna with cadmium yellow streaks for the sunny planes. Yes, and he’d carve out her form in purple and viridian. And work *alla prima*, with jazzy strokes, brushes fully charged. “You look fantastic. Now off with that cap—your hair will get wet anyway. Those caps leak.”

She unfastened the snap, threw off the cap, and tossed her head. As she moved forwards, her hair swished over her shoulders.

Wow, he’d render her like van Dyck, silky, light, sensuous—in a transparent chemise. “Closer. Come closer—you’re still too far away.”

She picked her way as if negotiating a slick surface. Then, arms outstretched, she ploughed through the swirl, shooting spurts up her legs. She lost her balance and cried out as the swell lifted her towards him.

He grabbed her and braced himself. “Hold still,” he said.

She yielded and he slipped his arms around her and she glued herself to him, cheek binding cheek. She yelled, “there’s something sharp down there,” lost her foothold, and curled her legs around his waist.

Her waterlogged hair smacked his face and her legs tightened and relaxed as she fought the current. He slipped his arms down her back and grasped her by the waist. “Put your feet down,” he said. “There’s sand under you.”

But she continued clinging to him as she hoisted herself to look over his shoulder into the water. “What are all those dark shapes floating about?”

“Over there, submerged rocks. Here, shadows, reflections—nothing to be afraid of. This is where I learned to swim and I’ve been diving off yonder rocks for years.”

She tightened her grip. “You’re *not* to frighten me today. No diving or disappearing.”

That meant there’d be a tomorrow.

“Not until I can swim,” she said.

“And you can save me?”

“Exactly.”

Thirty minutes later, by the hand and elbow, he waded her back to shore.

Without drying herself, she ducked into the beach-coat as if suddenly discovered naked and curled under the umbrella. “I love the smell of salty water,” she said like a child who discovered that a ball returns when lobbed skyward. “I’ve never felt so happy.”

He pulled his satchel towards him. “Roll over, make yourself comfortable, and stretch out your right hand on the sand as if you’re about to play the piano.”

With a sharpened stick of charcoal, he scratched, shaded, and crosshatched. “There,” he said. A final stab. He signed the sheet *Iraklé ’57*, scribbled something on the back and handed it to her with a flourish.

“‘Fulya’s right hand: Study No. 1’,” she read solemnly. “I’ve only seen beautiful things like this in library books. Can I keep it?” She stroked the surface then pulled back as if a flame had scorched her hand. She turned the finger towards her and inspected it.

“Smudged and fingerprinted by the model,” he said. “When you’re famous and I’m dead, it’ll be worth a lot of money.”

After her hand, her face. And they kissed and they talked.

And after their next swim she asked, “Do you have a girl in England?”

He’d predicted she’d use the Greek word ‘*philenada*,’ which implied commitment to marriage, rather than ‘girlfriend.’ Instead, she used ‘girl.’ “Girl *friends*, yes. A *girl*, no.” He looked at her. She wanted more.

“Have you drawn her? No, don’t tell me.”

Yes, Rosemary Smith. He’d collaged black-and-white cutouts of Rosemary’s figure—faces painted out—onto a brown cubist canvas. Along with cuttings from the “News of the World” and the label from the Chianti bottle she’d seduced him with. A work his art teacher had disparaged with, “if you insist on representing the obscene, Naxiotis, at least grace your class with something original.”

The rush of seawater masked his heartbeat. “Come to the cinema with me,” he said. “*The Seven Year Itch* is on at the Magic Gardens.”

She balked. “It’s terribly provocative.”

“You easily pass for Greek—we’ll be all right.”

“What do I tell my father?”

“A recital,” he said. “You’re doing a private recital organized by Miss Ouzanian. There’s piano in the film, Rachmaninoff’s something-or-other. Christakis will come along, and the two of you can do a critique. In summary, at least your reason is half true.”

“Are you always so devious?”

“I saw the film in England but I could watch Marilyn Monroe over and over. I want to be a director like Billy Wilder.”

A yell, high-pitched, echoed off the rocks.

“Damn,” he said. “I lost track of time. She’s calling us to lunch.”

The gardener hadn’t tended to the parched orchard. Elena hadn’t hovered around. No Stavros. No Sokratis. And viewed through EOKA binoculars from Kalopetria, he and Fulya were still specks on the coast.

Chapter 44

Irakles had showered and changed swimsuits, as had Fulya. They were now assembled in the living room, with the verandah doors ajar to funnel the breeze. Elena sucked sparingly from a cigarette holder, propelling smoke-slivers from the corner of her mouth. Fulya sat on the stool—which the enterprising Dimitris had also procured—and performed warm-up exercises on a Blüthner grand.

“Fantasie-Impromptu by Chopin,” Fulya said. “My favorite piece.”

She reached over her shoulder and he took her hand. Then, with fingers curved, she lifted her hands high, hesitated, and attacked the keyboard with the precision of a marksman. For the next five minutes, she skimmed and stroked the keys as if massaging a lover.

Amid cries of bravo and encore, Elena wiped a teardrop from her eye and said, “Precious girl. Her teacher at least taught her the grace of an artist if not how to use makeup. I’m adopting her immediately.”

He kissed Elena on the cheek. “Thank you for making her welcome.”

“Sokratis will be furious,” she whispered in his ear as Fulya shuffled on the bench and readied for the next piece. “His men borrowed this instrument right out of the Ledra Palace ballroom.”

She held her cigarette holder at arm’s length in a manner she must have presumed elegant. Perhaps the breeze would lift her off her feet and she’d magically waft through one of

her many doors, and Fulya would abandon herself to him—Zeus seducing a willing Danae, showered with gold in her prison tower, under the watchful presence of Eros.

“Polonaise in A-flat major,” Fulya said.

As she began, the beach-coat crept down her shoulders. She tried to shrug it back. No luck. She stood up and allowed Elena to yank it off. Composure restored, she continued playing in her bathing suit—a multi-colored, one-piece number with halter-tie straps, cut low in the back. The ‘best-fitting’ swimsuit Elena could find.

While his heart raced, Elena threw him what seemed to pass for a wink.

After Beethoven’s *Apassionata*, Fulya, bathed in sweat, bowed to a standing ovation and submitted to Elena’s sloppy kisses.

Elena cried out, “This calls for cham-pania,” and whisked out of the room. She returned with three glasses and a bottle of Moet & Chandon.

“I’ve never tried this before,” Fulya said. She gulped at it and spluttered.

He grabbed her glass and tapped her on the back.

“You must sip, like me, *ma cherie*,” Elena said. “Irakles said you were good. I said okay. But you’re marvelous! Too bad this classical music has no dance beat.”

“Syncopation?” Fulya asked. “You *do* find it in classical music.”

“In Bach too?” Elena asked.

“Of course.”

“And in rhythm’n’blues,” Irakles said.

“Like this?” Fulya stomped her left heel to simulate a back-beat. Her fingers burst into a slow rendition of the opening bars of Fats Domino’s *Blueberry Hill*. Knees wide, modesty abandoned, she hammered out the melody, mouthing the lyrics.

He moved close to her and looked over her shoulder. She returned to the opening bars, picked up the tempo, restrung the phrases, and added new ones.

Elena belly-danced across the floor. “Now *that's* syncopation.”

A bang. Dimitris and the contingent from Sokratis's factory had returned for the piano.

Oblivious, Fulya played on, dispensing with the tune but continuing with the chords. The crew's heads jerked between her and Elena's undulating flesh. The concert over, she bowed to a second ovation—bravo, encore, and wolf-whistles—and submitted to another kiss on each cheek. Suddenly aware of her open-mouthed audience, she snatched the beach-coat off the floor and tucked herself into it.

The men grunted the grand out of the living room with as much finesse as emptying a sack of carobs into a cattle trough. A nick here, a scratch there, no matter—avoiding cigarette smoke from bloodshot eyes took priority. Dimitris stood by the truck and, redundantly but solemnly, yelled instructions. At last, the Umanco (Cyprus) Ltd. truck growled away.

*

If only she could kiss him and whisper how much she adored him, she thought as they rose from the table following lunch. She must be patient, though, wait until they were alone again. She'd bob about in the sea, seated in his hands like a baby in a bathtub, her limbs curled around him. When she could swim, would he still cradle her and lift her high when a wave rolled by?

“Will it hurt me that I'm Turkish?” she asked looking into her glass, watching the champagne bubbles pop.

“Not in England or America,” Elena said, “nor anywhere outside the Middle East. When I appeared on stage, the audience was concerned only with my talent and my peerless beauty.”

Only in a fairy tale. Glass in hand, she swayed on her feet. “I broke into a boogie-woogie once. Christakis’s brother dared me. I started sweet then went for hot. Miss Ouzanian was horrified and threatened me with a really difficult piece—I was scared it would be a Rachmaninoff concerto.”

“Fulya’s coming to the cinema with me,” Irakles said to Elena.

“When?”

“On Saturday.”

“In that case,” Elena said, “we’ll first visit my beautician and then go to a boutique. She needs elegant clothes.”

Oh, God. “No,” she said looking straight at Elena. “I can’t.”

“To be noticed,” Elena said, “you must cultivate the right affectations.”

She raised her eyebrows and shook her head to declare that being noticed negated her upbringing. It would make being seen with Irakles even more dangerous. Besides, she couldn’t afford nice clothes.

“Doesn’t your teacher, Miss . . .”

“Ouzanian.”

“Yes—doesn’t she help you with clothing and makeup?”

“I’ve no time for that.” Not quite true. She felt herself reddening as she remembered times she’d dolled herself up, trying to look like Miss Ouzanian, trying to mimic her etiquette and attention to detail, but only in her own room behind a locked door. She glanced at Irakles. He wore that look again, the one that made her feel beautiful. She took another sip of champagne.

“I’ve always said,” Elena continued, shifting the champagne glass to her left hand and making the sign of the cross, “raw talent takes you only so far. Packaging is essential. Take

those Cadbury's, for example." Elena put down her glass and reached into the box—crimson fingernails and gold rings sparkling—and popped a chocolate into her mouth. She offered a bonbon, as she called it, to her listeners and placed one on the floor for Lucretia.

"A doggie that eats chocolates?"

"Not those awful things Sokratis makes," Elena said. "They're exported, thank God—they'll eat anything in Africa. Even my poochy turns up her nose at them. Where was I? Cadbury's. How do you know what's inside tastes good unless you announce it with a pretty box?"

"Actually," Irakles said, "if you remember, I said that."

"You see, Fulya, I told you he's destined for greatness. He thinks like me." Elena rushed away and returned with a strand of pearls. "*Ena doraki*—a small gift. For Saturday night."

"I couldn't possibly accept these."

Dear Elena, a romantic, unwilling to accept the danger of a Turkish girl's friendship with her godson. But she longed to resume the swimming lesson—to make the fantasy continue. The champagne. That was it. The champagne had dulled her sense of peril. She felt giddy.

At last, lunch ended, and she tripped behind Irakles down the shrubby path to the beach, saying, "Let's go in right away."

She started out the afternoon more skillful at minding those clumps of slippery rock. Or perhaps she missed bumping into them because Irakles wouldn't let go. Silly Fulya. As the seawater swirled around her, she maneuvered herself in his arms and said, "Hold me again like you did this morning."

She shut her eyes and molded herself to him.

Chapter 45

Metaxas Square, 1957. Nicosia's entertainment hub. Thick with souvlaki smoke and body odor—a predictable Saturday dusk in August. Youthful crowds segregated by gender, streamed across the neon-lit causeway that straddled the perennially dry moat around the city. Leaning against a railing alongside Irakles, Chris watched the melee.

Like himself and Irakles, except that Irakles's stuff looked expensive, men sported open-neck shirts and dark, tight slacks. Interspersed by preening—combs run through hair saturated with lavender-oil—men popped or crunched *basadembo*, *kounnes*, and *stragalia* plied by vociferous vendors. Girls clad in gray or blue sauntered by, arms linked. In answer to leers, the presumably modest among them tugged at their hair or smoothed their skirts. The ritual chatter? The opposite sex. The male chatter? Sex. One-on-one flirtation? Taboo.

He'd warned Irakles to go slow. Yet here they were, anyway, pissing away time before Fulya's arrival. Fulya should know better.

Irakles slipped his comb into a hip pocket and surveyed the girls. When sun-burnt foreigners ambled by, Irakles said, "I'll never forget the day I bumped into you and Jane."

Neither would he. Nor his and Jane's lovemaking in the sand.

"Sexy stepmother—Claire, isn't it?" Irakles shook his wrist as if searching for words of description and said, "Both times I saw her, her face looked different."

This was girl-talk. Yet, he wondered how girls altered their looks, particularly Rebecca.

“I confess, Jane rather grew on me,” Irakles said as if guessing his thoughts, then swung his hand at the crowd and added, “Makes these birds look like wallpaper.”

Mister Panache would laugh about how he'd let Jane dissolve from his life. Fortunately, Irakles knew nothing about 'Miss Ouzanian' other than she was Fulya's teacher. “Wallpaper?”

“Wallpaper reflects the national character of Britain.” Irakles threw him a glance.

“That's supposed to be funny.”

“How can you joke at a time like this?”

“Where's Jane?” Irakles said. “You've been kind of cagey about her.”

“I told you, she left.”

“Without a peep?”

“Without a peep.”

“That look you gave me in Kyrenia?” Irakles chuckled. “Intense enough to blister the finish on the Queen's Bentley.”

He also remembered Stavros's escape from the police that day and Jane's display of sympathy. He wiped his hand across his forehead. The day's stored heat, given back by the asphalt, clung to him like wet underwear. “Hey, let's move on.”

“She's probably still in Cyprus.”

How the hell would Irakles know? They pushed their way towards the cluster of restaurants, cinemas, and cabarets outside the city wall. They halted at a cabaret and looked at the array of photographs advertising tonight's performers. ‘Direct from Beirut’ read a caption. Those tits couldn't be real.

Laughter. He turned. Across the street, some girls were looking their way, their bursts of apparent glee drowned by the jangle of bicycle bells and honking cars. He felt his waist to check that his shirt was still tucked in.

Irakles ran his fingers through his hair. "They've been following us."

One of the bunch broke ranks and sliced through the traffic towards them. "That's Stella," he said. "My cousin." Perhaps she had a message from Stavros.

But Stella didn't so much as blink in his direction. Instead, she grabbed Irakles by the arm, pulled him towards her, and whispered into his ear.

"Thanks," Irakles said to her. "Perhaps another time."

Stella's face looked as if a priest had just banned her from Holy Communion. She darted back across the street, where her group swallowed her.

"What did she say?"

"She and a friend want to join us."

He stared across the street. "Stella doesn't take rejection well."

At the Magic Gardens open-air cinema, they checked the posters.

"We sure get our films late in Cyprus," Irakles said as they continued on towards the Nicosia Stadium.

We? Odd coming from someone who only spent the holidays here. "Not really. I already saw *The Seven Year Itch* last year." He glanced at his watch. "Have I told you recently you're a fucking idiot?"

"Strangely, there are moments when I hope Fulya won't turn up at all."

They were lounging by the wall of the stadium when Mehmet's van, wrapped in summer dust, scuffed its tires along the sidewalk behind indifferent pedestrians. Seemingly ready to make a grab for the door, Irakles edged forwards.

Not so fast, lover-boy. He grabbed Irakles and said, "Wait until he leaves."

Fulya stepped out. She'd caught sight of them—her face lit up.

What have you *done* to yourself, he wanted to say. He wet his lips and waited for Mehmet's van to pull away.

"You're gorgeous," Irakles said.

She shrank back and averted her eyes, but only for a moment. She straightened and smiled and her smile lingered. Was that a hint of lipstick?

Where *had* she picked up her clothes and these man-attracting signals? Her father and brothers should have given her hell. "You look so different," he said.

He turned to Irakles for explanation and got a jolt, a blatant I-snapped-her-up-right-under-your-nose-eat-your-heart-out look. Damn you, Irakles, if you try to eclipse me tonight or humiliate me—

"What a necklace," Irakles said. "As godmother Elena would say, *très chic*. Hey, we're embarrassing her, talking about her as if she weren't here."

With Fulya between them, they strolled arm-in-arm along Evagorou Street, back towards the throng, forty-five minutes to enjoy the hubbub before they had to make their way to the Magic Gardens cinema. He and Irakles ate a souvlaki in a pita. Fulya declined.

"What do the two of you talk about?" he asked.

"Her talent intimidates you," Irakles said.

Fuck this. Now Fulya might bring up their debate about him being pedantic.

"We discuss how much we appreciate you helping us with our letters," Fulya said squeezing his arm.

"I taught her how to swim," Irakles said.

"Isn't that fantastic?" Fulya said.

"My godmother's become Fulya's artistic patron."

Fulya must have somehow sneaked past Mehmet and hitched up with Irakles at Petrino, all under Elena's nose—the unthinkable nerve. “Really? She's interested in classical music?”

“Fulya plays rock'n'roll,” Irakles said. “Did you know?”

“She's passed Grade Eight music, so she can do anything.”

“Have you heard that number in *Baby Doll*?” Irakles said. “Ain't Got No Home by Clarence “Frogman” Henry? It's addictive, like watching Carroll Baker in a cot sucking her thumb. Fantastic piano lead-in—it's not Chopin but it gives me energy.”

Energy. The capacity for doing work. He'd have to work damned hard tonight to prevent Irakles from running away with every scene.

“I love the sparkling lights,” Fulya said. “Doesn't this remind you of Piccadilly Circus? I can hardly wait to go to London.”

“I hate to disillusion you, Fulya,” Irakles said. “This is nothing like Piccadilly, but it sure reminds me of Nicosia.”

Whereupon Fulya broke away from them and worked herself into the crowd.

He grabbed Irakles by the arm. “Just keep her in sight,” he said. “Let her cool off. Once you went to all the trouble to ask her out, you bugger, why can't you be nice? There's been an edge to your voice since we met her.”

“I was trying to be funny.”

They followed Fulya to Metaxas Square. “Fuck it. Stella and her stupid friends are behind us.” Doubtless, still monitoring Mister bicep-rippling Panache.

“Ignore them.”

“If you didn't want me around, why the hell did you ask me to be your chaperone?”

“She said she'd be performing in a private recital organized by your Miss Ouzanian. I put her up to it. Hey, watch her. She's heading for the moat.”

They scurried and dashed down the stairwell after her.

By day, the treed, sandy area next to Metaxas Square served as a playground. At dusk—dimly lit—it wasn't nearly as crowded as the streets. In seconds, facing a row of children's swings by the ancient city wall, they found Fulya quivering on a bench. But they too had been followed. Stella's crowd. Others too. This time, Stella had someone at her side, a young man who was pointing at Fulya.

Why Fulya?

Swaying as if drunk, the man pushed past them, feigned a stumble over Fulya's feet, and fell to his knees. "Remember me, your friend Fivos?"

Of course, Fivos—not Kalopetria's street sweeper as had flashed to mind, but the rioter whose fist he'd collided with in Miss Beecham's last summer.

Fivos knew Fulya?

Fivos sank both hands into her legs. "If you're still a virgin, you won't be when this night is over." Fivos sprang to his feet, and jiggled his crotch at her. "Remember this? Here, touch it." Arm out, Fivos made as if to coax Fulya's head towards his cock, and touched her head. She squirmed back into the bench as if to dislodge a lizard.

A fellow Greek was insulting Fulya. This couldn't be willed away. As someone's radio began to play Little Richard, he started forwards. But Irakles elbowed him aside and, with an upward thrust, blocked Fivos.

Fivos stumbled.

"Get up, *Fivo*," someone shouted. "Are you going to let that anglophile do this to you?"

As Fivos straightened and crept towards Fulya, Little Richard's Tutti Frutti ripped into the saxophone solo—a blanket of noise.

His feet apart, balancing on his toes, Irakles smashed the edge of his hand into Fivos's face. With both hands he snatched Fivos upright and, like a tennis player catching the ball with the sweet point of the racket, launched him into the wall of people.

No one seemed ready to scuttle the brawl. Or join it, thank God. Stella had disappeared. Along with those neighborhood- and school-friends, those familiar faces so evident earlier in the evening. If he or 'anglophile' Irakles had any friends left in this crowd, none dared show his face. He stared at Fulya, frozen to the bench.

He'd panicked, and held back that microsecond too long, as usual. Irakles had already dispensed with him. But he *had* to help. How, though? I charged you to escort Fulya, to remain by her side. Rebecca's voice. He heaved his legs, crashed his backside onto the bench, slipped an arm around Fulya's shoulders. He raised his other arm. If anyone dared an approach . . .

Blood streaming from his eyes, Fivos rolled away as if to rest and nurse his face. He put on a choking fit, probably to gain time. Egged on by the crowd, he bounded to his feet, angled his neck like a ramrod, and hurled himself at Irakles.

Irakles sidestepped and snatched Fivos's shirt collar. The shirt ripped. Fivos flew past Irakles and cracked his head against the bench. As he fell, Fivos seized Irakles by the calf and clawed him to the ground.

Chris yanked Fulya to her feet, steered her behind the bench, and held her. She buried her face in his shoulder and wept.

He watched people's eyes, people's hands, anything. Anyone might fling a rock, with more rocks to follow. But he couldn't walk her out of the park and back into the street—at any second, if Irakles needed him, he'd have to let go of her, and jump in.

Fivos's fingers seemed hooked into Irakles's groin. Irakles heaved like the Hunchback of Notre Dame, wrenched free, ploughed a foot into Fivos's chest, and clambered to his feet.

Fulya dug in her fingers and strained her head to look. He stroked her hair and prayed for a quick end. Irakles just *had* to win.

Fivos, face down, breathing in bursts, appeared beaten. He lifted his head to the crowd, and held up a hand as if in submission. Obviously, Fivos was faking, looking for an escape route. Irakles desisted. Bad move. Fivos lunged. The onlookers cheered. But Irakles's knuckles crashed against Fivos's face, this time flooring him martial-arts style.

Fivos was quaking, more with humiliation than anger. Spitting blood, he dragged himself upright and flicked open a switchblade. "I'll get you," he screamed at Irakles. He sliced the air with the blade, up and down, side to side—as if daring Irakles to risk a dash. "And your friend. He's finished too. And you"—Fivos pointed the knife at Fulya—Stay in your village, you Turkish whore. If I find you in the street again, I'll cut out your heart."

As if to clear his eyes, Irakles whipped a forearm across his face and seemed poised to launch himself at Fivos.

Chris struggled to undo Fulya's grip. He dashed around the bench, snatched Irakles by the wrists, and blocked his path. "For God's sake. He's not worth it." To the final "A lop bam boom" from the radio, he backed Irakles away from the spectators.

The fight had lasted two minutes.

Face a-jitter, caked in blood and dirt, Irakles stood akimbo and gasped for air. He'd lost a shoe, and his shirt and trousers were ripped.

Fulya grabbed Irakles's arm. "It's my fault," she said between sobs. "It's all my fault."

What *was* her connection with Fivos? That Sunday in Kyrenia, Fivos had singled *him* out. This evening, surely, he'd been spared because Fivos knew that Stavros was still alive. "I had a run-in with that slime last year," he said.

"Oh God, oh God," Fulya said. "I shouldn't have come here."

Irakles must know he'd have dived in, if necessary. By now, his knuckles probably throbbled like hell. However, Irakles had needed to triumph in front of Fulya.

"We'll take you home," Fulya said.

Panting, lip swelling, Irakles massaged his wrists and straightened up. "Chris, take Fulya to the cinema. It's the best place to hide her this evening." He ran his fingers over his mouth and pulled at his teeth. "I'll be waiting by the exit when the film ends. Walk slowly towards the stadium, and I'll catch up with you." And he turned away and spat into a dried-up flower-bed.

They made their way to the steps leading from the moat back up to Metaxas Square. Halfway up, Fulya stopped. Standing on a step above Irakles, she wiped his face with her handkerchief and kissed him.

At the top of the steps, Irakles looked at them for a moment, took Chris's wrist and pushed it against Fulya's arm. "Hold on to her," Irakles said. "Hey, and both of you, quit looking like your film debut has ended up on the cutting-room floor."

And he bade them adieu.

They watched Irakles leave, then they walked to the cinema.

A welcome breeze fanned the patrons packed into the Magic Gardens as they waited under a clear sky for the Cinemascope performance. Nights of fantasy, when men modeled themselves on Robert Taylor and women idolized Rita Hayworth.

The Seven Year Itch started. At the familiar opening of Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto, he turned to Fulya.

Under cover of the flickering dark, she returned his smile.

Right now, Rebecca should be somewhere in the Mediterranean sailing back to Cyprus. He thought of the day he'd spread her out in her bed and sucked her neck. The day he'd stroked her legs, ran his fingers along her spine, and discovered the dimple in the small of her back. The

day he showed her exactly how he'd kissed her while she lay unconscious. Why not? He'd saved her, she said.

But the real Christakis Ikonis had been discarded by his English girlfriend and was afraid to join the Cypriot struggle for freedom. Choked with cowardice, the real Christakis was a fraud. A tardy tongue served in verbal jousts with English pricks like Harry Lawrell, but when it came time for real action, his timing stunk.

His stomach knotted when Tom Ewell peeked into US Camera magazine to look up an "art" print of Marilyn Monroe. It reminded him of Irakles's suggestion that Jane pose. Irakles. Brave Irakles made light of conflict, yet dragged everyone into it.

Ah, the Chopsticks duet. Almost time for the mandatory intermission. Monroe, locked in Ewell's arms, toppled off the piano bench.

As vendors plied the aisles, he glanced at the apartment balconies that overlooked the cinema. "Those lucky people up there can watch this film every night," he said to Fulya.

He feigned nonchalance, but felt as if he were facing a dentist's drill. Stella. Of all girls to have developed a hankering for Irakles, Stavros's sister. How would Fivos exact revenge? His EOKA friends could yet be lying in wait for them tonight. For Irakles *and* for him. Irakles should have hailed a taxi, taken Fulya home. Yeah. Mister Panache and his sidekick still had time to choose between getting beaten up by Fulya's brothers or by a gang of fellow Greeks.

"I do hope Irakles is okay," Fulya said.

"He's usually Mister Cool. Always figured him as doing whatever he could to avoid a fight. Laugh things off."

"It's my fault." A hand touched his shoulder.

He turned. Stella was alone.

“Warn Irakles that Fivos is EOKA,” Stella said. “For now, though, tonight, he’s been ordered to get lost.” She looked at Fulya. “I’m really sorry. You’re lucky to have someone fight for you like that. Irakles. Hold onto him.” Then she left.

Who could have ordered Fivos to get lost? Stella? Being Stavros’s sister should be authority enough. He searched for words to question Fulya. “Do you know Fivos?”

“He lives in Kalopetria,” she whispered. She held on to her dress and quivered. “He’s scared me before. But my brother Serhan gave him a beating and he never bothered me again.”

“Why did you run away from us?”

“I spotted him,” she said. “I got frightened.”

Why had her family allowed her to go out looking so conspicuous? Who’d dressed her and done her makeup? “I’ll never forget the day Miss Ouzanian asked me to look after you.”

She pressed her head against his shoulder. “That’s when you told me Irakles wanted to write to me. Remember?”

Yeah. That was the day Jane had slammed her door in his face, also the day Rebecca opened up. “If things had gone bad for Irakles,” he said. “I’d have jumped in.” Well, no one would ever know. He and Irakles had never discussed the Fivos-led riot in Miss Beecham’s, nor Stavros’s resurrection. Yet both issues must have played a role in tonight’s drama.

“That girl over there,” Fulya said. “Do you know her?”

He followed the direction of Fulya’s nod. There, over to the side, in the row in front, unmistakably, sat Jane Simmons. Still in Cyprus.

As Jane returned his glance—or had she looked past him?—Fulya slipped her hand into his. “Don’t leave me,” she whispered and dug her piano-trained fingers into the palm of his hand.

A redheaded man sat between Jane and Claire. Not Jane’s father, but familiar.

He shut his eyes and rubbed his forehead with his free hand. When he opened his eyes, Jane was still there. No smile? No fond recognition?

The lights dimmed. Fulya held his hand tight. He struggled through tonight's tangle of events while enjoying her touch and blocking the image of New Yorkers' obsession with air-conditioning. When Marilyn Monroe caught the breeze at a vent and her dress billowed above her legs, he hardly stirred. Fulya's hand tensed during the dream-scene when the jealous wife shot the Ewell character. But the wife's sixth—or was it the seventh?—shot, close-range, after Ewell had rolled down a flight of stairs, surely already dead—that made Fulya jump in her seat.

“I have a knife in my hand,” Jane had said to him.

This was the second time she'd seen him with Fulya. Almost a year had passed. Perhaps she'd been ill. Where did she live? Why hadn't she written or looked him up? Had she found a new boyfriend? After the film, he would make his move. A Mister Cool wouldn't just let Jane disappear into the crowd.

But when the credits appeared, Fulya squeezed his hand and looked up at him. Tears streamed down her cheeks as she said, “You must convince Irakles that I can't see him any more.”

Chapter 46

“Come in, boy, come in,” Sokratis said with his hand over the telephone. “You look *terrible*. Beirut is on the line. Help yourself.” Sokratis waived Irakles to a chair and to the tray on his desk, then raised his voice into the phone. “I can supply three hundred lots for Addis Ababa. Arrival Djibouti four weeks. Price a hundred thousand, f.o.b. Aden.”

Irakles, aware of the swelling around his eye, took a last peek at Irini as she shut the door to his father's darkened, air-conditioned office. On his way in she'd fluttered those black eyelashes of hers and remarks his mother once made sprang to mind. “A job well-performed ennobles an employee, whether a maid, a road sweeper, or a king. But beware. When excelling at his appointed task, even the devil will appear regal.”

Sokratis replaced the receiver, flicked a switch and told Irini to hold his calls. “Everyone has his price,” Sokratis said after turning off the intercom. “One of life's lessons you need to appreciate—the sooner the better.”

“Do you actually *care* what your buyers do with your merchandise?”

“I don't see enough of you, boy.” Sokratis paused. “I'm flying to London in October—on your way out, ask Irini for details.”

Why wait? He stood up and made ready to leave.

“Sit down. You want my philosophy? There's no such thing as good or evil—”

“—Right,” he said returning to his seat, “only missed opportunities.”

“Are the pyramids torn down because they were built by the slaves of the pharaohs? Did the Allies tear up Hitler’s autobahns? *Hitler’s* downfall was that a few people lost too much, Stalin’s that the masses gained too little—the communist destiny. ‘Good’ is not taking too much and ‘bad’ is giving too little. So, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ can be boiled down to ‘too much’ for some versus ‘too little’ for others. And in a free enterprise, democracy serves as jury of what is too much or too little.” Sokratis reached for a bottle of whiskey. “Now, have a drink.”

Instead of reaching for the glass, he pressed himself back into his chair. Did you love my mother when you fucked her, he wanted to shout. “Love is for ditsy people,” Sokratis would declare. No, not ‘ditsy’—“Olympia and I had something better going for us and it produced you. If something happened, would I not get her the best medical help?”

Sokratis sniffed at the whiskey glass then tipped it to his lips. “A smartly-dressed man darts by looking like he’s late for an important appointment. You catch up with him at the urinal, where he keeps up the pomp even as he pisses. You might continue to think he has a rendezvous with Her Majesty the Queen. You might be wrong. Perhaps all he had on his mind when he dashed by you was to find a place to pee.”

Sokratis leaned his elbows on the desk. “To important matters. You’re pestering a prominent archaeologist—specifically Mr. Triandafyllides of the Department of Antiquities. You’re nosing through his archives, requesting confidential plans, annoying the office staff.”

“Why did Mr. Triandafyllides come to you?”

“Why does a bee seek nectar?” Sokratis chuckled. “So, what have you learned?”

The secret emergence of Stavros, who’d doubtlessly plunged right back into Elena’s own secret life. “This,” he said looking at the glass cabinet in the corner that housed Sokratis’s own collection of antiquities—coins, trinkets, artifacts picked up or dug up by villagers. “You can deface relics, acquire them by cheating their owners, or simply steal them. A hundred years

later, your name will be as renowned as the relics themselves, and professors of archaeology will interpret your actions to eager students.”

Sokratis banged the desk. “Exactly. Neither good nor evil. Only redistribution.”

“And commissions.”

“Naturally.” Sokratis resumed leaning on his elbows. “Judging by your face, docents are not the only people you’re annoying.”

“You want to discuss my research or the condition of my face?”

Sokratis’s lips tightened into a line. “I’m twisting many arms to extricate you from this mess. More importantly, you’re openly fraternizing with a peasant.”

It didn’t take much to twist a hungry Cypriot arm. “*Now* we’re coming to the point.”

Sokratis raised his arms and looked at the ceiling. “A woman socially beneath you as well as Turkish—a *Turkish* peasant. That’s worse than those destitute, unmarriageable Greek maidens your mother scrounges dowries for.”

“If you continue to be insulting, I’ll leave.”

“Inter-ethnic marriage in Cyprus is virtually nonexistent. What does she want?”

“Turks aspire to nothing higher than being street vendors. Right? You claim Turkish friends, but woe to any Turk who wants to marry your sister, or to buy your land.”

“You’re snooping in Kalopetria on some wild goose chase, clashing with EOKA—God knows what revenge is being planned as we speak.” He banged the desk. “Did Napoleon win wars brandishing a sword on the front line? I doubt it. So, if it’s money you need . . .”

Funds enough to close the file on Fulya. In sterling fivers. A job well-performed, his mother had said, *ennobled* an employee. Right. He’d ennoble himself. He could *ditch* Fulya and buy himself a Porsche.

“I’ve received complaints from mukhtars, priests, and politicians,” Sokratis said. “I had to make donations to keep everyone quiet. My entire afternoon run of chocolate-covered nougat was halted. Dimitris commandeered half the men of the confectionary department to spirit away the grand piano from the Ledra Palace—the rest became idle. Dimitris advised the duty manager—an inexperienced youngster, of course—that one of the world’s greatest pianists, supposedly available in Cyprus for just one day, needed to perform for His Beatitude.”

“Every idiot knows that Makarios isn’t allowed back in Cyprus.”

“Naturally, the piano was manhandled.” Sokratis waved at some papers. “The bill is right here. Can you imagine someone walking off with a grand from London’s Savoy?”

“Elena used the Ledra Palace only as an illustration.”

“My good friend Berge Shemelian of Shemelian’s Musical Imports could have arranged a delivery right from his warehouse. Dimitris claims you even insisted on a Steinway.” He banged his fist on the desk. “Elena’s been mesmerized by”—he paused for a moment—“a Turkish village girl who plays American Negro music. Furthermore, he reports that Elena performed a belly dance—I can only imagine what it must have looked like to my men.”

“She has more talent than you can imagine.”

Sokratis raised his eyebrows. “Elena?”

“No, Fulya.”

“My men returned drunk—conservative family men. Restrain yourself from politics, if not from fornicating with Turks.”

“I’ve been invited to a swimming competition at the Nicosia Club.”

“Good. Beat the English at sports, I say.”

“*And* I’m working on a business plan for itinerant merchants. Like Fulya’s brother.”

Sokratis raised his eyebrows.

“They come to disadvantaged agreements. Now if they could be organized—”

Sokratis smiled. “Then they’ll drive other small-timers out of business and let big importers, like me, get stronger. Don’t waste your talent. Paint my portrait instead, something big and classical like an Andrea Doria.”

“The ship that sank last summer?”

“The Genoese admiral who conquered the Turks.” Sokratis pointed. “I have his picture in one of these magazines.”

A Bronzino knock-off of Neptune—Sokratis in shimmering oil on canvas. “Half-naked, against a snow-capped backdrop of Mount Olympus or just leaning against your XK 140?”

“Nothing too mythological.”

Sokratis leveled a finger at him. “Turkish women lust after Greeks. It’s in their blood.” For a few seconds, it seemed his demeanor would mellow. Then, “You can fuck young virgins or old sluts, Christian, Jewish, or Moslem. But when you’re ready, hook yourself a Greek shipping-magnate’s daughter, cute and sweet, who lives in London. Or, catch a leggy offspring of a British lord, preferably a rich one.” Sokratis paused. “Thank God you have no sisters.”

None that he knew of. “Right, I’d wreck their prospects of marrying medieval psychos.”

He shouldn’t have mentioned Mehmet. Damned provocative. Sokratis would now order someone to lean on Fulya’s brothers. Flunkies from Accra to Zanzibar understood their obligations. Whatever followed would cost Sokratis nothing more than a phone call.

But Fulya herself Sokratis daren’t harm. Not after today.

He leaned forward and gripped the edge the desk. “I’m not dropping Fulya. Not for all the loot in Switzerland.”

Sokratis laughed and poured himself another whiskey. “This meeting is over.”

Chapter 47

Pregnant Jane. What a thunderbolt. And she'd delivered in that Prodhromos farmhouse—of all places, an EOKA laundry—while he'd kept watch from his roadway perch. A baby girl, Thanos the farmer had told him, blue-eyed and as beautiful as her mother.

He'd expected the baby to show up under Elena's care. But it hadn't, yet. And Elena made no mention of any adoption. The baby must have died.

In July, just after Prodhromos, under his new codename "Nemesis," he'd been assigned to help identify collaborators and traitors, track their contacts, and rank enemy agents for menace to the cause. An easy job: collect names, code them. Shuffle them around on bits of paper. Number them. He fantasized sneaking Sokratis Mavropoulos onto the list. It would be easier, though, to pin shoplifting on Archbishop Makarios.

Alistair McKay, who'd escaped assassination—Bambos himself had failed to kill him—now headed the list of spies. Free-spending, corrupter of Greek-Cypriot loyalties, Ginger-beanpole McKay had been designated for immediate but discreet liquidation and he, Nemesis, had been selected as hit man. On standing order from Dhigenis, ceasefire or no ceasefire.

If not ordered, Stavros-Nemesis would have volunteered. He would do anything to avert harm to Claire and Jane. *He* could make the liquidation look like an accident or a botched robbery. Cyprus was, after all, supposed to be enjoying this ceasefire. Initially, he'd planned to get a prostitute to lure McKay into a back alley. There, he would knife McKay. Steal his wallet.

He'd tracked McKay—and Claire and Jane—to the British base at Episkopi.

No better source of gossip than Claire's Greek housecleaner, a village slow-wit, but a guerrilla bloodhound once he explained his authority. Since Jane's father died, Jane and Claire had lived under McKay's wing and were soon to leave Cyprus.

Despinis Jane spoke Greek, the housecleaner said. So did *Kyrios* Alistair, a kind man, who always asked about her family and her health. His highly learned friend, a *Kyrios* Harry, also spoke Greek. But *Kyrios* Harry used Greek words one couldn't understand. The two men—the two foreigners—whispered to each other.

Whispering foreigners. Christakis's very learned English teacher not only created anti-EOKA literature for the Government, he spied on Greek-Cypriot youth. He'd already fingered potential 'troublemakers.' Lawrell ranked high as enemy agent.

Claire's housecleaner reported that *Despinis* Jane had taken to jogging at dawn across the salt lakebed at Ladies Mile. So soon after delivering, she'd tut-tutted. She couldn't imagine a Cypriot girl doing that. Neither could he.

A dusty four-mile, axle-jolting drive from Limassol's seaport towards the Cape of the Cats, Ladies Mile beach fell just short of the barbed-wire perimeter of Akrotiri's RAF Station. Cyprus's most beautiful beach, people said. Second to Famagusta, where he'd first met Claire and a fourteen-year-old Jane.

He languished many nights on Ladies Mile—deserted except for crabs, stray cats, and plagues of insects. To the gurgle of seawater, he'd waited for Jane those many heart-thumping predawn minutes while preparing her escort's death.

While she went for a swim, he would stab McKay.

That was what he'd intended. Many times.

He couldn't shake his recent nightmare. Novice monks were grouped around him, outside an Orthodox monastery. Across a small plaza, nuns encircled Jane beside a Roman Catholic convent, where, pregnant with his child, she'd been cloistered. His monks had crafted a letter introducing him to her. He approached her and handed her the letter. She read it, shook her head, and gave it back. The monks rewrote it. He approached her again. Three times he approached her. Three times she rejected him. The note, the monks told him, listed only his good deeds. His crimes had been omitted.

What crimes?

Killing foreigners to liberate his people was his duty. Even if ordered by a fascist leader. But, as a leftwing sympathizer, he'd forever be excluded from EOKA's inner circle. For sure, Grivas would assign dangerous missions then dispose of him. He would find no political niche in Grivas's ambitions. This explained why he was dragging his feet with the McKay liquidation. Didn't it? Jane's feelings, or Claire's, or even his, had nothing to do with it.

What other crimes?

He'd hidden the artifacts entrusted to him by Father Panaretos. Artifacts that would have added value to the Church or to a museum. Passively, though. To activate their wealth for freedom, or for any other cause, the treasures needed to be sold. Hence, within Cyprus, they were worthless. Elena had prattled to him about meetings between Panaretos and Sokratis—meetings they'd held before the artifacts were moved. Clearly, Sokratis had betrayed him. After the struggle, he would smuggle the artifacts to New York. Offer them for sale. He'd travel, study, return to Cyprus rich. He'd add connections and power to his glory as hero. Then he'd kill Sokratis.

Those were his crimes. Crimes he hadn't yet committed.

Crimes he hadn't yet committed? He'd been ordered to report daily on the unfinished business—the McKay liquidation.

“What shall I report,” his now co-conspiratorial but increasingly frantic Nikos the taxi-driver asked.

“Mission absolutely on track,” he responded. “No help needed.”

“For God's sake, kill the bastard.”

He had the agent's tail covered. Day and night. He'd been making notes on McKay's contacts too—like Englishman Lawrell. He would liquidate both of them.

But he knew and Nikos knew that he was playing truant, marking time in the mountains, cashing in his honor to keep the McKay mission for himself. He journeyed to Limassol, to Ladies Mile beach, and watched his target—as well as Jane—through binoculars. Sometimes, he slept on Ladies Mile beach—but kept his distance, all to ensure no one else butted in.

Once Jane, Claire, and McKay had set sail and left Cyprus, Nemesis would own up to his deception and submit to punishment. Right?

Go to New York? Return to Cyprus rich? Kill Sokratis?

There was only one thing he was absolutely certain of. He was seriously fucked up.

He had to get on with it, stop dragging things out. McKay must die.

Chapter 48

Dear Chris,

I was so happy to be with you last year. It was the happiest of my life—my halcyon year. (I looked that word up. Remember how we used to read together?) Then, after we left Nicosia, everything went wrong. I got sick.

Daddy made me promise not to try to see you. I wasn't even to write you, otherwise he'd pack me off to some ghastly boarding school in England. Anyway, I couldn't possibly have gone away just then.

Oh, I knew Claire had been seeing Stavros. But when we heard about those dreadful things they said he did . . .

Well, I did write you eventually. Two incredibly long letters that I secretly posted myself. (I used the address of a girl who used to live next door. She's kind of stringy and I don't think she ever washes, but she's nice.) I was absolutely crushed that you didn't reply and I swore I'd never write to any boy ever again after that.

That's when I really got sick and our doctor said I'd better see some kind of psycho analyst. God, that was awful. He was a creepy old crow in a threadbare white coat with shiny patches on it, and his breath smelled. Greasy hair grew out of his nose and—disgusting—he'd pick his ears with his finger then look at the waxy puke and wipe it on his sleeve while he asked me the most horrid questions about my dad, my mum, and even about Claire. About my

boyfriends, things people had done to me. Anyway, I told him hardly anything, I was so scared they'd lock me up in some loony bin. Whatever was wrong with me, I'm sure he made it worse.

I do hope those letters I sent you don't ever turn up, that you never got them.

Oh, and that psycho-analyst fired lists and lists of word-association questions at me and showed me all these funny-looking brown ink blots. I quickly caught on, though. I told him I just saw ink blots. That annoyed him. Then I said I saw pretty things, flowers and butterflies, dreamy things and all. He got even more annoyed. He said I wasn't being cooperative.

Do you remember those flowers you once brought me?

We've always been on the road, Daddy and me. After Mummy died, we never stayed anywhere very long. I barely got to make friends before Daddy yanked me away again. I had to be horrid to you. Don't you see? Being horrid made me hurt less.

When I saw you in that cinema yesterday, my heart exploded with joy. Every time we set off for Nicosia, I promised myself I was going to look you up, but I just couldn't. Then there you were. You didn't see me at first. The lights dimmed and the film began. All through the first part, I wondered what I was going to say to you. I was so thrilled to see you.

Then I spotted that girl. One moment I wanted to kiss every inch of your face and cry out, "I'm sorry, I promise I'll never marry anyone except you," the next moment I felt as if a train had clobbered me. She'd shoved her horrid head against your chest—your look told me everything. I was so angry I couldn't breathe.

I just know you love her. Ever since you first told me how well she played the piano I heard it in your voice. After that, whenever you looked at me, I knew you wanted her. Just wait and see—I'm never going to fall in love again.

Oh, I might pretend.

All through the film, I couldn't see anything on the screen. All I saw was you and that girl and how I loathed her and hated myself for looking forward to seeing you. I wanted to hurt you any way I could.

Alistair, the man we were with, noticed that I was restless and held my hand. After Daddy's stroke—Daddy stayed for ages in a kind of nursing home—Alistair's been so nice to us. I don't think I mentioned it yet, but Daddy never recovered. He died.

They say I was awfully ill last year. Anyway, that psycho man wanted to put me in a sanatorium. He suggested that out of spite, because I didn't take him seriously. Obstreperous was the word he used. Thank God Claire rescued me. Sanatorium makes me think of crematorium. But I'd never admit that. Not to him. All I know is that I hurt and hurt and hurt, frightfully, all the time. I stayed in bed a lot and I missed months of school. I've stopped cutting myself now, though. Then they took my baby away. Surprise. You didn't know about that, did you? And you won't, ever.

You'll never see this letter either, so you'll never know how I feel about anything.

You should've seen Claire's face when I told her that I wasn't sure whether my baby was yours or Stavros's. She practically needed a sanatorium herself then. I wanted that baby so much to be yours. (It might have been. Remember Kyrenia?) And that you'd fall in love with me all over again. But Claire says a boy always stops loving a girl once he knocks her up. Even if she gets an abortion.

Up in Troödos, where I stayed I learned to make necklaces using pine needles without snapping them (the needles). You know, sort of looping them together. I talk to you—pretend, of course. When something wonderful happens, my first thought is to wait for you in my garden and tell you. I kind of roll up on the ground and lean against the wall. I wait and wait but you never come, so I write you a letter instead. I have tons of letters I've never posted.

Mr. Lawrell's a good friend of Alistair's. (I think they're spies. They have such strange conversations. They even speak in Greek to each other—proper Greek.) I asked him—Mr. Lawrell—how you were getting along. Know what? You're awful in poetry and literature (we knew that!), but you're into Kafka now. I am too. Spooky that we both like Kafka. Mr. Lawrell thinks you still prefer to play marbles than do literature homework. You're bored with Shakespeare. I was so proud when he said you were the best science student the school has had in years. He said you're abstract, whatever that means (I suppose he means brainy), and you're teaching yourself differential something or other. He says you sit in the front of the class and help other students with their work. He says you even solve problems your maths or science teachers can't. I say, do you still wonder why traffic bunches up and whether you'll ever be able to explain it? Obvious to me—too many cars on the road coming back from the beach on Sundays. (Do you know? I've watched ants swarm over some ghastly dead thing. They don't seem to bunch up. Maybe the ants know something we don't.) Mr. Lawrell is sure you'll get a "First" at any university in England. I'm so envious.

I decided I'm going to study languages, or maybe anthropology. I love Crusader castles and those tablets with ancient writing on them, the tablets not the castles—although castles do have words carved into them too. Gosh, I think that's archeology, not anthropology. Anyway, I love that stuff too. I'm really good at French and I know you'd be so proud of my Greek.

Alistair's teaching me judo. He thinks I need to defend myself against the vermin of the world. Oh, and I've started to jog and swim enormous distances. I bet you never thought I'd do that. But I don't want to develop beastly muscles. I want to be a secret agent.

Alistair was hideously banged-up by the man who killed his fiancée, Zaira. It's so awful—he thinks it was Stavros. His friend Blotchet (don't pronounce that the French way) came around, just after Zaira was killed and asked us bags of questions.

Talk about weird. I dreamt last night that I left a crowded restaurant and crossed a street through pelting rain to a dinky little house. It was a café or English pub or something quaint with a thatched roof. I'm chilly and soaked to the skin. I go in. Two couples are spread out in the little room of about half a dozen tables, and which isn't brightly lit. A woman with an apron stands behind a kind of counter—really a vitrine—filled with patisseries. She's beautiful with long blonde hair, Aphrodite probably. (Her birthplace is close to where we live.) I ask if I can have a drink. She says, you're not old enough. I say I'm more than twenty, more than thirty, actually. An attendant, whom I hadn't noticed, asks why do I always say that when I come in here? I say I've never been here before. Aphrodite looks up and says, you have, you're here every day. I say I'm in love and I came for my mate. Tears spring from Aphrodite's eyes. You can have him, she says, but only when they take the barbed wire out of my garden.

Claire says I cry in my sleep. We're quite the pair!

Remember the time we saw Stavros skip the police? You and Claire shut me out. Until then, I thought we told each other everything. Then, the day I broke up with you, I'd just found Claire's diary. She uses codes, mostly dots, crosses, and hearts (pathetic). Obviously, she kept track of her periods, people, and secret meetings. Then I saw a heart on the same day as 'Chris, starkers,' and my brain exploded.

Dear Chris, I've been so wicked. Ever so much more than you might have been, and I know you'll never forgive me. About Stavros, that is. I felt so ugly then, I lost control—I'd have done practically anything to get back at you and Claire.

Claire got us lots of money for my baby, I'm sure, but I daren't ask. I can't even believe I'm writing all this. I wonder if I'll ever see you again. We're on our way to England soon, after the summer hols. Then I'm not sure. Southern Rhodesia? I hope not. Something Alistair has to do. It's all very confusing. I'd rather go to Switzerland and study French.

Chapter 49

Fulya had parked herself in an armless chair by the wall. Behind the imposing desk, closed shutters darkened this grand office at the Cyprus Museum. She balanced a glass of fizzy *gazeux* on a knee with both hands while her mind drifted to Irakles. She'd told Mehmet about Fivos and how Irakles had beaten Fivos back. But she'd made Mehmet promise to let things be, and in turn she'd promised to stay clear of Irakles.

Standing in the middle of the room, Mr. Sokratis Mavropoulos seemed to focus on a chart suspended on the opposite wall between horizontal rods. An archaeological chart of Cyprus—the largest map she'd ever seen.

Meeting with him would benefit her future, a Mr. Yannakis had assured Mehmet. Confirmed by a written message from Elena. Nothing else would have persuaded Mehmet to drive her here and let her go in alone. But why couldn't this meeting have been held at the Petrino mansion? And why wasn't Elena present?

Someone had been killing Serhan's sheep. She hoped Mr. Mavropoulos had the influence to order a stop to it. She'd beg him.

“As they say in France,” he said, “my *raison d'être* is to reach the top and stay there.”

As if parceling building lots on a survey plan and in the manner of geometry dividers, his fingers zigzagged across the map until they reached Kyrenia at the top edge. “Ha, my thumb marks your village and this finger my villa.”

His fingernails, she observed, were as carefully manicured as hers.

Accompanied by a snap of the arm that made his bracelet rattle, Mr. Mavropoulos pirouetted on his heels and faced her with his sunglasses. “Do you speak French, young lady?”

She shook her head. His shoes looked flawless. She thought she could smell new leather. She knew they were Italian-made crocodile because he'd told her. Whenever he moved, they squealed on the tiled floor, freshly mopped by a little woman in a black dress and shawl, whom he'd dispatched from the office along with her mop and bucket.

“I want the same for young Irakles,” he said and the black lenses of his glasses shone like the eyes of an insect. “That is, to reach the top.”

He switched on the desk-fan and aimed it in her direction. Its whoosh—rising and falling—accompanied the late afternoon street concert of bicycle bells, honking horns, and squealing tires. The fan whipped her hair. When she reached up, her blouse flared then clung to her chest. Fidgeting only made things worse.

“Your swept-back, Eva Peron hair style,” he said. “Pearls and earrings. I see Elena's hand.”

It seemed a matter of pride that his wife's gifts had been apt. But perhaps they were too expensive and he wanted them back. All too easily, she'd convinced her family that the pearls she'd been given couldn't possibly be real. And she'd declared to her father and open-mouthed brothers that from now on she'd need changes of hairstyle for important events. They just *had* to accept her with makeup and jewelry. Anyway, she'd said, Miss Ouzanian would insist on it.

Mr. Mavropoulos shook his head. “But that watch . . . Next time you're at Gulbenkian's tell him I sent you. He'll give you a good price.”

Her gaze drifted from the wobble of the ceiling fan—why did it have to look as if it were about to crash onto her head?—to the black roman numerals of the wall clock; from the big map

to the gold glitter at the notch of skin above his open-necked shirt. A finer cotton, surely, than her blouse. The sheen on his slacks fascinated her too. Were they silk? She couldn't bring herself to focus on his glasses for more than a blink, let alone imagine what might be churning through his brain. Why was he staring so?

"The Director of Antiquities is an old friend," he continued, raising his right hand in emphasis. "He's on a pilgrimage to New York to gain access to the Cyprus collection at the Metropolitan Museum. More Cypriot antiquities languish in America, all stolen and stored out of sight where no one can see them, than we have right here in the Cyprus Museum."

He stopped to let her speak, but she remained silent.

"To aspire to the pinnacle of the mountain, you must proceed one step at a time, and not rest for too long or admire the scenery." He laughed. "Let me rephrase this. You have to watch out for loose stones on the steepest slopes."

Why did this Greek man speak in riddles? He was wasting an awful lot of time—unless, of course, he wanted to muddle her up. She tucked a strand of hair behind her ear, and startled herself when she said, "Loose stones?"

"You found your voice again," he said.

She cast her eyes downward. She mustn't speak. Behind his sunglasses, his eyes could explore. Her chest. Her lap. Anything. He'd be speculating on what lay beneath her gray plaid skirt. As she tugged at it to cover her bare shins, she felt her blouse billow. Her hands trembled, her legs twitched, and the *gazeux* sloshed over the lip of her glass.

"Please, would you turn away that fan," she said.

She reached out to return the tumbler to the tray, glad to divert attention to the dark patch spreading on her skirt and away from what, for him, lay hidden underneath.

He reached into a side pocket and unfurled a neatly pressed, monogrammed white handkerchief. It reminded her of Irakles's handkerchief. "I understand why Irakles is attracted to you," he said. "There, you're embarrassed." He patted his brow. "Elena tells me you have great talent. What was that tune the beggar outside the museum was playing as we entered?"

She shivered. "Rondo Allegro from Eine Kleine Nachtmusik."

When most men would have used the backs of their hands, he'd used his handkerchief. Yet he wasn't sweating.

He swatted a fly. "I see. You've mastered that too? But, as I've observed to Irakles, you have to learn to drive before you are permitted your first car accident." He waved his handkerchief in front of her face.

She pressed herself back into her chair, clenched her legs, and tugged her skirt harder over her knees. "I'm sorry?" she whispered.

He dropped the handkerchief on the desk and paced the room as if he were dictating a letter to his secretary. "Temperance, prudence, faith, or chastity: which are you? Or—"

His words hung like a curse. He stopped pacing, looked at her, and rubbed his two index fingers slowly along each other.

She moistened her lips.

"A Turkish girl of presumed good family," he said, "consorting with a Greek boy of certain good family is to spit at tradition. Both communities will assume you are a *petalouda tis nichtas* and treat you accordingly."

She tucked her skirt fiercely around her thighs. Another word and she'd dash for the door.

"A butterfly of the night, my dear—a prostitute."

She gasped and leapt to her feet and her chair flew across the floor and clattered against the door. He made a show of following the chair. She steadied herself by pressing her back into the wall. She'd never let go like this before, even in her angriest moments.

He paced again, his heels squeaking whenever he changed direction. "Irakles will betray you the moment he's in the UK, if not sooner. Why, I've seen him brazenly invite a waitress twice his age to model for him. Not a cabaret dancer, mind you, who would have jumped at the opportunity, but a mere waitress. He was, as usual, angry with me and wanted to prove a point. He was fifteen. Know what?" He chuckled with undisguised pride. "That's when he learned he could have any woman he wanted. He just had to ask."

She shut her eyes and squirmed into the wall. How could Elena tolerate this person?

"We saw her again," he said. "The waitress was with a man then, probably her husband. Come to think of it, that wench had breasts that were soft and round—like yours. Not like those cement pyramids sprouting stiff and unyielding from women's chests nowadays. Artist Irakles is attracted by only two attributes in a model: her face and her breasts. I see by your look that we understand each other."

She stretched her arms and scratched the wall's plaster with her nails.

"Weeks later he even sold her the finished painting." He snorted. "Have you posed for him yet?"

She reined in her hands and covered her ears.

"Look at this," he said as he opened his wallet.

Her heart pounded in her throat as she squinted at a color photo of what looked like a painting of a naked girl.

He turned the print over and appeared to read from the other side. "Rosemary Smith." He looked up. "Irakles competes at the Nicosia Club pool. Did you know? He has the pick of any of those blonde English girls. You didn't say whether he's asked you to pose."

"Enough," she cried.

"*Despinis* Fulya, I will make modest deposits to a foreign account, presumably for your education, so long as you adhere to your promise to discontinue your doomed relationship."

She dropped her hands, opened her eyes, and looked up. "I don't promise—"

"—Payment to begin the moment I'm assured you've abandoned interest." He seemed to study her for a while, then said, "Don't let your pretty rosebud shrivel before it has begun to bloom."

"What do you mean?"

He leaned against the desk. "Irakles was involved in a bloody brawl during which threats to your family were made."

"Fivos has been bothering me since I was little." Tears welled in her eyes. "Two of Serhan's sheep have already been shot."

He lifted his glasses briefly. "A van's tires can explode on mountain roads and grocery shops are vulnerable to arson."

A teardrop hovered in the corner of her eye then streaked down her cheek. She watched it drip onto the floor.

"No, no, no. You misunderstand. I would offer you every measure of protection if only I could." He glanced at the ceiling and made the sign of the cross. "We must arrange for you to leave Cyprus immediately. Elena's suggestion." He eased himself away from the desk and approached her. "Remember," he said, "half-truths are the most dangerous to one's reputation—they might be close enough to be believable."

A spark of defiance began to steal into her mind. “If I win an entrance scholarship,” she said standing erect against the wall as if to counter his motion towards her, but finding herself glaring at her reflections in his sunglasses, “and Miss Ouzanian thinks I will, Irakles and I can be friends in England where nobody will care.”

“Pardon my bluntness, but you both have families to consider.”

“I have relatives in England,” she said. “And I’ve been promised help from our neighbor, whose son my father saved. It won’t be much, but—”

He sighed as if impatient and swung his arm upward to signify his desire for silence. “I could’ve arranged a concert for you at the Ledra Palace Hotel attended by every dignitary on the island. Instead, you had your unfortunate audition in my house. You don’t have to pass around the hat for baksheesh—Elena insists we sponsor you.”

Elena. Her mood brightened.

“Locate yourself in Paris,” he said, “and promise no more meetings with Irakles.”

Why had Irakles’s parents only been referred to in passing? She resolved that unless Mr. Mavropoulos guaranteed her family’s safety, she’d promise him nothing. “I *will* go to England.”

“Do you know where the thirty-fifth parallel is?” He strode to the wall and slashed his hand across the center of the map. “Turks want to split Cyprus along the thirty-fifth parallel. I say, never. Unrest is an opportunity for personal scores to be settled. Don’t ever forget that.”

“I can’t tell whether you’re safe or dangerous.”

His face softened. “I prefer to be dangerous, like the first kiss.”

Years ago, she’d submitted hers to Fivos, but only after he’d showed her his switchblade.

He stepped closer. “I have good friends in the office of the Chief Superintendent of Police. Do you understand what I’m saying?”

Mr. Mavropoulos was too close, close enough for his aroma of freshly laundered shirt and cologne to blanket her when the oscillating fan's airflow whipped across him. He reached out to touch her cheek. She recoiled, sliding herself along the wall. He trailed his fingers over her hand. "An apartment in Paris?" he said. "Perhaps, once you're settled, I could . . ."

The room darkened, started to spin. Her heart pounded with despair—as if someone dear had just died.

"And you could treat me to a private recital," he said.

She couldn't breathe. She sniffled, rubbed her nose with the back of her hand and looked at it. Blood. She tried to sidestep him to reach the handkerchief lying on the desk. But she faltered. He steadied her, picked up the handkerchief and offered it to her. She took it and snatched herself from his grasp. "I had already made up my mind to stop seeing Irakles."

"Then why did you agree to meet me?"

"Someone is killing our sheep—"

"It's settled then." He looked at his watch and said, "Your brother will only have to wait an extra ten minutes. My confidante will outline the arrangements, answer your questions, and give you a telephone number where I may be reached. Now let's pick up this chair."

What had been settled? Or agreed to? She shoved the handkerchief against her face, hid her eyes, and struggled against a blackout.

Someone rapped on the door. It edged open and a chubby man wearing a lightweight suit and a trilby peeked in. "*Kyrie Sokrati, Kyrie Sokrati*, I must talk to you," the man said.

"Here's the devil," Mr. Mavropoulos said. "Did you have a chance to visit the exhibits?"

Sweat trickled down the man's face.

Mr. Mavropoulos winked. "*Despinis Fulya, Kyrios Yannakis*, my general manager."

Mr. Yannakis shuffled in, shut the door, and tipped a finger to his hat before grasping her hand. "It's one hundred and eight degrees today but your hand is so cold, *Despinis*," he said, his handshake lasting a little too long. He pulled out a handkerchief and a threadbare wallet overflowing with bits of paper. He fumbled with the handful, shoved the wallet back in his pocket, wiped his face, and turned to Mr. Mavropoulos. "I must speak to you urgently."

Mr. Mavropoulos removed his sunglasses and rubbed his eyes. "Dry Sahara air and grit," he said, "*Hamsin*, as the Arabs call it." He blinked at her. "We need rain."

"Her brother," Mr. Yannakis hissed then winced in apparent pain. He reached into a pant pocket as if for cigarettes.

"Put those away, *Yannaki*." Mr. Mavropoulos turned and flashed a glance at her. "Kidney stones. I've told him to take care of himself."

"I can't hold him back much longer," Mr. Yannakis said.

She slipped into a corner of the room, out of sight of Mr. Yannakis, out of sight of a roving Mehmet. Oh, God, Mehmet mustn't find her like this.

Mr. Mavropoulos blinked at her once more, then placed his sunglasses back over his eyes and said, "Wait." He took Mr. Yannakis by the shoulder and ushered him out.

Alone, she shivered behind the hankie as a thought, a toxic idea she struggled to dismiss, germinated in her mind. Moments ago, when he'd removed his glasses, Sokratis Mavropoulos's eyes had burned with a familiar hue and intensity.

She knew those eyes. She'd looked into them before. With love.

They belonged to Irakles.

Chapter 50

As Irakles strained for air, swimmers in the Nicosia Club competition splashed towards him and proffered a slap on the back and a “jolly good show.” The ritual over, Irakles kicked to poolside to make room for the belly-floppers and wished Fulya could have been here to see him win.

“Hi ya, *Hercule*.”

He blinked into the burning sky. A girl. Not a recent arrival on the island—not slicked skin, oily, or worse, a beet face—but someone who respected the sun and stayed out of it. She wore a loose-fitting dress and had a satchel slung over her shoulder. “Jane,” he said.

She put down her satchel and squatted at the edge of the pool. “I watched you win last week too.” The hot breeze puffed her hair—black as Fulya’s but restless. She bent towards him. Air filled her dress, yet her posture seemed as choreographed as a dancer’s. An urge to depict her, to etch her expression on canvas, fired up in his belly.

She waved her hand. “Hello, ship to shore. You still there? Over.”

“It’s good to see you,” he said.

“We’re leaving Cyprus. I wanted to say goodbye.”

The Club’s date palms, eucalyptuses, and dense cypresses towered like chess pieces over the geraniums and flowering hibiscuses, a horseshoe-shaped funnel of seclusion open to the clubhouse and to the sky. He looked at Jane, this dark-haired, fiery, yet strangely sad-eyed

young woman who thought naught of squatting in public. So very un-English. She surely wanted him to get a message to Chris. "It's Chris you should be saying goodbye to," he said.

She dropped to her knees and touched him. "No," she said.

"Chris adores you."

"We're sailing on the Athena Queen."

"I'm on the Pegasus. What happened between you and Chris?"

"Oh, he's got a girlfriend."

"Not that I know of—"

"—A Turkish piano-playing girl."

"Fulya? Did you spot them the other night at the cinema? I should've been there too.

It's a long story."

She wrinkled her nose. "Is she nice?"

He laughed. "Fulya's *my* girlfriend. At least she was until a few days ago."

She glanced around. "He won't leap out from behind one of those bushes, will he? I waited until I was sure you were on your own." As if for comfort, she worked her hands under her knees. "Would you be my friend if I asked you?"

How much of a friend? He pressed his legs against the side of the pool. "How about I be your brother?" he said.

"I'd absolutely *love* that. Golly, this cement pricks." She lifted herself, gathered her dress around her legs, and resumed squatting.

He looked at her feet, her red toenails, toes that nodded his way like turtles. "Come," he said. "I'll get dressed and we'll collar Chris."

"I can't."

Before he could respond, a suntanned, curly-haired blonde in a swimsuit edged herself between them. Her stare seemed anything but Sunday-school wasp. “We’re having a party tonight,” she said. “Can I persuade you to come? Oh, do say yes.”

“Steady on, Felicity,” a red-faced boy said and grabbed her arm. “You’ve already invited everyone in sight.” Red-face’s skin favored an enraged rather than a sunburned interpretation. The boy didn’t wait for her response. “Cheers, and jolly good, old chap—you’ve a perfectly splendid stroke. You’re pretty good for a—”

“—Cyp?” he said.

“Charlie Trounce, what a *horrid* thing to say,” Felicity said and stomped her foot.

Jane rose to her feet.

Charlie wiped his brow and peered at Jane with admiration. “I say, are you a Cypriot too? Actually, you look more . . .”

“Jewish?” Jane said. “*Piso mou s’echo Satana.*”

“Is that Hebrew?” Charlie asked.

“Twerp,” Jane said.

Irakles splashed water at Charlie. “Be a sport and clear off.”

“Yes, Charles, do stop your palaver and clear off,” Felicity said and turned to Jane. “I’m Felicity Goring. What’s your name?”

“Jane.”

“That was Greek back there, wasn’t it?” Felicity asked. Keeping an apparent eye on Charlie, who hadn’t budged, she half-turned and said, “And you’re Heracles, mighty god of thunder, or something. Right?”

Felicity might as well have squirted lemon juice into Charlie's eyes. His face turned a richer shade of crimson. He hopped onto his toes and flailed his arms at Irakles. "I say, get up out of there, you sod, and fight like a man."

"Don't be so gauche, Charles," Felicity said.

"I insist," Charlie yelled. "Get out of the water."

He swung himself out of the pool. But wait. A fight would get him banned from the Club. "How about a pushup competition, old boy? The best man wins Felicity."

Charlie swung at him. He caught Charlie's arm and twisted him to his knees. A tweak and Charlie faced the cement. A further tweak— Charlie whimpered. "You're hurting me."

"You rotter," Felicity yelled and slapped Charlie's head. "You're spoiling everything."

The kafuffle hadn't alarmed the security forces. So far. Keeping Charlie in a lock, he looked at Jane and read contentment. He turned back to Charlie, whose nose hovered an inch above the concrete. "I'll let you go if you promise me a pushup competition."

Charlie threw Felicity a sideways appeal and said, "You're hurting my knees."

"Stop groveling, Charlie," Felicity said. "You started this."

"We'll do it at the same time." He jerked Charlie's arm to elicit a final yelp.

Charlie cringed on his knees, massaged his wrist, then flopped onto all fours. "Yikes," he said and smacked the ground. "My hands are frying."

"You drip," Felicity said.

Irakles positioned himself. "Ready?" A young crowd encircled them as they stretched side-by-side, supported on hands and toes, arms locked.

"Don't you dare cheat, Charlie," Felicity said.

"One of you chaps, say 'go' and count," Irakles said.

At “go,” he sank into the first cycle and let Charlie set the pace. At ‘twenty-four,’ Charlie teetered, at twenty-five, he collapsed. Irakles completed his twenty-sixth then raised his left hand straight up. The spectators’ chatter swelled. He glanced at Jane, angled his left arm behind his back, and continued with pushups. He stopped on the count of thirty-six—ten cycles one-handed—curled into a crouch and shut his eyes. If only pushups could bring Fulya back—

Jane whispered into his ear, “Well, *Hercule*, if I asked, could I be your girlfriend?”

Where had she leaned to squat like a Cypriot? *Piso mou s’echo Satana*—she’d said in an authentic Greek voice—get thee behind me, Satan.

Maybe Sokratis had put her up to this.

Chapter 51

The spectacle over, Irakles led Jane to a secluded corner behind a flowering hibiscus. In the shade of freshly hosed cypress trees, he scrunched two deckchairs together, side-to-side, facing in opposite directions. His towel over his shoulders, he sat upright. Jane settled herself upright too, knees bent, her dress rolled up to her hips. They drank cold lemonade, freshly squeezed but sugary—the English way—decanted by a waiter. For a time, they listened to the trill of the *ziziro*. Thus they basked—face-to-face and thigh-to-thigh—in the hollow heat of the afternoon.

“Well, you have her address,” she said. “Are you going?”

“*Piso mou s’echo Satana—*”

“—Get thee behind me, Satan.”

“Where did you pick up that accent? A village?”

But she reached out and put her hand over his mouth.

He got up and plucked a hibiscus bloom from a bush. Then he knelt beside her, stroked her hair, and placed the flower over her ear. Back in his chair, with thumbs and index fingers at eye level, he framed her face. Just a trace of makeup. Right. Nude, structured in lights and darks. Breasts sculpted, thrust into the viewer’s space. Skin—tinted ochre. Hair—sienna with gold. A rainbow draped over her right breast, a riot of saturated colors. Left nipple, prominent, perky, scandalous. Orange flowers against viridian leaves. Contrast—high. Simplified negative spaces. Surface—glassy. Washed with magenta and viridian. Execution—spontaneous. He

dropped his hands from his eyes. "Our house has a room barely bigger than a closet. Mother uses it as a studio."

She hugged her legs, propped her head on her knees, and looked sideways at him.

"When did you start painting?"

"Soon as I could hold a brush." He must get back to her period in the village. "I haven't done much painting lately, though," he said placing his hand on her shoulder. She straightened, cupped her hands over her face, and the hibiscus slipped off her ear.

She sniffed. "I love reading." A dribble appeared at her wrist. "And being read to," she said stifling a sob. Perhaps she had a summer cold, an allergy.

Bookworms, Jane and Chris—surely still in love. "I've got it," he said. He clapped his hands and reached for her wrist. "You're a pink rose beneath black clouds. You've survived a violent winter storm. Raindrops trickle along your petals and sparkle in the final rays of an alizarin sunset. Solitary, prickly, shocking."

She looked up, tearstained. He handed her his towel. Her eyes seemed to darken and recede as she said, "I see through all that stuff about wet petals and alizarin sunsets, whatever they are. Admit it. All you want is to paint me, my body. Nothing else."

"Let your eyes go, Jane. Pretend that night beckons, that your dreams will set you free, and that no one will see your beautiful eyes smile except God and me."

She bit his neck. "What am I again?"

"A flower."

"That's so darling, but what about a person?"

"You're in the studio of *Iraklé*, grand master of art nouveau."

"Where's the studio?"

"Vienna."

“When?”

“Turn of the century.”

She shut her eyes. “What am I wearing?”

“Nothing, of course, but a wedding ring. I’m rendering you full-size on a tall canvas. Purple-hued. You’re standing by an open window on the second floor of a tavern that overlooks *die schöne blaue Donau*. Your head, profiled in the window, is flung back as if awaiting an illicit kiss from your lover, a gypsy. Your hair is a tangle of sleeping serpents. Your lips are slightly parted. Scratch that. Too passive. Better idea, you face the viewer from a pedestal. Full frontal. The serpents are awake. Writhing. Their tails and heads curl around your breasts. Their tongues flicker. The viewer, in this case, the artist—*moi*—wants to make love to you. You castrate him with your stare.”

“Early tomorrow, come to Ladies Mile beach in Limassol. We can jog together.”

“I’m seeing Fulya tomorrow.”

She raised an arm and rubbed the back of her wrist across her forehead. “You love her, don’t you, and you’re afraid I’ll spirit you away from her. That’s why you’re making those horrid comparisons.”

“I’m teaching myself to paint in the style of Gustav Klimt. Come to my house and—”

“—That lovely sketch you did of me? Did I tell you I use it as a bookmark?”

“Klimt’s Judith and Salome supposedly look Jewish. Pre-Nazi stereotypes, I guess. My favorite Klimt is a pregnant girl, a nude, kind of saggy with a sickly skin-tone and emphatic nipples. She was probably unmarried too—”

Jane gasped. She grabbed his towel, draped it over her head, and began to sob.

He slipped his arms around her. “How long did you stay in that village?”

“Tighter,” she said.

Elena and Sokratis had just adopted a baby. Coincidence? “What were you doing there?”

“Tighter. Tight as you can. Tighter. I want to die.”

The day he'd clashed with Sokratis, Irini had stopped him on his way out with the ‘joyful news.’ Elena had taken ‘delivery’ the previous evening. Indeed, Elena did call him about Xanthia. “A baby. Yes. Come see it. Before you go to England.” He'd thought he and Chris might drop in at Petrino on the way to Fulya's—not a good idea, if Xanthia was Jane's baby.

Jane struggled in his arms. He tightened his grip. “Stop it.”

“God, if only *you'd* been on Famagusta beach that day.”

“Instead of Chris?”

But she had someone else on her mind. Someone she'd met in Famagusta.

She hadn't communicated with anyone because Sokratis would have insisted on absolute secrecy. All parties would have been paid off, including postmen.

She slipped the towel off her head and pressed her face into his shoulder. “I'd always thought that Mummy ran away, that she'd abandoned us when I was little. But earlier this year, I overheard Daddy tell Claire that she'd died in Nyasaland. Daddy said she'd been hacked to pieces in front of me, and that he'd been too pissed to do anything. I was only four.” She sniffed and rubbed her nose along his chest. “Daddy died this spring. They said he suffered a stroke while driving, that he'd veered off a cliff. Just an accident. That's all I was supposed to know—I think they were afraid I'd go bonkers. But I got the truth out of Claire. Later. As usual, she told me, the night Daddy died, they'd been arguing. They argued about all sorts of things. Serious things, you know, like money. During the argument, she'd let slip that I'd overheard their conversation about Mummy's murder. This time, Claire said, Daddy got really pissed and drove away into the night. But before his car left the road, she said, he'd apparently cut his wrists.”

He swallowed hard. Shit, shit, shit. When her dad had done himself in, she must have been long pregnant. And they'd been afraid to tell her.

She pulled away and looked him in the eye. "Let's run away together."

She didn't look like a new mother. Or act like one. He made as if to get up. "I'll have Chris in this chair before you finish the rest of the lemonade. He's crazy about you."

"Switch your ticket and sail with us."

"Monday? Can't."

"Can I see you in England?"

"Only if you make up with Chris."

"I wrote him heaps of letters—you too, at your school—but I never posted them."

"Don't ever vanish again," he said. "Promise?"

"Actually, I sent Chris a couple of letters, but he never replied. If I write you, will you come up to London to see me? Thing is, I rather like you."

Her letters must have been intercepted. "Last year, anyway, you wrote me and I answered you. Did you get my letter?"

She glanced away. "Did you tell Chris?"

"Jeepers, you're frustrating," he said.

She kissed him, licked her lips and said, "My judo is practically as good as yours. I could've done what you did to Charlie, except Alistair says I should only try those tricks if I'm fighting for my life."

"Write me again. We'll check out the flicks in Leicester Square the first Saturday you can come."

She stared into space, then looked at him and said, "You're meeting Fulya tomorrow?"

"Sunday morning."

“Don’t remember Judith’s story. I’ll be Salome.”

“What are you saying?”

“Can you get me home by dawn? Don’t look so surprised. Claire will be livid, but it’s all above board, isn’t it?” She leapt to her feet and snatched off her dress. “Now, let’s go for a swim. I’m boiling.”

While his parents were enjoying the Berengaria Hotel this weekend, he and Jane would have the run of the house. “I’ll make sketches, take photos, finish the painting later,” he said, more to himself, as he rose. Yeah, and for John the Baptist’s head dangling from Jane’s bloodstained fist, a self-portrait of the artist. “But all bets are off until I have something tangible in my hands from you, right now, to give Chris.”

How would her figure have developed over the year? She’d been hiding from Chris, and wanted to continue hiding. The father? Someone she’d met on the beach in Famagusta.

She reached into her bag and pulled out an envelope. “Give this to him Monday, after I sail. Not a moment earlier. Promise?”

Suspicious, plans, and promises. They ballooned by the minute. Some to be shelved, some kept from Chris, others from Fulya. From Jane, for sure, he’d have to hold back whatever he knew of her baby’s disposition. He’d just opened up another front in the war with his father. And sunrise was a filled sketchpad and umpteen rolls of film away. He turned the letter over. There was no return address. “Seal it.”

Thoughtful, she looked for a few moments at the letter then snatched it out of his hands. She shuffled the pages, scratched out a few words with a pen, held back a page, and scribbled her name. She sealed the envelope. “There, give him that.”

Chapter 52

Rebecca's door opened a crack. He saw her nose, her cheeks, her sunshine eyes, and he inhaled her scent. She drew a quick breath, eased the door ajar. A dressing gown covered her from her neck to her slippers. Purple, floral, flimsy. She clasped it at the lapels, raised herself to her toes, and peeked over his shoulders. Then she stood aside, let him squeeze in, and bolted the door. She leaned against it, briefly held the latch, then reached out and said, "I've been expecting you."

Her grip felt warm, familiar. After a few seconds, she let go and trailed her fingertips along the back of his hand. He flipped his wrist and took her hand. She flinched.

He let go of her hand and held out his brown-paper package. "I brought you something."

She didn't reach for it. Instead, she brushed by him and cleared the studio's disorder—envelopes and papers on the coffee table—then turned to him. "Tea or cold drink?" she said.

"Tea please." He put his package on the coffee table and watched her walk out of her studio. She'd been expecting him, she'd said. But why, after so many weeks away, in a dressing gown, without her usual makeup? She could have insisted he wait on the verandah while she dressed. He paced the fringe of the carpet. His finger could land on any specified note on her upright, in a single try, blindfolded. He leafed through her music. The room pealed with her presence. Why tea? It took longer to get rid of someone who drank boiling water on the hottest day of the summer than ice-cold Cola-Cola. One gulped Coke. One sipped tea.

She returned with a tray and poured from the teapot. "Help yourself." She stepped into her bedroom and shut the door. Shutters slammed. The window latch screeched. He sat down and reached for his tea. No, the key still hadn't been turned in the bedroom door-lock. Ouch. He snapped back his fingers from the hot glass.

She'd be standing in her bedroom, tugging the end of the tie that held her gown. The knot would unravel. She'd peer into her mirror and scan the lights and darks of her body as her gown undraped. She'd shrug the gown to the floor and bend, reach for the stool. From her bed, where he'd be sitting, he'd peer over her shoulder at her reflection. When their gazes met, she'd lift her elbows high, undo her hairpins, and place them one by one on her dressing table.

The unlocked door beckoned. He rose to his feet. The handle turned before he could reach it. Still in her gown, just inches away, Rebecca stood in her bedroom doorway as if waiting for his move. But her lips formed a silent "no." She drew a small circle in the air with her finger then pointed to her studio. He turned and headed back to his seat. She pulled up a chair and sat obliquely, so that they had to half-turn their heads to look at each other.

"I'm glad to see you," she said.

Her finger had traced a circle just an inch from his mouth. The 'no' on her lips surely meant 'not right now.' He lifted his brown package from the coffee table. As she reached out, he said, "Watch out for the glass."

She unfolded the wrapping from the 1575 print of Cyprus by Steffano Lusignano. "Lovely. You're so thoughtful." She rose and began to approach him but changed her mind. She stepped towards the piano, set the gift on the dustcover and switched on a lamp. While she studied the map he studied her silhouette. Light from Zorro's window streamed along her waist. He edged his chair closer to hers—*surely* she had her panties on under that gown.

The first time, on Famagusta beach, she'd probably used him to score points with Harry Lawrell. Since then, for two years, whenever her veil slipped she'd snatch it back into place. Like the day of Zorro the cat when he'd rescued her, hugged her, explored her, kissed her. She let him. He'd saved her life, she said. But the instant he shifted his knees off the floor, she'd whispered, "Not yet."

She returned to her chair and, self-assured as a daisy in a meadow, pushed her chair even closer to his, then sat down. Had she changed? Hell, no. *He* had. He was joining *her* world. He opened his mouth. For a moment, he couldn't speak. Then, "I need to look at you."

She looked away and fondled her necklace. "You know what draws me to a man?"

He must be tall, handsome, rich?

She raised her tea as if in toast. "Intelligence, assertiveness, sensitivity—necessary for success gained honestly. But watch out if he's late for an appointment or dares to put his feet up when I want something done." She blew the steam away from her glass and she sipped. "Doctors, lawyers. Each begs you to confirm his importance and treats you accordingly."

Teachers were worse, Harry Lawrell for one. He returned the tea-glass to the table. "No matter how hard I study, there's always some bastard out there who knows more than I do."

She reached out and rubbed his hand. "Hush," she said. "You'll never be happy if your only goal is to avoid being second best. You once said only God and Einstein know everything."

"Einstein's dead."

"Invent your own mathematics. Didn't Einstein believe in imagination?"

"There are rules."

"Free yourself." He sensed her regret. Yet *she* imitated—she insisted her pupils stick to the classics. Glued to conformity like him she might be, but oh, her hand felt good.

She looked at him. "Unlike you, Fulya's not unhappy with her progress."

She should admit it. Classical or not, art was useless. Mathematics was useful. So was a hard-on. “Fulya’s boyfriend, Irakles, believes that if you can imitate da Vinci you’re a good artist. I say Leonardo was a draughtsman.”

She clapped her hands. “What about sensitivity?”

Hell. Did Attila the Hun win females through sensitivity? Did Rasputin? “Love hurts.”

“Smile, Chris. I’m joking.”

“But how does a man know when a woman wants him?”

“She’ll signal. You’re not to make his move until she signals. If you saw two women, one of them naked, which would instantly capture your attention? The naked one, of course. Now if a woman were to see two men, one in a business suit and one naked . . .”

Sure. The girl would vote for the suit and spread her legs later. “Do women think about sex? What do ‘love,’ ‘make love’ and ‘sleep with’ really mean?”

“*Ritardando*, slow down—you haven’t forgotten the terminology?” She refilled their glasses from the teapot. “A woman can make love to you with her eyes and you could try to sleep with her without touching her, but to sustain either activity for long without consequences is impossible. Love is the only game where the weaker party wins.”

“That makes no sense.”

“It does to me.”

“I want to make love to you.”

“I know. That’s exactly why I have to push you out of my door very soon.”

“Who were you talking to on the phone the day I saved you from the electricity?”

Her hand trembled as she poured more tea. Unnecessary, since she’d just refilled the glasses. “Chris— Now is the wrong time.”

“I want to look at you forever.”

“You’ll be disappointed. The last time I looked cute was in my school uniform.” She smiled. “Your friend, the boy who’s stolen Fulya’s heart. I must meet him. Soon as possible.”

Never. The pervert would want to paint her. The first time he’d visited the Naxiotis’ house, Irakles had shown him piles of nude drawings stashed under his bed. And hyper-real sketches of body parts. Male, female, and animal.

“Tell me what happened this summer,” she said. “As we speak, Fulya’s letter weeps in my *portemonnaie*.”

“What?”

“My handbag.” She raised a finger to her lips. “I know. You feel I’m holding her back. It’s because I’m scared for her being alone in the big cities of Europe. Like I was.”

He shuffled his feet to see where his blood had once stained her carpet.

“To the left,” she said.

Why did excitement feel like fear? “A Greek boy attacked Fulya. Irakles beat him up.”

“Irakles’s godfather rushed me a message for an urgent meeting,” Rebecca said nodding sideways as if to the pile of letters she’d cleared from the coffee table.

“Her attacker made threats.”

“She’s terrified *and* she’s brokenhearted. Why? If you can’t shed more light on it then I must speak directly with Irakles.”

Better not reveal they’d planned to find Fulya. If tomorrow went well, though, perhaps a meeting between Rebecca and Irakles could be averted. “Have you been to the Lido?” he said.

“Of course.”

“What’s the Grand Hotel like?”

“If you mean—no, too expensive. I usually stay at a *pensione* near St. Mark’s.”

Usually? “Do you swim at the Lido?”

“It’s a place to meet the most interesting people.”

Exactly, Italian men, lotion-spreading Romeos. “What do you talk about?”

“I can disappear into my music like you into your mathematics. In this boat-ride of life, we’re one-way passengers. Nature and chance have—”

“—Reinvented us.”

She sprang to her feet, moved the Lusignano print to the top of the piano, and repositioned the bench. Running her hands below her buttocks and along the back of her legs, she smoothed out her gown and sat down and said something about a Beethoven sonata.

He eased down beside her, rubbed shoulder and said, “Can I be your *ex*-lover one day?”

Her hands continued stroking the keys while her shoulder wriggled against his hand, working it closer to her neck. “Loosen your wrist,” she said. “I have a knot . . .”

He should rip off her gown, execute a roll off the bench, and take her on the floor—Tom Ewell-Marilyn Monroe style. “Say something.”

“I love you too much,” she said. “Our friendship, not to mention my reputation, would instantly collapse. I’ll sap your creativity and rip you apart, and you’ll end up despising me.”

He craved to kneel before her, to part her thighs with his cheeks, to trade sweat. “I think about you, on average, three times a minute.” He stroked her neck with his cheek and refueled his lungs. Funny, it was okay for clothes to cling to a woman’s form, to announce her shape, but to press skin against skin? “Lovers can be friends.”

“It’s either/or.”

Not for a glimmer did she turn away from the keyboard or lose her timing. Her fingers were disciplined, structured—against the frenzy in his groin.

“I need time to primp.” Her fingers stopped working the keyboard. She looked at her watch, closed the dustcover, and rose to her feet. “I must be in Prodhromos in time for dinner.”

Dinner at the Berengaria Hotel? "Who are you seeing?"

She took his hand and pulled him to the kitchen. "Pour some red." She pointed to a cupboard. "Two glasses. Calm yourself while I get ready."

And she shut herself in her bedroom.

This 'dinner' thing could be connected with Fulya's situation, with Sokratis Mavropoulos. He glanced at the kitchen ceiling. A year had passed since he'd torn out the lamp cord that she'd connected to her iron. He found a bottle on the table. Burgundy. Open. He rummaged for wineglasses. He poured and took a sip. A book sat on the table. It couldn't be, but it was, *Heliopolis*, Harry Lawrell's smut. He flipped open the cover. "To Rebecca O in memory of unsurpassed companionship and banter, with highest esteem and affection, H.L. N.B. Best relished with decanted 1953 Domaine de la Romanée-Conti Burgundy (room temperature) beside a glowing hearth."

Fuck! He banged down his glass, charged to Rebecca's bedroom, and whacked the door with Lawrell's book. "I'm coming in," he yelled and flung open the door.

She was sitting at her dressing table in her bra and panties. "What's wrong?" she said without looking away from the mirror.

"You're meeting that disgusting Lawrell at the Berengaria Hotel."

"If you're going to keep me company, bring the wine in with you."

He dashed the book to the floor. "Fucking know-it-all philosopher-poet Harry Lawrell."

She turned towards him. "Chris, you're frightening me."

He jangled the coins in his pocket. "The pig's married." He flicked a coin towards her. "What can *I* buy for a shilling?"

"Chris. Sit down."

He threw down another coin. "Two shillings. A kiss?"

“No. Don’t!”

He emptied his pocket to the floor. “Sorry, but I don’t think I have quite enough here for an hour in your bed.”

“Chris.”

“You know why you’re not married? You, you”—what was the worst thing he could think of?—“you smell like a fish.”

She shrank away and covered her eyes. He expected her to jump up, to scream at him, to order him out of her house. But she remained motionless, seemingly holding her breath.

“You picked up that nonsense from Lawrell,” he yelled. “Challenging tradition—”

“—Please stop—”

“—Those are Lawrell’s ideas. Trash.”

“He knows all about you and Jane.”

“I’ll kill him.”

“Sit down, will you? You’re having a nervous breakdown.”

He flopped onto her bed and curled his face into his knees.

“You’re annoyed with yourself at letting Jane go,” she said. “You’re still mourning her. I could never compete with her memory no matter how much I loved you.”

“Right. And you don’t intend to try.”

“What’s the worst thing you did this year?”

“I missed you.”

“I mean, at school.”

The worst? “I lied when I told my classmates I hadn’t already solved certain examples. I let them think I was working my way through them on the spot.”

“Good. Now what’s the worst thing you’ve done in your life?”

Where the hell was she headed with this? “I abandoned Odysseas once, left him to drown. Some man saved him, but I pretended it was me who’d saved him. I lied.”

“Did you tell Jane you abandoned your brother?”

“Yes.”

“Did she believe you?”

“No.”

“I don’t believe you either. Because I heard otherwise, on good authority.”

“From Lawrell?”

“Once and for all, will you *stop* dragging Harry Lawrell into everything we discuss?”

He sat up and looked at her. Would she sprawl on her back for Lawrell? Had those legs already wrapped themselves around that hairless stick of English lard? “I forbid you to see him.”

“Stop! Stop all this ranting. It was your *brother* who told me you saved him. He’s proud of you. So you were once a frightened little boy. So what?” Jars crashed to the floor as she fumbled on the dresser. She swung around and flung a hairbrush at him. “I understand Jane. I’d be devastated too if you gave me up after a simple slap in the face.”

How did she know about that?

“I want a man, not a saccharine boy,” she said. “You’d as easily run away from me.”

His heart hammered as he yelled, “How could you let that mound of slime touch you?”

“You don’t own me!”

“I’ll kill him.”

“You’ll never kill anyone. You’re not like your cousin. *He’s* dead. *You’re* alive.”

Fuck it. He jumped to his feet. “Do you sleep with him?” His brakes had failed. A horror he couldn’t prevent was about to take place. “What about those gigolos on the Lido beach? Do you sleep with them or do you just make love to them with your eyes?”

Her eyes blazed, not so much with rage, more with disdain, as she said, "What if I did?"

She'd compared him with Stavros. Stavros who was alive. Don't let your Greek friends pressure you to join EOKA, she once insisted. Now she called him a coward. He wrestled a sheet off the bed and dumped it over her. "I know," he said. "Lawrell's not too choosy, either. But he'd have to be paid really well to fuck you. How does he stack up against your gigolos?"

He had to pull the sheet tight around her neck. Tight as possible.

"I need a man who'd die for me," she yelled from under the sheet, "not a boy who ducks out at the first sign of trouble."

A boy who ducks out at the first sign of trouble? Like when Jane threatened to slash herself. "You had a boyfriend once who died for you. Remember?"

"Get out. Get out of my bedroom."

He did. But not fast. He clung to the doorframe to steady himself. Perhaps he'd injured her. He heard her sobbing. More cosmetic jars dinged the floor as she leaned, still under the sheet, against her dresser. "Wait." Her voice. She was okay. She was fumbling to untangle herself. He left her room and strode out through the front door onto the sunlit verandah. He clamped his eyelids but tears forced their way through.

A few breaths later her hand pressed his shoulder.

"Come inside. Please. There's so much you don't understand. Things I've been too scared to share with you. You missed me, and you're angry. I know. I missed you too."

She wasn't injured. Good. He jerked away from her grasp and hopped down the stairs.

"Come back. Chris! Come *back!*"

He slammed the gate and ran. He must get as far as possible away from her before he drowned in shame.

Chapter 53

In which mountain-top resort could Sokratis compliment another man's wife, or a man's daughter, embrace her for endless minutes, prospect her assets, and probe her willingness to share them? Where could he whisper into her ear and plan with her the ideal spot for their next rendezvous? In short, where in public, and in full view of a husband or father, could he reheat a current affair, or fish for his next mistress?

Of course, at the Berengaria Hotel. But never while walking in the pinewood forest, rarely while lounging on the terrace or by the swimming pool, obviously not while test-driving an already willing candidate in one of those bedrooms-with-a-view, and not usually while playing solitaire in the reading room—where he now relaxed in a leather chair by an open window—but gliding upright and center-stage around the ballroom floor.

A ballroom dance called for more than a series of steps. The first move, the first impression—confidence, mood, and a strong recovery from those inevitable collisions. Dry palms, dry armpits—essential. And, Mademoiselle, one must declare at the outset, regardless of the lady's condition and mileage, may I have the pleasure of this dance?

Anyway, most women couldn't wait to escape their husbands—his Elena certainly couldn't. But while a husband looked on, this Romeo didn't press his marbles between sweet Juliet's legs. At least, not repeatedly. For a Romeo lamentably weightier-footed than Fred Astaire, though, foxtrots served well. The slower the better. A well-tipped bandleader obliged.

In July, following the truce between the British and EOKA, the Berengaria had reopened. People flocked here for the evening or weekend or—if they had spare cash—for a week. Brits, romantic or straight-laced. Affluent locals and lounge lizards.

But *he'd* checked in indefinitely.

Unfortunately, Fulya Özal wouldn't let his money soil her pretty hands, he'd reported to Elena. No doubt, he'd added, in misguided collusion with Irakles. That pearl necklace Elena had given her had spoiled her—he'd now have to ratchet up his offer. She'd come around, though. So would Irakles. He'd see to it. "Out of my sight, you monster," Elena had yelled at him. "And don't show your face in my house again until Fulya takes our money."

A penniless Turkish bitch had gotten him banned from his own house. But tonight's dinner-dance should sooth his wounds.

He looked at his watch. Five o'clock.

Claire should show up at any minute. Tonight, a final briefing. And a deserved rebuke—she'd been lax in keeping Jane reigned in. Then, dinner, and God only knew what next. Claire would soon discover that their self-imposed abstinence had run its course. After all, she was still on his payroll. Like Jane.

But before dinner, while Claire amused herself elsewhere, Yannakis would update him on the week's events. He'd been assured of the demise of Fivos Lousides—an easy liquidation, and imminent. But why did Alistair McKay and, above all, Stavros Ikonis still roam the island? Yannakis couldn't blame the ceasefire indefinitely.

Saturday, August 24, 1957. Jane's baby should be seven weeks old.

He must stop thinking of Xanthia as Jane's baby.

Naturally, Elena had expressed initial displeasure the evening he'd shown up at his estate with baby and wet-nurse in tow. "You think I'm going to look after the bastard child of one of your whores?" she'd said. "Take this brat out of my house immediately."

He'd told Elena that their Dr. Michaelides had come across the baby at a convent. "Look at her," he said. "You'd have fallen in love with those blue eyes too."

"Don't blue-eyes me," Elena had screamed. "You've been duped once again, you stupid man. It's certainly not yours. Away. Send it to an orphanage."

Upon which, he looked at the wet-nurse, and said, "Offer it to someone who wants it."

To which, after taking another peek and pinching the baby's cheek, Elena predictably declared, "Don't you dare. I have so many exciting preparations to make. We'll call her Xanthia."

"As you say, *agape mou*," he'd said. "The paperwork is in hand."

He couldn't inform Elena that, on his orders, Xanthia had been whisked away before even her English mother had snatched a look at her. Nor why he'd waited another forty odd days before finally accepting her. Why hadn't he brought Elena the baby sooner? He didn't think she could handle a newborn. Nonsense, she'd replied. He couldn't have confessed that he'd marked time in case of repercussions from Claire's camp. From McKay the spy. From the British.

It also took time to muddy the origin of the acquisition—to shed its history—by filtering it through a convent. Equally importantly, a healthy product had to be ensured. Strategic delay. A sound business practice.

By tradition, to conceal the absence of her pregnancy, Elena should have been dispatched to Greece or elsewhere. And to return home with the newborn. No matter. Elena's friends would play along, even though Elena might be seen as a bit too old to have given birth to her own child. Let the gossips talk. In a private ceremony conducted by a mystified but well-

compensated Father Panaretos, baby Xanthia underwent a belated fortieth-day blessing. Cold cash bent the Law of Moses.

A pair of heels clicked. "A lady awaits you on the terrace, *Kyrie Mavropoule*."

He turned to the waiter and raised his eyebrows.

"She already asked for a pot of tea, sir."

Of course, after he'd dragged her all the way up here on her last evening in Cyprus, Claire had to make *him* walk the last few yards. She never quit. "Another whiskey," he said. "A double. On the terrace."

If Claire only knew a sliver of what he'd conspired around her stepdaughter's baby. Of the manpower involved. Thus far, a smooth outcome. He swung himself out of his chair and made his way to the lobby.

Chapter 54

The potted vine beside Claire blazed orchid-like white flowers, a waterfall of fragrance, sickly and intense. Yellowed blooms littered the terrace. Something she'd miss during those soon-to-be-endured, throat-rasping London pea-soupers. Sixpence-in-the-meter if you could afford it, chilblains if you couldn't. This time she could. Thank God.

External beauty signified inner purity. Where *had* she read that? She'd put on her belted, one-piece summer cotton, simple, not too loose. Taut enough to liven her hips, and to keep her breasts obvious, energetic. Shoulder-length hair silky with just the right number of curls. Lips and fingernails fire red. She lit a cigarette. Too bad it messed up the smell of the jasmine. 'You must remember this, a kiss is still a kiss, . . . '—As Time Goes By.

And there he was. Ivory-complexioned, deadpan like an aged carving. Quite a contrast with the blue-jowl locals. Clad today in shimmering beige silk with long sleeves—and in dress-to-the-left golden-brown pants, linen for sure.

A lady didn't rise for a gentleman, but this lady had set her handbag on her gentleman's chair, a good excuse to get up and move it. So that today's gentleman wouldn't lose any time in taking her all in—that bit-of-all-right that would make the gentleman feel special. As Sokratis approached, she rose, walked around the table, and removed her handbag.

Before sitting down, he repositioned his chair. As planned—he wouldn't have wanted to face the wall. And now he'd get to see her in profile. Her best one.

“Your whiskey, sir.” Mr. Starched Shirt set down a full glass that jiggled ice cubes, and snapped to attention. “I also have a message for you, sir.”

Sokratis took the envelope from the tray and slit it open with the paperknife provided. He unfolded a slip of paper, looked at it, and placed it back on the tray.

The waiter clicked his heels. “Anything for you, madam?”

She shook her head.

“Grapes,” Sokratis said. “*Veriko*. Make sure they were picked today.”

The waiter clicked his heels again. “*Malista, kyrie*.”

“What’s your name?” Sokratis asked.

“Ippolytos, sir.”

“We’re not in the Bavarian Alps, Ippolytos. Don’t click your heels.”

“Anything else, sir?”

“Remove that twig that’s hanging into my guest’s eyes.”

Mr. Starched-Shirt Ippolytos set his tray on their table and closed in on her. She tilted her head and flicked the branch. “No need,” she said. “I can easily move.”

“Don’t,” Sokratis said.

Ippolytos pulled a penknife from his pocket and hacked off the twig.

“Go, Ippolytos,” Sokratis said. “Fetch the grapes. How was your journey, Claire?”

“Nothing unusual. All we killed en route, I believe, was a black cat.”

“Bad luck, I fear. Do you still carry a gun?”

Of course she did. Reggie had encouraged it. So did Alistair. She took a drag on her cigarette. “You’ve had my handbag snatched twice this year. If anyone should know, it’s you.”

Even Jane’s bag had been pinched. Days later a constable returned whichever bag had been stolen, usually minus cash, nothing else missing.

Sokratis swirled the ice cubes around his glass and took a drink. “To bump into someone is a way of forcing contact—a cheap way to trick loneliness. Destiny, like success, has a better chance with proper planning and management.”

And, she could have added, to draw a man's attention to something, a girl only has to make a point of appearing to hide it. ‘It's still the same old story, a fight for love and glory, . . .’ She finished her tea, put down her empty cup, and signaled a clip-clopping Ippolytos for some of whatever Sokratis was drinking. “Now can we discuss the baby?”

He smiled at her. “In Cyprus, my dear, any natural blonde is considered exotic—”

“You gave me the distinct impression you'd adopt it. Tell me where and how it is.”

“A woman like you is forgiven her start in one of London's infamous slums—her background of purse-snatchers, prostitutes, and pimps.”

“Fuck you, Sokratis—”

He held up his hand for silence. “Mrs. Claire Simmons, née Claire Phyllis Taggart, youngest of four siblings. A fourteen-year-old Miss Taggart—yourself—ran away from home. And promptly dropped out of school, presumably to boost Britain's GNP as a cinema usherette, a sales-girl, an underage barmaid, and much more. How am I doing?”

Where was Mr. Starched Shirt with her drink? She lifted her empty teacup to her lips.

“Your brother died during a break-out from borstal. Motorcycle smash-up. After the War, your slum was razed and your parents relocated. They now inhabit a council flat. Two-bedroom. Your father still operates his garage, minus the helping hand of your deceased brother. He's done time but continues to traffic in stolen car parts. To this day.”

Sokratis stopped as if to let his words sink in and took a sip from his glass.

Inhabit? Operate? Fuck. This detour in their conversation could get worse. He could bring up her abortion. Or how her downtrodden mother had taught her daughters to cock-tease

their small-time father for pocket money. How after a screaming match with her mum, she'd stomped out for good. How she'd had it. With school, with empty pockets, with watercress and soggy ham sandwiches for Sunday dinner, with listening in on her dad fuck her mum three times a week—those five-minute bangs at eleven o'clock weeknights, an hour earlier on Sundays.

Ippolytos returned with her whiskey and a bowl of grapes. She snatched the glass from the tray.

“We had an agreement,” Sokratis said looking towards the pool and appearing to take stock of a girl letting herself dry in the sun. “No contacts. But you left Jane at the Nicosia Club last week. And there's today to account for.”

Hang their agreement. Jane had more than earned some bloody time off. “Alistair took her. They're doing the rounds, saying their goodbyes.”

“Well, he dropped her off at the Club.”

How would he know? Of course, that message back then that Mr. Starched-Shirt Ippolytos had brought to the table. “Did Irakles—?”

“—My godson prevailed again. He and Jane have just left the Club—hand in hand.” He picked at the bowl of grapes. “Have one. You won't find anything as fresh in London.”

She took a drag on her cigarette and exhaled towards the sky.

“Irakles is not the baby's father, but you worked hard to convince me otherwise. My enquiries confirm that you and Jane, between you, have lapped up enough Cypriot oats to overflow several cereal bowls. Unpalatable oats.”

Unpalatable, huh? If Stavros's sperm had been so unpalatable why would Sokratis have bid for the resulting brat? Alistair had to be right. Stavros was probably alive. Or, at any rate, more alive now than when he was dead.

She steadied herself on the arms of her chair. “The baby's found its home, then.”

“Too bad Reggie had to die. You’d have become wealthy.”

Good thing they’d kept Reggie’s suicide under raps. If Sokratis had found out, he might have called off his baby-purchase deal. She propped her elbows on the table. “The baby, fuck you. The baby.”

“It ended up at a convent.”

“A fucking convent?”

“Unwanted babies are regularly abandoned on the doorsteps of monasteries and nunneries.”

“I assumed you’d adopt it, whatever the outcome.”

“As a matter of fact, my wife and I did adopt a beautiful girl. A healthy one.”

“Jane’s?”

“Nothing, no paperwork connects the baby we adopted with the one Jane delivered. The baby’s track leads to a death certificate.”

She slapped the table. “You betrayed us.”

“I helped Jane and averted an abortion.”

Reggie had taught her nothing if not about how business got done here. But, like a hoop, this deal-crap never seemed to come to an end. “Why didn’t you tell me this in July?”

“Excuse me, sir.” Ippolytos. Mr. Starched Shirt was back again. “The courier awaits your response.”

Sokratis slit open a foolscap-size envelope and extracted a sheaf of papers, carbon copies. He rose to his feet and crinkled through them.

“Madam?” Ippolytos said.

She shook her head.

“A bottle of champagne, Ippolytos,” Sokratis said. “On Mr. Lawrell’s table tonight, with my compliments.” With a back-in-a-moment, Sokratis walked away.

She should have made a dash for the powder room and have a good cry. But she’d lost her energy. Sokratis made such a show of being free of guilt and shame— She rattled the ice cubes in her whiskey and took a sip. ‘Evening shadows make me blue, how I long’—no, no, that ain’t right—‘When each weary day is through . . .’ Crap. That wasn’t *As Time Goes By*. My Happiness. That’s what it was. The melodies had got tangled.

She snapped open her compact and stole a look at herself. She clicked it shut and stuffed it back into her bag.

“My apologies,” Sokratis said sitting down. “Business beckoned.”

On Saturday afternoon in paradise? “Jane’s baby,” she said in as even a voice as she could muster. “Tell me it’s alive. Tell me!”

“Monday night on the Athena Queen, you have a seat at the captain’s table—”

“—Jane and I—”

“—There’ll be a reservations mix-up. You’ll appear upset. They’ll make up for it. You and Jane will travel first class. It’s arranged.”

“Alistair?”

“Your faithful Scot remains in a second class cabin. Tomorrow night, the captain’s guests include a member of the British House of Lords and an American businessman from New York—a Jew. A Saudi prince joins you in Piraeus. There’ll be others. Charm everyone. Charm their wives. Gain their confidence. And collect as many social invitations as you can before disembarking in Marseilles. You have five days.”

Her headache had lifted. “What do you want?”

“What are your expectations for London?”

Dank pubs with nicotine walls. Drizzle. Gas meters, socks to bed, and throat-grating smog. The stench of the unwashed—wet hair, wet woolies, wet stockings. Bald lechers prowling the dance halls. Jane pregnant again. “I’ve always fancied a job at Harrods.”

“Yannakis will be by shortly with a letter of credit in your favor. Set yourself up in decent place—Knightsbridge will do.” He downed the rest of his whiskey in a manner that seemed to signify an end to their discussion and said, “We’re still strangers enough for our relationship to be erotic. Don’t you agree?”

Dare she say, dream on? “Hate to disappoint you, old sport, but my pussy’s sore today with something your wife won’t want you to catch.”

He shook his head. “We’ll figure out a pleasant alternative, then Dimitris will drive you back to the garrison.”

Sokratis was right about one thing, though. Best think of Jane’s baby as dead and buried. Poor old squeamish Reggie. She’d sure done *her* bit to do him in. She reached for her handbag. ‘No matter what the future brings, . . . as time goes by.’

Stuff the future. Right now she needed the powder room.

Chapter 55

Inside the hotel, the band had struck up *Begin the Beguine*. Behind the hotel, on the pathway beneath the terrace, Sokratis came to a halt. The woman on the terrace seemed as if she might step into space. But she stopped at the edge and stared beyond him, as if searching for someone in the darkening forest. Then she looked at him and held her stare.

The band must have frozen her attention. That smooth clarinet.

One of her hands curled over a bag that hung by a strap from her shoulder. Her other hand rested by her side. She wore pearls. A broach. A head-scarf. And an orchid-print dress. An Athenian celebrity, or a Cypriot woman with style. Life offered little better. She bit her lip, perhaps to acknowledge to the two men on the path below her that she'd caused them distress. Yet her gaze questioned, as if by the thought that she should have been elsewhere. Perhaps a lover would burst onto the scene, claim his place by her side. As if in response to a call, she turned in the direction of the hotel and smiled. A man took her elbow and ushered her away.

"Miss Ouzanian," Yannakis whispered.

Of course. Fulya Özal's piano teacher—tomorrow's dinner companion and solution to his most recent exile from Elena's bosom. If she recognized him, well, she hadn't shown it. "That face," he said to Yannakis, "plaster it on a billboard and sales of the associated product will double."

"You want me—?"

“See to it on Monday.” No, life was definitely not for the squeamish.

Not to interfere with today's finale with Claire, he'd proposed a dinner meeting with Fulya's piano teacher tomorrow night, Sunday. The woman had arrived a day early. Yannakis had been filling him in. Rebecca Ouzanian. A respectable upbringing in Nicosia's Armenian quarter. The Terra Santa School for Girls. Then Vienna. Two years ago she'd taken over her aunt's house, where she now taught music. Her meager income she spent on travel—Venice, Florence, Salzburg. And on clothes. She liked to rub noses with intellectuals, Yannakis had reported. She'd been seen on the arm of writer Harry Lawrell.

Now that he'd got this close-up whiff of the stylish bitch, her student days in Vienna screamed for clarification. To optimize her utility, she'd need unmasking—her so-so musical success, her craving for the attention of the intelligentsia, or the literati, or whatever those hard-drinking foreign bores were called these days. And why wasn't she married? A woman's imperative was to marry up. By remaining unmarried, she broadcast that she hadn't found anyone worthy of her.

Someone held her key.

Good timing. He'd warned Claire that there was one list Harry Lawrell's name had better be on before the EOKA ceasefire ended—a list of passengers departing Cyprus. Not because Harry corralled ladies without regard either to their marital status or to his. Nor because he bored people with his wit. Writing government propaganda plus the belief that Lawrell spied on activist Greek youth were reasons enough for his liquidation.

Good thing McKay would also be leaving, he'd remarked to Claire. McKay's long overdue demise had been delayed because of the Scot's record of help in Greece's liberation. Anyway, that line held a flake of truth. He couldn't tell Claire that EOKA had bungled her

friend's assassination. Nor that resurrected hit-man Stavros had less than forty-eight hours to snuff out McKay, perchance in the process to be snuffed out himself.

The afternoon naps over with, the band played on as guests spilled across the terrace and children scampered among the trees. Hell, he himself might enjoy strolling through these pines one day, hand in hand with little Xanthia. What next? Irakles teaching Xanthia how to swim, *he* taking her for spins in his XK 140, or whatever his next Jaguar would be called.

Love, like money, required effort and insisted on the recipient's ability to appreciate it. He lit a cigarette. "Go to reception," he said to Yannakis. "Get Miss Ouzanian a better room. Next to mine."

Yannakis dabbed at a sweaty brow. "I believe the hotel is full."

Did everything have to be explained? "Inform the manager that I will buy the hotel and toss him into the street. This property is valuable. He isn't."

Why care whether Rebecca slept in the room next to his? Why engineer the issue into him now having to save face? He'd pushed his mouth too far today. Billboards indeed, changing Rebecca's room, buying the Berengaria. Nonsense. Maybe not. At the end of the Cyprus conflict, prices would soar. "Make sure she stays the night," he added. "Then go home. Enjoy your wife and children. Take Sunday off." And he swung on his heels, rounded the building, and headed for the driveway that fell towards the village.

The headlights of traffic converging on the crossroads below flickered through the pines. Distant motors whined. Dogs barked. His thin-soled dress shoes slipped on the gravelly asphalt. He stepped off the curved ribbon of driveway to let a car go by. The car slowed. Taxi? the driver asked. No, he signaled and continued walking.

Stavros had certainly once lurked in this forest. Perhaps he still did. The village hub and its coffee shops offered safety a mere two-hundred-and-fifty-meter downhill stroll, but he should

have taken his car. Or stepped into that passing taxi. Stavros might yet leap out of the darkness, slash him with a knife, and disappear without a trace.

He recalled himself as a ten-year-old, at camp. Frightened of the night. Of wolves. And the older boys. The wolves had been imaginary, the older boys had been real.

Good breeding signified good manners, good health, and good looks, but also courage and iron-control under all provocations. Hitler had despised cripples and crybabies. As had Alexander the Great. And the Spartans. What was it he'd told Claire? Destiny, like success, had a better chance with planning and management? To strengthen Irakles, his heir, he continued to endure their verbal duels. What his boy didn't yet know was that he'd gained more from arms smuggled to the Irgun than from the 'exploitation' of Jewish refugees. And that this 'evil' money and a blind eye to the EOKA cell that flourished in his workforce, kept him clear of EOKA recruiters. No Greek with pull would permit his only son to serve as fodder for undisciplined sodomites and thugs.

Irakles and Jane Simmons, hand in hand in England. For a while, why not?

Neither an EOKA thug nor a dark night frightened the boy. Fed but not fattened—a Spartan with brains—Olympia's former milk-sponge of a son had turned bare-fisted street fighter. A fight, no less, over a Turkish peasant girl's honor. If such could ever exist.

At the crossroads he leaned against a lamppost, took off a shoe, and shook out the grit.

One coffee, one glass of water, and one cigarette later he left the coffee shop and picked his way back along the forested driveway. Halfway up a figure appeared, walking towards him. Backlit by the hotel. Soft footfalls. A woman. She stopped and waited for him to reach her. "Give me a cigarette," she said.

A jeweled hair clip had replaced her scarf. In the moonless gloom, her lipstick looked as black as her hair. She remained motionless.

He dug his hand into his pocket and obliged her with a cigarette.

They lit up, then she said, "They say the only thing you don't have in common with a reptile is that your skin isn't scaly."

Her earrings and eyes flashed pinpricks of light.

A similarly dark-haired beauty came to mind. He was twelve, Alicia was older. Flower in hand, he'd knocked on Alicia's door. Alicia opened it, and he held out the flower and asked her if she'd come out. She'd looked him up and down, and shut the door. Years later, Alicia sat on a chair across from his desk and begged him for a job. She didn't laugh that day either.

Rebecca took the cigarette out of her mouth. "You asked me here for an urgent meeting."

"I made Fulya Özal a good offer—"

"—and she rejected you."

"Did you speak to her?"

Rebecca dropped her half-smoked cigarette to the ground and stomped it out. "Tell me, did your good offer specify threats against her family?"

"Others have—"

"You can't afford harm to her, or her family, not after she's been welcomed into your house. Consider the headlines."

If only she knew—Fivos's entrails would soon make dog-food, as well as the headlines. A missive he'd backed with cash. "I'll write you a cheque tonight."

"Does Irakles know of your meeting with Fulya?"

Rebecca wouldn't be so stupid as to turn down ready funds for her student. She must have some other windfall already in hand. Elena's trickery had to be behind this posturing.

"Consider it an anonymous donation," he said. "Send her to New York."

She fondled her necklace. "The Julliard School? Will that ease your conscience?"

She'd started to fidget. She had no cigarette to lean on, just a necklace and a handbag.

"Artists change names," he said. "So must Fulya, to throw Irakles off her scent."

As if on cue, she opened her handbag and pulled out a key.

Promising news. So, her price had been negotiable all along. "Tell me, Rebecca, if you ran this hotel for me, how would you improve it?"

As she passed him the key, her tone turned icy. "The receptionist, it seems, has switched our rooms."

He slipped the key from her hand.

"Well," she said turning as if ready to head back to the hotel. "It was nice meeting you, Mr. Mavropoulos."

"Tomorrow—?"

"—Won't be necessary. We have nothing left to discuss."

Chapter 56

Rebecca's disdainful "What if I did?" clung to Chris like an infection as he teetered alongside Irakles into the morning shade of a house in Fulya's village. "I have to pee," he said.

Irakles took off his sunglasses and wrung the sweat from his hair. "You've been loading up on Coke. Squeeze your dick."

He wiped his face with the end of his shirt. Water. Moments ago, some granny had emptied a bucket of bilge through her front door, just missing them. Stop. He must stop thinking of water. Last night, another without sleep, he'd fantasized solving the equations of an articulated pendulum, whose shafts were connected by a simplified ball-joint or pin. He'd considered friction, rigid joints, flexible joints. Yes. The branches of a tree. One day he'd solve the dynamics of a lone windswept tree. Rebecca. The hollow in her lower back. Her skin. Her legs. Did you sleep with him? What if I did. What if I did. What if I did. Jesus fucking Christ.

"Hey, wake up," Irakles said shaking his elbow.

He blinked his eyes open. A man and a sheaf-laden donkey buzzing with flies shambled towards them. Two children, skipping, also approached. One girl carried a pomegranate, the other held eggs. The girls peeked at Irakles's legs. At a playing field they might have cheered. But in this village street, hairy knees evoked mirth if not outrage. The pomegranate-girl held out her fruit. Chris shook his head. A woman's voice yelled out a name. At the second call, the girls giggled, about-faced, and followed the donkey as it nosed around a curve.

Hilltops obscured the Kyrenia coastline. Neither the dazzle of surf nor the haze that softened Turkey's silhouette could be seen from the gravelly gashes that passed for Pano Vounaki's streets. Lumpy walls collided with aqueducts. Concrete slabs hooked ankle and hoof. Below the orange and purple Pentadaktylos rocks, scraggy pines competed for rootholds with stone shacks that seemed a notch on the Richter scale from collapse. If the ancient Greeks had invented geometry, the news hadn't reached the homebuilders. Nothing was planned here, nothing was plumb. After his struggle with Rebecca, and a night to forget, neither was his brain. He yawned. "Lucky Fulya's brother opens his grocery on Sunday. After that miserable climb from the bus stop, I'd have elbowed the sheep for a spot at the trough."

"Thirst is reason enough to keep popping in," Irakles said.

"So, we met brother Ulu. What happens when we bump into Mehmet?"

"I told you," Irakles said, "I have suggestions on growing his business."

"And I told you, I know zip about financial planning."

"Wing it," Irakles said. "Profit and loss."

It had been a week since Fivos's threats. Why couldn't Irakles admit that if a crazed Turk didn't cut them up today, a crazed Greek would? They were probably already under surveillance. "Let's get this over with. Go tell Ulu you're looking for Mehmet." He bashed the wall with his fist. The knot in his throat eased. He whacked the wall again and the pain in his stomach vanished.

"Hey, what's eating you?" Irakles said. "Jesus looked more serene on the cross."

"Have you read Harry Lawrell's *Heliopolis*?"

"That Egyptian shit about twelve-year-old prostitutes? Lawrell. Is he still your English teacher?"

Chris picked grit from his pierced skin. His hand was turning blue. "He's also my rival."

“You fucking Casanova. Lawrell’s wife? You’ve got this penchant for high-octane wenches. Have you finished with Jane?”

Nice try.

“Okay,” Irakles said. “Madam X. You had a fight with her.”

“We yelled at each other.”

“What was the last thing she said?”

“Come back to me.”

“You mean, come-back-to-me-at-once-and-face-the-music, you rotten bastard, or come-back-to-my-yearning-arms-all-is-forgiven?”

Irakles led him to the gravelly plaza on the edge of a ravine, the only level spot in the village. Here, trimmed in provocative Greek-flag blue, the church boasted its clean geometry. Perfect horizontals, perfect verticals, and perfect stone arches contrasted with the surrounding lean-to animal shelters and chicken coops—wooden posts and iron sheets secured by rusted headboards, bedsprings and car-jacks, and corrugated roofs fastened by planks and rocks.

From this hub, along a street barely wide enough for a tractor, they tagged behind a couple of nattering, church-departing women in black. Black and white. Didn’t village Turks dress in white? Anyway, Greeks could be distinguished when they spoke.

“I saw Jane,” Irakles said.

“What?”

Irakles released his arm. “I met her at the Nicosia Club Yesterday, after the race.”

“You bastard. You had all morning to tell me. You’ve been acting as if you hadn’t a clue about Jane.”

Irakles threw a smile at a passer-by. “A celluloid lie.”

He snatched the bugger’s wrist. “Why the fuck don’t you say things people understand?”

“Jane’s father died.”

His pain sharpened. He couldn’t admit he knew nothing.

“My friend, unshackle my arm. Tell me, did you first meet Jane on a beach?”

Where did that question spring from? “No. It’s where she first met Stavros.”

“Stavros, of course.”

“Why ‘of course’?” Where was this shit headed? “If you must know, I was on that beach too, in Famagusta, but I didn’t meet her then.”

“Suffice it that I vowed never to lose touch with Jane again. The four of us—you, Jane, Fulya and me—will end up in London. Fantastic, huh? Trouble is, we’ve three problems to resolve. One, Fulya’s situation. Two, your obsession with Madam X. And three, Jane gave me an envelope on condition I not hand it to you until after she leaves Cyprus. That’s tomorrow.”

“Do you—?”

“—Right here.” Irakles patted his hip. “After we see Fulya, I might let you wheedle me into giving it to you.”

“What did Jane say?”

“She misses you like crazy. I begged her to see you yesterday.”

“How did she look?”

“Ditch your Madam X. Spit blood for Jane.”

He reached into his pocket. “I wonder how much a taxi would cost from here.”

“Stop.” Irakles wiped the sweat from his brow. “It’s three miles to the main road. Right now, even if I have to chain you to my arm, you’re staying until we find Fulya’s house.”

He grabbed Irakles. “I want Jane’s letter now, you bastard.”

Irakles twisted the arm off his shoulder. “You’re *my* crutch today. Remember? If things work out, Mehmet could drive you to Limassol.”

“There’s no sign of his van.”

They reached the end of the village, a low point where stones, islands of concrete, and patches of asphalt petered into a storm-gouged track that plunged into the trees. It was the third time they’d arrived at this location. Still no hint of Fulya. He stepped across the concrete water channel, squeezed into the rubbish-strewn thicket beyond the last home, and undid his pants.

“I cornered Yannakis Polydorou,” Irakles said. “My godfather’s weasel. Apparently, they met with Fulya in the Cyprus Museum and put the squeeze on her.”

Clips stolen from an American gangster film? What next? As he pissed against a rusted oil drum, at last, the sound he’d been praying for. “Fantasie-Impromptu,” he said.

“Hurry. Tuck it away.”

Irakles banged the doorknocker of Fulya’s house. The playing stopped. A black swift skimmed along the channel for a sip.

Would she come to the door? More likely, one of her brothers. She yelled something in Turkish. They had about thirty seconds, he reckoned, before the village erupted and they got their jaws broken.

But the playing restarted.

Irakles knocked again, insistent.

The passing clip-clop of heels and hooves faded. So did the piano playing. But the watery rasp of nearby shovels mixing sand and gravel started up, birds screeched like vultures, and the stream that trickled by Fulya’s house seemed to roar like a waterfall.

“Who is it?” Fulya asked in Greek.

“It’s me,” Irakles said. “With Christakis.”

“I don’t want to see you.”

Some unattended goats jingled by. At the helm, a bearded ram with handlebar horns. At the rear, a baby goat. The baby goat stopped and wagged its tail. A baby goat? Hell, no. It was a white puppy blending into the herd.

Irakles kept knocking. "I must see you."

"Go away."

Irakles cupped his hands to the door and said loudly, "Let's sit down until she opens up."

A bolt crashed. One second to go before hell broke out. The door opened a crack. An aroma. Lamb stew. The door creaked. Fulya, barefoot, blouse tucked into a long skirt stood in the doorway one arm akimbo, the other holding onto the door. "Go away. Please. Mehmet will be back soon."

A cat sidled from behind her and unfurled its tail along her ankle. Its cheek caressed Irakles's foot, then Chris's pant cuffs, then it darted into the street on a mission known only to felines. Children's laughter, trickling water, distant barks. The sound of a hammer against a nail. Obstinate nail. A final thud. Silence. The nail had surrendered.

"Elena told me you met with Sokratis," Irakles said.

As if looking for something to do with her hands, Fulya yanked an elastic band off her wrist, tossed back her head and, with both elbows held high, laced her spread-out hair into a pony-tail. When she slowly twisted a lock of her hair around her index finger, all the while staring at Irakles, he knew why Irakles wanted her. At that moment, he wanted her too.

"What exactly did he say to you?" Irakles said.

"Sokratis Mavropoulos," Fulya said backing away. She seemed to let the name hang in space, then continued, bitter. "Only a Greek father would go to all that trouble to drive a Turkish peasant away from his son. You could've warned me. He's your father, isn't he?"

There were tears in Fulya's eyes as she—and he—waited for Irakles's denial.

Instead, "Elena can raise money to send you to England," Irakles said. "She wants to meet with Miss Ouzanian at once."

"Did you know? About his father?" Fulya looked into his eyes. He shook his head. "Go away," she said to Irakles. "My life isn't your canvas. Or your horrid father's."

Nobody moved. Nobody spoke. Her rejection had plunged the house into darkness. At last she added, "And I know all about you and Jane."

What the hell was there to know about Irakles and Jane?

Irakles pulled the envelope from his hip pocket. "As a matter of fact, I saw Jane yesterday. It would have been fabulous if you and Chris had been there too. I have a letter—"

Fulya snatched it and ripped off the envelope. Sobbing, she dashed to a corner, shoved the sheets deep into a bucket and—as if rinsing laundry—swished her arms.

"That's Chris's!" Irakles yelled.

Out of control, she rammed a mop into the bucket, sloshing water across the floor.

Before the mop came down again, Chris ripped himself from Irakles's grasp, dropped to his knees, and shoved his hand into the bucket. He fished out bits of paper and laid them on the floor. "This letter was mine. Mine."

"I don't understand," Fulya said. After a moment, she tossed the mop aside, sank to her knees, and peeled a wet fragment from the floor. "Oh dear, I'm so sorry. The ink has run." She scooped more bits of mush from the bucket. "We can lay them out in the sun."

Jane. Getting to Limassol to see her might take hours. Petrino, miles away, had a phone, but he had no number. He looked at the wet sheets draped over his fingers and wanted to cry.

A shot. The sound of a distant pistol shot through the open door.

He glanced from Fulya to Irakles then back to Fulya. An echo. Then nothing but dog-howls. Must have been a hunter.

“Father’s late,” Fulya said and leapt to her feet. “He should be home by now.”

They rose from their knees. Fulya went to the door.

Another shot.

Still barefoot, she tramped out. They followed her into a squawk of chickens. Down the track, outside the village, they ran into goats. Fulya plunged in. The herd separated except for the ram, caught in mid-munch on a clump of straw. Fulya yelled. The ram hopped to the edge of the track and soared into a thicket. Fulya continued running. “Greeks have been killing our flock,” she shouted.

Irakles put his hand on her shoulder as they approached a bend in the track, a ridge in the mountainside. Several shots crackled, too close. Irakles yanked her to a halt and pinned her into a cleft in the hillside.

“Let me go,” she yelled.

Bells jangled. Dogs barked. Fulya’s feet were bleeding. As Chris dodged her kicks, he crunched Irakles’s fallen sunglasses.

“Let me go,” she yelled at Irakles.

Irakles ducked her elbow and said, “See what’s around the corner.”

Leaning into the hillside, he crept ahead and looked around the bend. Scraggly cypresses bordered the track. Beyond the track, the landscape dropped to a sun-lit terrace the size of a football field. The clearing sloped down to a dried-up stream flanked by olive shrubs on this side, a cliff on the other. Sheep bleated. Goat-bells jangled. Some animals huddled in a chicken-wire pen, others ran free. Dogs. Brown shapes. A person in the dirt, crawling.

His chest heaved. “Bodies,” he shouted. How many bodies? One, two.

The sky darkened. The landscape blurred. Rebecca's voice shrieked through his brain. Coward, I charged you to look after Fulya, remain by her side. He gulped air as if preparing for a long dive in the sea. He wanted to run away. Hide. But his legs wouldn't budge.

"Hold her," he heard Irakles shout.

Right. Irakles would plunge and drown, while *he* stayed with Fulya like last time. She screamed. He turned. She'd wriggled free of Irakles. As she bumped alongside, Irakles grabbed her again. "Hold her," Irakles yelled into his ear.

He shut his eyes. He had to brave three open meters, the width of the track, hide for a moment behind the cypresses. His drowning brother called to him.

"Hold her for me, damn you," Irakles yelled.

A shot.

He opened his eyes. Two figures were slumped in the clearing. One lay still, one crawled. All else, a smear, a fog. He couldn't tell where the shots came from. Nails, someone's fingernails, had hooked themselves into his hand. He blinked at the fog. Tears or sweat? No matter, his throat had cleared, his pain had gone. He ripped away the fingers, lunged across the track. He paused behind a tree-trunk, took a breath, and tumbled down the mountainside.

Chapter 57

This Sunday, as usual, Stavros awoke on Ladies Mile beach to the screaming jets from the nearby RAF station. But Jane didn't show up. He would be there again tomorrow. Catch a last glimpse of her. Maybe.

Nikos sped him from Ladies Mile to Kalopetria in time for a quick bath in Panaretos's tub and a late Sunday breakfast cooked by Maroulla. And at noon, haversack on shoulder, he set off with the priest on the two-mile donkey-trail from Kalopetria to Pano Vounaki.

They hiked in silence—he armed with binoculars and a Browning, Panaretos with spectacles and his conscience. He could do without lectures on forgiveness from Panaretos, to whom Elena had confided her fears for Irakles and Fulya. Still, a one-armed, bearded bumpkin hobbling on the mountainside in the conspicuous company of a priest should, during the EOKA-declared ceasefire, attract neither village Turks nor British security forces.

Like everyone else, he'd heard about the fight at Metaxas Square—Stella had given him the details. "Keep watch on Pano Vounaki," Elena had pleaded with him after sheep carcasses had been strung from trees. Elena's pleas weren't necessary. For Christakis's sake alone, he'd already vowed to liquidate Fivos. Panaretos, who had abandoned his Sunday obligations, could be useful. He could give Fivos his last rites.

He kicked his way over ruts and stones. At a crest in the path, he stopped. It was time to mop his brow, scratch his beard, and to offer his priest a cigarette.

What about Xanthia? When, on his way to see Elena, he found a twenty-four-hour guard around the Petrino estate, he'd phoned and asked her what the hell was going on. "A great surprise," she'd said. "A baby." A baby! And Sokratis had insisted on those guards and night-watchmen, she'd said, but she forbade them access to her house. He could slip through, he told her, if she cut the electricity—he'd tell her how to—and boosted the blackout with a commotion. "Keep watch on my Fulya, on her village," Elena had said. "There's only one solution," he'd replied. "Yes," she'd said, "yes." And he met Xanthia, Jane's baby—blue-eyed, as beautiful as Jane. *His* baby girl, alive, and adopted by Elena and Sokratis after all. Xanthia—the blonde one.

He stomped on his cigarette and said, "Did you discuss my mission with Mavropoulos, my mission to move the Kalopetria artifacts to Kykko?"

Panaretos looked away. "I was inexperienced."

"The British were waiting for us."

The priest put a hand on his shoulder. "*Stavro*, please God, *Kyrios* Sokratis is first and foremost a Greek Cypriot of the highest reputation."

"Greeks are moneygrubbers first, patriots second. There's not an outhouse on earth that doesn't boast a Greek motherfucker selling something—his product, his skill, or his honor. Mavropoulos betrayed us."

Like him. EOKA *would* punish him, but surely not execute him. His total dishonor and family disgrace would suffice. "Let's go," he said.

"He still thinks you're dead," Panaretos said as they trudged onward to Pano Vounaki.

"He's too clever for that."

"It's personal. Because of you and his wife. You must stop. I beg you to stop. Anyway, you're not only officially dead, but also a dead hero. Schoolboys compose poems in your honor. Nobody can touch you. Not even Sokratis." If so, even Grivas daren't touch him directly.

Panaretos looked skyward. "If we encounter Fivos, I beseech you, let me speak to him first."

"Good idea. Find out if he's baptized before I rip out his throat." Panaretos could do a priestly round of Pano Vounaki's Greeks, and maybe flush Fivos into the open. "We split up here, Father. You proceed to the village."

The priest eased his collar. "But we must act together."

Act together? Fivos mightn't even show up until long after Panaretos had tucked himself into bed. "It's steep, and you're wearing sandals. I'll follow you with my binoculars. Go."

Steep and loose, with boulders to negotiate and a dried-up stream to cross. As he ploughed up the gravel-strewn ascent he let his mind wander. The stashed treasure. He should have coughed it up months ago. Now it was too late. He'd also dragged uncle Zacharias into the scheme. How much would foreigners pay for the stuff? A million pounds rang well. After Cyprus's union with Greece, he'd be a leftwing millionaire. Revolutionaries, like Lenin, went into politics after trashing oppressors. He'd get a government post. Maybe not if Grivas became president of the new Greece. He could offer the stuff to Sokratis. To find a better buyer than Sokratis could in a day, *he'd* take half a lifetime.

Shots.

At first, he thought they'd come from the rocky outcrop up ahead. No. Just echoes. He cursed his missing arm. God's will. At least he could steady himself against the slope with his left hand. He stopped, balanced himself on the precipice and peered down the mountain. In the streamside dell, two hundred meters below, pandemonium was raging. Sheep, goats, and dogs were chasing each other in circles. He scurried to the lookout.

Bambos. On the two-meter-high outcrop, squatting, smoking. Here at least, thank God, and not on the McKay job on the other side of Cyprus. Bambos looked relaxed watching the

action below. Beside Bambos, a muzzle poked over the rock. The devil. Bambos, flaunting a machine gun in broad daylight, during the ceasefire. Might Bambos be on the same mission, to kill Fivos?

“You’re in trouble,” Bambos said with glee.

“Fuck you.”

“By order of Dhigenis,” Bambos said flicking cigarette ash in his direction, “I am to bring you in. You will not resist. Anyway, in your condition, I’d outrun you in seconds.”

Now that he had a clear view, he tamped footholds into the gravel and lifted the binoculars to his eyes. To the right, east of the glade, Fivos was sitting on the edge of a cliff that overlooked the dried-up streambed. Fivos, pistol in hand. Arms flailing, Father Panaretos, ten meters behind Fivos. Thus exposed, using Turkish sheep for target practice, Fivos might as well be counting his final minutes. Long before British paratroopers blanketed the hillside, Turkish shotguns would have dispatched Fivos to hell.

Fivos fired. Five shots.

Stavros swiveled his binoculars westward toward Pano Vounaki, to the dirt track that hugged the hillside among the trees and thickets. Turks or soldiers would spill from there at any moment. Again, he scanned the clearing. Animal carcasses—five. Crutches—a pair. Two victims, one slumped in the muck, the other, still crawling, likely the cripple who’d lost his crutches. He swung the binoculars back to Fivos and Panaretos. Fivos, now reloading, now brandishing the pistol at Panaretos.

“The *pousti* priest has stopped Fivos,” Bambos said.

For the moment.

A noise. A new commotion had begun. He panned the binoculars to the point where the trees opened onto the track. A cloud of dust appeared to be following something that had

crashed through the bushes and was bumping down the slope. Someone slammed to a halt in the glade, at the crook where slope met clearing. No doubt a village idiot—empty-headed, empty-handed, unarmed. The idiot hopped into a crouch, lifted his head, and jerked it from side to side. Holy Mother of God. Christakis! The idiot was Christakis, about to collide with Fivos's bullets.

Useless location! Useless legs! At this range he might as well chuck his binoculars at Fivos. "That's my cousin," he yelled.

"Don't be stupid," Bambos said, "it's a Turk or communist."

He swung the binoculars back to Fivos and Panaretos. They'd seen Christakis. The black robes still fluttered—useless Panaretos. And Fivos had already leveled his pistol. Back to his cousin. More shots, and dust spurting pinpricks at Christakis's feet. Stavros cursed God. Even if he could climb the boulder and wrestle Bambos for the gun, he couldn't possibly hit Fivos at two hundred meters, the Sten's maximum range. Climb, wrestle, then shoot? Not one-armed. He dropped his binoculars, snatched the pistol from his belt and pointed it at Bambos. "Shoot Fivos," he shouted. "Shoot him. Shoot or I'll kill you."

Bambos snatched the Sten gun, leapt to his feet, and spat out his cigarette. "Fuck your Christ. Your days of giving orders are over. I say we let Fivos celebrate a few more dead Turks. They'll liquidate him for us. Then you come with me."

For us? Bambos had to be on the same mission. "Shoot Fivos or I'll kill you."

From below, another shot.

"The Turk's been hit," Bambos said.

He couldn't risk a look. He must concentrate, fix his gaze on Bambos. His trigger-finger tensed. Mustn't hit Bambos, though, his only hope.

He fired. The bullet pinged the rock a few inches from Bambos's backside.

Bambos jolted forward as bits of rock skipped along his spine. "Fuck your mother!"

He pointed his gun into Bambos's face. "Kill Fivos, you bastard."

"Out of range."

"Shoot! Shoot now or you're dead!"

Chapter 58

Chris slid into the abyss, ripped through shrubs, and scraped over boulders until something whacked him and he stopped dead. A moment of dark, then he scrambled onto hands and knees. Dirt had plastered his eyelids and stuffed his nostrils. His head throbbed. His elbows hurt. He coughed soil, snorted his nose, and swiped an arm across his forehead. As he forced open his eyelids, grit-blurred sunlight stung his eyeballs.

He leapt to his feet and hustled into the field.

Several retorts, and bullets pinged around him, and grit sprayed his pants. How would he know if he'd been hit? There, up ahead on the cliff. A man. Shooting or just watching? Whatever, the man had seen him. Zigzag, he told himself, he'd be harder to hit if he zigzagged these woolly carcasses, the paws, the galloping hooves. As if in the sea, splashing through the shallows and weaving between seaweed and rocks, he skirted a sheep, leapt over a carcass, collided with a goat, and thumped into the dirt. Facedown.

He scrambled upright, his chest heaving for air. Only yards to go. One eye, painful, stayed shut. He'd grab the downed man and drag him to the sheep-pen.

Another shot. And a hammer-punch.

His body twisted. He faltered. A rock must have hit him, just a rock. He thought he heard another gun, distant, start up. A heavy gun. Rapid fire. His right leg wrenched. Something, someone had clamped it, but he must keep moving. Keep moving.

*

Trying not to let Fulya hurt herself as she strove to wriggle from his grasp, Irakles let her forward momentum pull them towards the spot where Chris had plunged from view. He steadied her as she staggered over stones and potholes. By the time they reached the cypress tree at the track's edge, she'd rotated herself in his arms. For a moment, they stood nose to nose, and he looked into her eyes. Ignoring her protests, he curled his ankle around her feet, tripped her, and lowered her onto her backside. With her face pinned against his chest, he rested on his knees beside her and peered over her shoulder. She strained and squirmed as if to slither out of her dress. He let her tilt her head so she could breathe.

“My fault, all my fault,” she repeated. “Dear God, it's all my fault.”

Several shots cracked. Fulya screamed and thrashed.

Irakles shook his sweat-filled hair out of his eyes and looked up. A flock of birds veered in mid-flight like a school of sardines smacking into a barracuda. He looked back into the clearing. He couldn't see Chris. Bells jangled, animals stampeded. Two men on the ground, one crawling towards the other—Fulya's father and brother. Had to be.

But there, up on the edge of the cliff, across the open space, above the dried-up gully, that was where the shots had to be coming from. He could see two men standing there, arguing. One man in priest's robes—flailing his arms, invoking God—looked like Father Panaretos. The other man, young, surely Fivos.

Fulya managed to wrench her arms free. “I must see,” she cried.

Wait. Someone was running. It was Chris, surging through waves of animals towards the bodies. Irakles, angry at his helplessness, clamped Fulya's head in his hands. She mustn't see. He saw Chris collide with a goat. As Chris scrambled up, another shot crackled, and Chris

staggered—had he been hit?—no, Chris limped, hopped, and dragged his leg through the dirt. He seemed to flounder as he approached the cripple—Fulya's father? Oh, God, a bullet *had* struck Chris.

New shots. A machine-gun staccato. Irakles closed his eyes and held his breath until the metallic patter-patter echo faded away. Then he checked—Fulya was still breathing. He looked back towards Chris, who'd reached a body and was heaving it towards the sheep-pen. Good boy. Nothing else seemed to have changed—no obvious new injuries to anyone. Who'd strafed whom with that gun? And from where?

Fulya yelled, "Let me go," and scratched his face.

He pulled away her arms, clamped them to her sides.

"*Pusht-pezevenk*," someone swore in Turkish. "Get off my sister."

A jab seared his spine and he released Fulya. Now kicked side, prone beneath boot and gun-barrel, and with his cheek squished into the gravel, he watched Fulya scuttle to her feet. Clack. A shotgun was being cocked. He didn't budge. He couldn't.

Fulya yelled in Turkish, "Stop it, Ulu, stop. He's not the problem. Stop!"

She screamed again and the boot and gun-barrel eased off. He raised himself to a crouch and looked towards the cliff. Ulu emptied both barrels and the gunman and the priest disappeared. Ulu reloaded and fired again. And Fulya began to run down the track.

"It dangerous, Fulya, come back," Irakles shouted.

As he leapt to his feet to give chase, he heard a scream in Turkish. For Fulya to come back? For him to "stop or else?" Right now, he cared about nothing but Fulya.

In seconds, she'd left the trail and had struck down an exposed but easy path through scrub and thistle. Once in the clearing, she began to sprint towards the pen where Chris was squatting with her father.

Someone—perhaps Ulu—shouted, “Our fighters are on their way.”

The machine gun patter-pattered again.

Chris had seen her—he was hobbling towards her into the gunfire, shouting, “Down, down. Lie down.”

*

Stavros kept his Browning trained on Bambos's right ear as Bambos, standing on the rocky outcrop, fired his Sten gun downhill. But Stavros couldn't verify the damage. He had to keep his eyes and his pistol focused—if Bambos just caught him in a blink, he'd die today too.

The instant Bambos stopped firing, Stavros said, “Hold your aim. Twitch and you're dead.”

Bambos spat. “The motherfuckers, Fivos and the priest. They're looking up at us. I told you we're too far away.”

Over what seemed like the ripple of distant wings, retorts. A shotgun—two blasts. Village Turks must have appeared. But they could be shooting at anyone. Fivos. Christakis. Anyone.

The ripple became a whirr, a deep-throated mechanical beat.

He was puzzling at the sound when he heard two more shotgun blasts in quick succession. “Fire. Fire again, you bastard.”

“This will keep them busy,” Bambos said and began to shoot.

But Bambos had tweaked his aim. Just a touch to the left, away from where Fivos should be. The bastard had a new target. For God's sake, who? As Stavros squeezed the trigger, his arm trembled. The roar of the helicopter muffled the shot.

Bambos toppled off the ledge, blood spurting from his head.

*

Irakles heard a distant whirr as he closed in on Fulya. But more machine-gun patter swallowed the whirr. And, ahead of him, bullets raked the earth between her and Chris. She'd stopped dead, but poor Chris was still moving towards her, whipping the air with his hands to gesture her to the ground.

“Down, down,” Irakles shouted.

But Fulya had frozen. A rugby tackle to the ground. To down her.

The whirr turned to a growl. Bullets continued to rain between Fulya and Chris, but Fulya remained standing.

No. Not a rugby tackle. That would hurt. Irakles leaned low and buckled her knees from behind with a swipe of his arm. As she sank he grabbed her shoulders, pushed her forwards and eased her to the earth. He straddled her and pinned her between his legs. Hunching over her head, on his hands and knees, he braced for Chris.

Dust and grit whipped his face—a dust storm. He shut his eyes. The helicopter's roar deafened as he took Chris's weight over both of them. Sandwiched between Chris and Fulya, he arched his back to avoid crushing Fulya's face into the earth. Then, a dull bump. Above him, Chris shuddered and went lifeless. He thrust his left arm up and hooked it around Chris's leg to steady Chris's body from toppling and sending all three of them rolling. As blood streamed into his face, he tightened his hold and prayed that he wouldn't die too.

Chapter 59

Kyrenia, August 25, 1957

Dearest Chris,

You mustn't die! Please God. You mustn't.

Thank God for pills but nothing helps. Death's mantle covers me. I imagine hell, a world of opaque seas and forlorn landscapes, where fire-scarred catacombs transform their shapes as I turn to look at them. Strangers shuffle by. I search for a familiar face, but my memories are gone.

I understand the wayfarer's predicament, Schubert's life as a Wanderschaft, his final days. I taste disappointment, isolation, despair. Please God, don't die.

I was still up at the Berengaria Hotel when I heard what happened. As soon as I recovered my wits, I phoned the hospital. They say you lost a lot of blood but only soft tissue is injured, and there's no nerve damage. They're hopeful.

When I professed shyness about intruding on you with so many people around you who love you, Irakles insisted I write. "And," he said, "deliver it yourself." You would love that, he added.

If talent weren't distributed among people like a pyramid but was uniform and everyone performed all creative tasks equally (utopia?) we'd still need division of labor. Even if they could, there wouldn't be enough time for everyone to do everything. What do you think? A few

would write symphonies, some bake bread, others would be heroes. You may not believe you're at the top of any of the pyramids of your choosing, but you've capped the most important one.

I've heard all about it, and I feel it. You offered Irakles and Fulya your greatest gift. Your life.

But don't you ever do anything so desperate again, do you hear?

I started to smoke again. And if you must know, I ditched that misogynist H.L. (I know, never trust anyone who parts his hair from the right of his head or wears a goatee.) On that horrible afternoon, I found him hogging the hotel piano. Practically under his wife's nose, he told me he was still planning to use me as a model for his next novel. I said, why not use your wife. He looked in her direction, stopped playing for a moment, tossed back his drink and said—thank God she was out of earshot—he'd had it with necrophilia.

As he started banging again on the keyboard, he casually said he'd "just got off the phone" with his departing pal Alistair. "Ruddy massacre," he said. "Pano Vounaki. Our master Ikonis, don't you know, having had the misfortune to find himself at the wrong end of EOKA artillery, had earned himself a helicopter flight to hospital. Condition undisclosed."

Condition undisclosed. I must have stood there, staring, because he kept on jabbering. Anyway, he said, it would have been "only a matter of time before our whiz kid succumbed to EOKA's pressure. They all did eventually. Another bright future flushed down the toilet. If he has the indecency to die on us, I'll have to rehash the blasted ending to my book" (whatever that was supposed to mean).

I must have run out. I next remember lying on a couch with Sokratis Mavropoulos, handkerchief in hand, sitting beside me, and hotel people hovering in the background.

You and Irakles had been evacuated by helicopter, Sokratis told me. The British had sealed off Pano Vounaki—his wife had already tried to see Fulya but had been turned back.

Fulya, thank God, only suffered cuts and was being attended to at home. Irakles, a few bruises.

It wasn't supposed to happen like this, Sokratis said. The previous night I'd been so rude, I said, about Fulya. He laughed. Mine was the "best opening gambit" to a negotiation he'd ever been sucked into. (I'll tell you about it later.) Worthy of the proverb "Trust a snake before a Jew and a Jew before a Greek, but don't trust an Armenian."

I didn't ask what he'd meant by "wasn't supposed to happen." Anyway, he put a car at my disposal and I met with Irakles and Elena. But I was turned away from Pano Vounaki.

You'll live, thank God!

They've just shipped you here. Petrino. Elena invited me. What a place. Guards and all. Right now it's really late and everyone's gone home and you're resting. It feels strange to know you're so close.

Earlier Sunday morning, I hiked the Troödos trails with a friend. After lunch, I sat alone in one of those coffee shops by the Prodhromos crossroads and watched the arriving buses. I was sure you'd return to my door, find me gone, and come up to Berengaria. Why didn't you followed me? I wanted you to. (Oh, a teardrop.) Come to think of it, you did say you were seeing Irakles on Sunday. Obviously, you'd already planned to visit Fulya.

Funny, I look forward to nice events, but when I'm in the middle of one I'm so anxious about its outcome I hope the event would just end. In case it sours. Maybe that's why things in the past appear better. Our longing for the past, like the taking of snapshots. It's easier than creating a new memory? Does all this make any sense?

Anyway, I want to hold you in my arms, apologize for my hurtful words.

After you stormed out, you became everyone whose back was turned to me. I was furious with myself. We were getting along so well . . . What am I to make of you? One moment you're the most unpretentious academic I've ever met, the next so earnestly adult. One moment your eyes blaze. As suddenly, you're endearingly naïve. Dull never.

Remember Famagusta? I was the last to see who'd just made H.L. shift from some ad-lib pentameter theatrical he'd been trumpeting to clenching his teeth and cracking his knuckles. I hardly expected the boy, who moments earlier had so self-consciously pulled himself out of the sea. You made him quack like Donald Duck.

You want me to need you, but it scares you. It should. Love itself is more fragile than a love song. Love songs last.

Like it or not, dear Chris, your name stays on my list forever. So you'd better recover!

I'll share a secret with you. I adore it when a man takes charge—the right man, not a guy who's slotted into someone else's pecking order. Remember that bit about you challenging tradition? That was my idea.

You're Greek, you're a mathematician, and you'll finish university. H.L. can't ever be the first, will never achieve the second, and didn't manage the third. You know why you're attracted to me? I had to stop for a moment, read my question. Like all real thoughts, as someone once said, this question feels ambiguous. Every man thinks his love-object is special. He's supposed to. It's one of nature's tricks to encourage pair-bonding. One day, you'll hate the very things about me that once drew you to me. In some ways, maybe you already have. I'm quite ordinary. When you find that out, it'll come as a shock. I'll disappoint you and you'll stop liking me.

In Europe, I tried to forget you. I've reinvented you a hundred times, made love to you as often. (You must destroy this letter.) Are there any stupid things in this world left for a girl to do? When you search for love you have to work at it, be analytical, be aware.

Fulya's father and brother are dead. Fulya must leave before Cyprus becomes her graveyard too. Kyria Elena and Irakles's mother will find the money. I know, a woman loses

control when a man gives her money but this is different. It's time for me to leave too. I'll see that Fulya settles. We (you and I) will see each other in England.

It's funny. On trains in Europe I can share more with a stranger than with my closest friend. There's no attachment. With you and me it's the opposite. Every mishap binds us tighter. When I cover my ears, I can still hear the wobble of iron wheels on iron tracks. Somewhere in that thought, I think, there's a bit of Schubert the wanderer.

After I saw the specialist in Vienna, I lost interest in my master class. I won't be able to play well much longer. Could you love an ex-pianist who suffers from rheumatoid arthritis, a damaged girl who keeps pushing you away? One day our age difference will complicate your life in ways you can't even imagine. But then, even Marilyn Monroe's high heels scuff during wear.

Jane leaves Cyprus on Monday, along with Claire and Alistair. I knew this on Saturday when you came to my house, but things went so terribly wrong. Have you seen Jane's picture in Saturday's paper? She's gorgeous.

Irakles sketched me. A standing pose in a summer dress he said you'd kill to see me in. I didn't know he designed costumes and hairstyles. My dressmaker will work on it. Yellow muslin, as he suggested.

By the way, I bought you a fancy slide rule in Vienna. Complicated-looking.

Love and hugs,

Rebecca

P.S. Right now it's 5:00 am, August 26, and I'm coming out to find you, to return your coins, the ones you threw in my face. Never pay for what you could have anytime for free.

Chapter 60

Chris blinked open his eyes. No, he hadn't been air-lifted to a faraway maharaja's palace. He hadn't been swept off Cyprus. He was sprawled in a verandah deckchair at Petrino, a place that Irakles would, doubtless, inherit. Sokratis Mavropoulos—Irakles's father, by God.

He looked at his watch. Four a.m. He was alone with the frogs and the outdoor lamps and a row of sandstone columns. Beyond greenery that had defied the rainless summer, the dark rocky shore curved seaward like a funnel. The oncoming water swelled, crested, and raced into the cove. It boiled over the cratered ledges and frothed onto the little strip of sand. Those streaming whitecaps might as well pack it in. His swimming season had ended.

He must have dozed off, because Rebecca's letter had appeared in his lap. His returned coins lay on the floor. She must have gone home.

He shut his eyes and imagined her stepping out of a heat-quenching cold shower, drying off her arms, and settling down with her letter. She'd tap her lips with her pen and review her previous paragraph She had seeded her letter with words and, as he discovered, absences of explanations. She'd set up subtexts for him to decipher, gaps to agonize over. Fact. Sound and silence, of equal value. The spaces between the notes were as important as the notes themselves. Fantastic worlds of sound, layer upon layer.

Wait, though. How many times had Rebecca used the word 'love'? He'd count the instances again and make a note.

If he had 'the indecency to die on us' be damned. What the hell was he doing in Harry's book, anyway, and why would Rebecca mention it? Perhaps he was Harry's mouthpiece for colonial propaganda. Harry, moreover, wanted *Rebecca* as a 'model' for his next novel. Someone had better explain—more data needed. No more word-games. He would provoke Harry into an Anglo-Saxon-style fisticuffs. Better, he would try his hand at a novel and stuff Harry into it.

Reading her letter was like gorging on oven-baked lamb and potatoes—his favorite Sunday meal—licking his plate clean, and frantic for another helping. Destroy her letter? Never. It would make a bulky but fitting bookmark to his copy of *Engineering Thermodynamics*.

He had convinced Rebecca that he dared defy tradition. What about the conjugal variety? Would she dare marry him? She'd once quoted Einstein—imagination, blah-blah. Imagination could also be more important than reality, like imagination (bad information) precipitating world-shattering events. Long before he'd wrung out its thousand-and-one interpretations, he'd crave another of her love-offerings. And another. She'd made certain of it. She'd crafted her letter as a mirror in which either of them could contemplate the other, or themselves. It exemplified one of nature's tricks, this one to promote a bond between equals.

She knew where to find him. He wouldn't be running anywhere too soon.

Jane's picture. Yes. Rebecca must have left him this copy of Saturday's *Cyprus Mail* folded open at the society page. He picked it up. "Charming Mrs. Claire Simmons and equally delightful stepdaughter, Jane, are UK bound Monday. Mrs. Simmons, wife of the late Reginald Simmons, shone a bright light on the social landscape of Cyprus since 1955. Family friend Alistair McKay of the expatriate press corps accompanies them. Alistair, a crack photographer,

has captured sixteen-year-old Jane for us in pin-up pose. Sappers and all you home-sick boys out there, eat your hearts out.”

Jane's picture spanned two columns. Her eyes seemed wistful yet defiant

While he had languished in hospital, Irakles had plastered him with false praise and downplayed his own role in shielding Fulya.

Did you tell Jane you abandoned your brother?

Yes.

Did she believe you?

No.

I don't believe you either.

What had Jane written him? Those scant pages Fulya had managed to mush. There'd been more to her letter, Irakles had told him, but she'd kept it, and there was *no* forwarding address.

Elena clanged a tray onto the table beside him. “I'm so clumsy,” she said snatching up a serviette as frilly as her blouse. As if tending a wound, she patted the serviette into the puddle on the tray.

In apparent sympathy with his right side, his left leg began to throb. If only his discomfort could be daubed away as easily as that spill. He reached for the codeine.

The laws of physics. Every woman—even men—believed that hot tea cooled you. Here, now, instead of scalding his fingers by holding a hot glass directly, he'd have singed them on the silver glass-holder. But elegantly. Fortunately, he'd convinced Elena, without scientific explanation, that he preferred lemonade.

She wobbled upright. “*Marrons glacés?*”

For breakfast? “You spoil me, *Kyria* Elena.”

“Love. True love. Sweetens life’s bitterness, don’t you think? It conquers sadness, survives death”—she fidgeted with the topmost button of her blouse—“and confers dignity on everyone.” Her eyes twinkled. “The most intense love is the forbidden kind.”

She must have read his letter. A week earlier, he might have blushed.

She looked around as if to make sure that they were alone and whispered, “Sokratis has surrendered to the yoke of tribal ignorance. Locked himself away. But . . . a wonderful surprise. A visitor. For you. What a to-do. The devil tugged at my elbow. Surprises are so thrilling, aren’t they?”

She looked into his eyes. “Let us just say, *une jeune fille—très chic*.” She made the sign of the cross. “I have it on the highest authority, by the way, that the mystery-man they call The Third Man is to be whisked out of Cyprus, to Greece.”

Stavros, of course. “Have they figured out his identity?” he asked.

A baby cried.

Elena pressed a finger to her lips. “Abandoned on a monastery doorstep. Can you imagine any mother doing that?”

Her adopted baby, Xanthia, blue-eyed and black-haired, had the whitest skin he’d ever seen. He watched Elena pad through the French doors into the living room. A doll in a red skirt and skimpy blouse, taut in all the places that mattered

Fulya’s life. Still in danger. A Turk would kill his sister’s Greek rapist, but he’d kill both the Greek and his sister if they happened to be in love. Islamic Law. Elena’s yoke of tribal ignorance. On second thought, the Turk might kill both of them in either case—the sister and the Greek. Death offered a solution to disgrace of all kinds.

He picked up the miniature two-pronged fork and prodded one of the chestnuts around the dish. *Marrons glacés*. For a moment, he stared at the sticky green trail on the plate then he

peered along the verandah to the orange horizon. Daybreak. Monday morning. He lanced the *glyko* with a prong.

He reached for Rebecca's letter. But don't you ever do anything so desperate again, do you hear? "You charged me to look after her, remember?" he whispered. "You wanted a man, not a saccharine boy."

He'd counted the word 'love' ten times.

He wakened in the hospital awash in memories of the Pano Vounaki shooting. Through the haze he saw people gathered around, bending over his bed, whispering. He made out Irakles and Fulya's beautiful faces and asked, "Are you okay?" They'd smiled back.

A crack had developed in the shell of his guilt. To his surprise he discovered he could bear almost any thought without flinching. Yes, he had once abandoned his six-year-old brother to the mud pool. But yesterday in the dusty, bullet-spattered olive-glade, he had acted.

By now, Jane would have heard the news. Soon, she would be on her way to the land of high tides, drizzle, and pea-souper fogs. For her, just another voyage.

Rebecca must have known about her through Harry and his Alistair friend. Perhaps Jane had also made it into Harry's book. Perhaps Irakles had tattled to Rebecca about Jane's letter. Perhaps, perhaps, perhaps, . . . Rebecca said she'd ditched 'H.L.' That should have been easy to accept. It wasn't. He wanted to ask her *exactly* what she meant by 'ditched,' and why she referred to Harry by his initials. And corollary questions. About lying on a couch with Sokratis Mavropoulos. About hotel people hovering in the background. What hotel people? About Irakles's father—Mavropoulos—did she find out? If the news of Fulya's (and his) trauma hadn't hit the whistling pines at the Berengaria Hotel that afternoon, she might have graduated from afternoon tea with Harry to dinner and a nightcap with Mavropoulos. What the hell was 'the best opening gambit' that Mavropoulos had ever been sucked into? An opening gambit for what?

Untrustworthy Armenians? Don't trust an Armenian. Don't trust a woman. Hence, don't trust an Armenian woman. Q.E.D.

He must calm down. Love and hugs. Love and hugs. Better refocus on love and hugs.

A door banged amid girlish squeals. *Une jeune fille*. For Elena, though, probably anyone under forty. Elena asked her visitor about breakfast. Good. He looked toward the living room. Lucretia had abandoned her doggy rug.

Never pay for what you could have anytime for free. Hadn't she'd warned him that she latched on to lovers?

He unbuttoned his shirt all the way down.

Heels clickety-clacked. The curtains fluttered. An arm curled around them and hugged the doorjamb. A woman's arm, a beautiful hand with pretty fingers. Fingernails unpainted. A dress flared into the doorway.

Her face still hidden, Rebecca stretched her hand towards him. "Truce?" she said.

Chapter 61

The sun's blood-red disc popped free of its fuzzy orange tail and hung over the glassy-calm Akrotiri Bay like a beheaded lollipop. The fresh sunlight dimmed the twinkle of Limassol's lights and that of a ship—perhaps Jane's—anchored offshore, decked out like a Christmas tree.

When he spent the night on Ladies Mile beach, Stavros usually stashed his weapons in the sand. Today he kept them in his haversack, close at hand.

Nikos had pleaded with him. “This is madness. Everyone wants your blood—EOKA, the police, everyone.”

“Tell them I threatened you,” he said.

“In the name of God, make it quick. McKay surely knows who you are.”

He fumbled through the bag for the Monday edition of the *Cyprus Mail* that Nikos had managed to swipe on their way here, right out of the Cyprus Mail office. Two pictures on the front page. Okay. The first: Fivos's body, sprawled face-up in the dry streambed, apparently being mauled by dogs. “Stray dogs finish off EOKA sniper Fivos Lousides.” Good job. The caption under the second picture read, “Christakis Ikonis, 17, a second-time hero gambles his life for Turkish friends.” He glanced at the article.

EOKA HORROR: 4 DEAD, MYSTERY GUNMAN ESCAPES

By Myles Fenton, staff reporter

KYRENIA, Sunday, August 25

“The serenity of the tiny mountain village of Pano Vounaki lies shattered after a bloodbath in a dusty olive-glade.” Serenity? “Four men are dead, two hospitalized. Thanks to the timely arrival of an RAF helicopter, further bloodshed was averted.” Snappy reporting. The clash had been over by then (except for the disemboweling of Fivos in front of wounded Father Panaretos) but the Brit had to find some way to tip his hat to the British. “Dead are Turkish Cypriots, Levent Özal, 49, a retired police constable, and his son Serhan Özal, 28, a shepherd, both of Pano Vounaki. The third fatality was Fivos Lousides, 19 . . .” Blah, blah. “The fourth fatality was Bambos Ioakim, the EOKA death squad leader, wanted for murder. Injured are Christakis Ikonis, 17, of Nicosia, Father Panaretos, a priest from Kalopetria and. All were rushed to . . .” blah, blah.

“Unconfirmed rumors allege that the man responsible for killing Ioakim is Stavros Ikonis, wanted for the brutal assassination last year of Mr. Stelios Hadjipavlou, Nicosia lawyer, in the Nicosia General Hospital. Ikonis was believed to have died during a military sweep of the Troödos Mountains earlier this year. This mystery third man, who is said to be missing his right arm, remains at large. The Governor has ordered an island-wide dragnet for the apprehension of the terrorist that Greek Cypriots have dubbed Tiger.”

He looked up. Yes, the entire British army might yet show up

“The hero of the day, ironically, is Christakis, cousin to Stavros Ikonis. Christakis sustained a 9-millimeter shot in his right thigh as he dashed to the aid of Levent and Serhan Özal. Under fire from a Sten gun, Christakis flung himself over his friends Irakles Naxiotis, 17, and Fulya Özal, 16, who had collapsed in the dell. It is believed that Christakis sustained his second wound in the right buttock at that time.

“Mr. Özal, a widower, retired from the police in 1949 after being crippled while on duty . . . survived by sons Mehmet and Ulu, and daughter Fulya.”

His Excellency the Governor, condolences, etcetera.

“The Sten submachine-gun fire is thought to have originated from a lookout where paratroopers later discovered Bambos Ioakim, who died from a bullet in the head. He was surrounded by angry Turkish Cypriots. Villagers report having seen Ioakim with the one-armed man, rumored to be Stavros Ikonis. Who fired the Sten, whether Ioakim or his companion, and whoever killed Ioakim, remains a mystery.

“ ‘Fulya’s father seemed to be alive,’ Irakles Naxiotis said. ‘I saw him moving just before Chris dragged him to cover. Fulya thought the shooting was over and ran to her father. I tried to stop her. We tripped. Chris planted himself on top of us to protect us. Fulya and I were soaked in his blood’.”

Irakles had given Christakis the credit. But Irakles had also *used* Christakis as a shield. If Irakles had hesitated long enough for Christakis to reach Fulya first, they could have traded places with Irakles flopped on top of the pile.

Had Irakles really tripped over Fulya? Unlikely.

“Christakis appears to be in satisfactory condition after removal of the bullets.”

Yeah. Christakis was in satisfactory condition before being shot too.

“Miss Fulya Özal of Pano Vounaki was in her house with her Greek friends Irakles and Christakis when they heard pistol shots. They rushed to the scene and discovered her father and brother lying among carcasses of sheep and goats also alleged to have been slaughtered by Fivos Lousides. Thanks to Christakis, Miss Özal was lucky to escape with only lacerations to her feet, Mr. Naxiotis with mere scratches.”

Mere scratches. Christakis Ikonis, blah, blah, blah, “one of the best science and maths students the English School has seen in years. ‘We’re proud of him,’ his father, Zacharias Ikonis, himself a teacher, said,” blah, blah, “he once saved his younger brother from drowning’.”

Right.

“Lieutenant Colonel Barry Villiers was on a reconnaissance flight by helicopter along the spine of the Kyrenia mountains when he was radioed to investigate a shooting spree in Pano Vounaki. ‘The timely appearance of our helicopter undoubtedly ended the bizarre inter-communal conflict,’ Col. Villiers says. ‘We landed in the middle of the glen and found three youngsters stacked on top of each other. Christakis, like a human pincushion, sprawled unconscious on his friends, bleeding over them like a ruddy geyser. Three cheers for Christakis.’

“The young priest, suffering a bullet wound to the shoulder, slumped on a bluff some fifty yards from the carnage. The body of Fivos Lousides, whose face had been beaten almost beyond recognition and who suffered severe slash wounds that opened up his stomach, was later recovered from the streambed below the bluff. Witnesses agree that there had been a struggle between Father Panaretos and Lousides.”

Fucking witnesses. They could have done something other than surrounding the already dead Bambos, and crushing Fivos's brains.

A mystery one-armed third man had escaped the late-arriving paratroopers and their dogs. No other details.

He'd better make short shrift of McKay—if the man ever showed up—and clear the hell out. Catch that boat to Greece that Nikos had lined up.

A motor. A lone motor. Good. Droning towards him from the dried-up lake. He stuffed away the newspaper, brushed the sand out of his beard, and donned his hat. This daybreak, as usual, in a long-sleeved football shirt, shorts and running-shoes, Jane sprinted ahead of McKay's jeep.

Her appearance calmed him. It shouldn't have but it did—McKay wouldn't have brought her here today if he suspected anything. He lit a cigarette.

She kicked off her shoes, huffed to the water's edge a few meters along the shoreline, and flopped into the sand. She pulled a flask from her waist-side pouch, unscrewed the top, and pressed it to her lips. Having killed the ignition, her red-haired escort sat in the jeep and smoked. He never let Jane out of his sight.

Whenever she was close, Stavros tried to think of McKay as Ginger-beanpole in case "Alistair McKay" accidentally slipped off his tongue.

Jane rested her chin on her knees and faced the sunrise. Sweat had plastered her shirt to her skin. She wiped her face with a sleeve and sobbed—quiet sobs, but deep. She had to be grieving for her baby. Did she have news of it? Did she know that Xanthia was alive and safe with Elena Mavropoulos? He ached to speak to her. As suddenly as the sobs began, she sniffed, wiped her fingers across her eyes, and sprang to her feet.

He snapped his gaze towards the bay as she began to walk back to the jeep.

A minute later he heard a patter behind him. The sand hissed—bare feet. The skin on the back of his neck tingled. His heart raced. But he wouldn't look.

"*Yasoo*," she said. "I'm Jane."

He partly turned but continued to face downward and let the brim of his hat conceal his face. The Stavros she'd known, the man with five thousand pounds on his head—if not more right now—must remain dead. The man she'd just addressed was "Nemesis," her protector's foot-dragging executioner.

She stood a meter away. Her limbs, splashed by new sunlight, seemed to flow up, out of the sand. Her feet, parted, askew, seemed to embrace him. He remembered those feet. She'd buried them in his armpits the night she'd taken him between her legs.

He tried to imagine her from the waist up. He longed to peek at her eyes. But if he eyeballed her face, he might succumb, risk capture, risk everything, put her into danger.

He flicked his cigarette into the sea. Without lifting his head, he turned towards the jeep. Ginger-beanpole hadn't budged.

She laughed. "He won't hurt you," she said in perfect Greek.

McKay *must* know who he was. The man couldn't be that stupid. A set-up. That's what this was. He didn't care. He glanced at her legs, at muscles that rippled with a runner's stamina, at creamy skin now flushed from exertion, not at the baby-fat from two years ago when he'd first met her. Legs that he'd kissed the sweat off as fast as it had beaded up, while his ears drank the few words she'd uttered between stifled moans. She'd been a virgin then. He was sure.

"Have you eaten?" she said.

She thought him a beggar. Let her. Like Claire had the day she'd showed up and said, look at that poor, one-armed man. Toss him a shilling, Jane dear.

He'd kept the coin for luck. Drilled a hole in it and wore it around his neck, under his shirt. It marked his fall to obscurity. God knew how short-lived a fall. He nodded towards his haversack where tomatoes, bread, and figs usually kept his weapons company, weapons whose possession alone carried the death penalty.

"Why are you so sad?" he said.

The RAF jets that skimmed the bay drowned out her answer. Had she replied that her father had died? Perhaps. That she'd given up her baby? Unlikely. Perhaps she'd heard about the massacre. About Christakis.

"Do you live around here?" she asked.

He waved vaguely towards *Ayios Nikolaos ton Gatou*—St. Nicholas of the Cats.

"Meow."

"The cat monastery?" she said in English. "Among the snakes?"

He chuckled and gestured to mimic a snake.

“Yuck,” she said.

“Why do you run?” he asked.

“It makes me happy. But you won't see me here any more. I'm leaving Cyprus for good.” She pointed. “That's my ship.”

Making sure he kept his head low, he pointed over his shoulder at the jeep.

“Yes, we're all going,” she said.

So the housecleaner had been right. McKay might escape after all, if he didn't act soon. He fumbled in his haversack. He touched his switchblade. Like his gun—cold, hard, comforting. His fingers found what he wanted. Fuck my Christ. Could he give her a gift—a wooden carving of a dove—moments before he murdered her protector? He'd give it to her, then decide. His dove—oval, smooth, life-size, heavenly to touch, like her legs. He'd carved it for Xanthia. He pulled out the dove, rubbed it against his forehead, and held it up.

“For me?” she said in English as she took it. “It's lovely.”

He wouldn't reply in English. She might recognize his English voice. “To say *adio sas kai kalo taxidi*,” he said. Wishing her bon voyage? He was a mother-fucking hypocrite.

“Did you make it?” she said.

What she meant to say was, how could a one-armed man whittle or carve. He pulled up his pant legs, clamped the cigarette packet between his bare feet and, with his index finger, mimicked paring the box. He could hardly confess he used a real clamp in an EOKA workshop where his comrades built guns to shoot Englishmen and made bombs to tear their flesh.

“Oh, your poor legs,” she said in English.

He ploughed his heels though the sand but remained silent.

“What happened to your arm?” she said.

“A mountain.”

“You fell off? How awful.”

Not as awful as when she'd return in a few minutes from her swim to find her jeep seeping blood and McKay slouched dead beside the wooden dove.

“What's your name?” she asked gently.

“Stavrakis.”

“That means ‘little Stavros,’ doesn't it?” she said in English. “Hang on.” She turned and strode towards the jeep. He followed her red swim-suited figure with his gaze until she reached Ginger-beanpole, who appeared to be reading a newspaper. He lit another cigarette and turned to face the bay. Would she return or would McKay instead come to meet her beggar-friend?

He checked his haversack's position.

Gutsy Jane. He'd watched her give a gang of beach-boys the shove before either he or McKay could spit out their cigarette-butts. She'd sworn in juicy Cypriot as she hammered her heel into a tormentor's balls.

She returned. Alone.

She fell to her knees, leaned a hand on his shoulder, and pushed a photograph under his nose. Jane, in black and white, reclined in a bathing suit on a beach.

“Alistair takes photographs for newspapers,” she said. “Do you like it?” Her voice hushed. “Why don't you look at me? Everyone else does. Are we enemies because I'm English? Look at me.”

“You're too beautiful,” he said. He looked at the other side of the photograph. “To Little Stavros with love, Jane Simmons, August 1957.” Don't leave me, Jane, he wanted to cry.

“I knew a handsome boy called Stavros once,” she said softly. “Stavros Ikonis. They've written songs about him.”

He couldn't breathe. Not only her words, her scent clinched it. Oath or no oath, if he messed with Jane or her protector now, he wouldn't deserve a dying purr from a whore's cat. Better he should get up right now, walk down the beach, cut his own throat.

Her fingers squeezed his shoulder and she rose up and ran into the sea. She trusted her Greek beggar-friend on the beach. If she recognized him, she didn't declare it. She'd be happy to know that her Stavros was alive. Wouldn't she?

A one-armed beggar tailing a red-faced, red-headed six-foot foreigner? Day and night? He would never figure out a convincing lie. He'd failed in his duty. Forget Bambos. For this alone, EOKA would punish him. Ban his song. He would be covered in eternal contempt and his family would be shunned.

You must never return to my house. You will not be my son.

But if Bambos had taken on this assignment, Jane would already be dead.

He watched the water swirl around her thighs. She turned and faced land as if deciding whether to head back. Had something frightened her? She waded a few steps towards shore and stopped. He strained his eyes against the sun. He couldn't see the expression in her face.

She waved. He waved back. The figure in red sank and splashed seaward.

He kissed her picture and packed it into his haversack. He pulled on his socks, fumbled with his boots, stood up. Haversack on shoulder, he walked slowly along the beach towards Limassol—to the spot where Nikos and Blackie the taxi would be waiting for him.

Epilogue

Telegram. "HEARD NEWS STOP PROUD BEYOND WORDS STOP LOVE JANE."

"I stood at water's edge on the beach. On the horizon, the ship—"

"—What did it look like—?"

"—Washed orange by the setting sun. Belching cogwheels of smoke, the ship glittered like a diamond adrift in a black sea. Toy-like. Anyway, I jumped up and down like a lunatic and waved but I was just a speck in the crowd. On board, rows of people with pin-sized heads bobbed for a last view of Limassol, Jane among them."

"What does Cyprus look like from far off?"

"Arid, dilapidated, washed out. I sent Jane a telegram. I wrote 'CHRIS SENDS LOVE STOP WRITE US STOP BON VOYAGE STOP IRAKLES'."

Acknowledgements

My deep appreciation goes to multi-lingual John Vlachopoulos, entrepreneur and professor of chemical engineering, for his infectious enthusiasm and continuous and unstinting encouragement from the start of the project through its many drafts. He helped shape story lines and to authenticate scenarios and characters, both real and fictional.

Special thanks go to Makarios Drousiotis, Cypriot writer and journalist, for frank and spirited discussions on EOKA, Cyprus politics, and current affairs. He provided crucial contacts and sources.

Priceless acknowledgements go to former fighters for their trust and confidence during memorable face-to-face meetings and interviews: the Greek-Cypriot EOKA fighters Vassos Kallenos, Dionysos Malas, Athos Petrides, and Thasos Sophocleous; and the Turkish-Cypriot TMT fighters Vural Turkmen and Mehmet Ali "Tremecheli."

I consulted many books and articles during the writing of this book, including works by Lawrence Durrell, Charles Foley, Harry Scott Gibbons, Christopher Hitchens, Dan Hofstadter, Costas Kyrris, Harry Luke, and Penelope Tremayne. I made use of the archives of the *Cyprus Mail* office, and the Press and Information Office in Nicosia. Archived copies of the *Cyprus Mail* and the *Times of Cyprus* provided an important source of news and background events. The quoted EOKA oath was transcribed from the *Times of Cyprus*, February 17, 1957.

Huge thanks go to Carl Ballstadt, Valerie Burke, Catherine Bush, Steve Chisholm, Sue Cocks, Douglas Haggio, Eleni Hapidou, John Hewson, Steven Jacklin, Janet Myers, and Theresa Sansome, for their patient reading of various drafts of the manuscript and for their continuously motivating insight.

Art historian Regina Haggio inspired many of my art historical images. Pianist and teacher Diana Lawton shaped several musical references.

For their expertise and critique of my literary efforts, thanks go to the following writers and teachers: Ven Begamudre, Catherine Bush, Wayson Choy, Terence Green, Brian Henry, NourbeSe Philip, and Shyam Selvadurai. The inputs of Catherine, Brian, and Shyam helped considerably in shaping my characters, my story, and my writing.

I extend thanks to Christakis Charalambous (a long-time friend), Nicos Christofides (a long-time friend), Eleni Chrysostomides (for providing several key contacts), Costas Demetriou, Christina Hadjiparaskeva, Leo Hadjiparaskevas, Kiki Ikossi, Joseph Joseph, Peter Kas, Lenia Kapellidou, Ufuk Taneri, Arif Hasan Tahsin (for his personal views and for providing important Turkish-Cypriot contacts), Christos Tifas, Kyriakos Vassiliou (for insightful discussions about Cyprus and his comments on my manuscript), and Taner Yalchin. Through my interactions with them, and hearing their personal stories and perspectives, I was able to significantly sharpen the political and social scope of this work.

Eleni Christoforou, Father Stavros Hatzis, Stavros Kolliopoulos, Nick Markettos, Georgina Marinos, Father Dimitrios Tzaneteas, and Eirini Zacharidis deserve special mention. They offered important suggestions on Greek culture, practices, and aspirations at key points in the project.

Polychronis Koutsakis, novelist and playwright, read parts of the manuscript and inspired me to study the arts of playwriting and screenwriting. This led to a substantive restructuring of my story.

Maureen O'Connor and Ross Pennie read early pieces of the manuscript and made a significant impact on its evolution.

Thanks go to Joanna Alexandru, Gary Spearin, Sybil Cohos, Janet Delsey, Birgit Elston, Stuart Haggett, Wolfgang Hoefler, Bob Love, Patrick van der Puije, Judith Robinson, Neslihan Sengör, Jennifer Turso, Nelly Vladimirovsky, and Max Wong for their timely input.

My childhood Cypriot friends, Dinos Mavromatis, Vassos Mavromatis, and Andreas Mavromatis, and their families, are thanked for their continued hospitality as well as for sharing personal stories.

Finally, my wife, Beth Bandler, deserves special mention for her love and encouragement of this project. She suffered through endless revisions of the manuscript and the stifling upper floors of the *Cyprus Mail* office in Nicosia.

Context: *Barbed Wire in Aphrodite's Garden* by John Bandler is a novel set in Cyprus in 1955 to 1957 against the guerrilla conflict involving Greek and Turkish Cypriots (as well as Greece and Turkey), and the British occupiers. The island remains divided.

The time intersects that of Lawrence Durrell's *Bitter Lemons*, and likely Durrell's writing of *The Alexandria Quartet*. In 2006, in a session on creative influences, the author John Bandler presented "Bitter Lemons and Barbed Wire" to the biennial International Lawrence Durrell Conference. In 2007, Bandler spoke on "Durrell's Cyprus—Tainted Observations on the Colonial and Postcolonial" at the ACLALS Conference: Literature for Our Times.

Author's Note: The author has rendered historical events, public or notorious figures, as well as geographical scenes, as faithfully as possible. This allows the author to create an authentic mood for the readers. All active characters, their affiliations and specific events in which the author places them arise from the author's imagination. Consequently, any similarity with real people, whether living or dead, is coincidental. Most locations on the Mediterranean island of Cyprus are referred to by their real names. Notable exceptions are the villages of Kalopetria and Pano Vounaki, which the author has placed west of Kyrenia on the northern slopes of the Kyrenia range facing the Turkish mainland. All events, characters, and historical references linked with these imaginary locations, including the artifacts, are fictitious.

Acknowledgements: Thanks are extended to numerous individuals from diverse backgrounds, including writers, writers-in-residence, politicians, artists, musicians, academics, teachers, priests, historians, and childhood friends. A partial list of names: Carl Ballstadt, Beth Bandler, Valerie Burke, Catherine Bush, Christakis Charalambous, Steve Chisholm, Nicos Christofides, Eleni Christoforou, Eleni Chrysostomides, Sue Cocks, Costas Demetriou, Rauf Denктаş, Makarios Drousiotis, Christina Hadjiparaskeva, Leo Hadjiparaskevas, Douglas Haggio, Regina Haggio, Eleni Hapidou, Father Stavros Hatzis, John Hewson, Kiki Ikossi, Steven Jacklin, Joseph Joseph, Lenia Kapellidou, Peter Kas, Stavros Kolliopoulos, Polychronis Koutsakis, Diana Lawton, Georgina Marinos, Nick Markettos, Andreas Mavromatis, Dinos Mavromatis, Vassos Mavromatis, Janet Myers, Ross Pennie, Theresa Sansome, Neslihan Sengör, Arif Hasan Tahsin, Ufuk Taneri, Christos Tifas, Father Dimitrios Tzaneteas, Kyriakos Vassiliou, John Vlachopoulos, Taner Yalchin, Eirini Zacharidis, and several Greek and Turkish Cypriot fighters of the 1950s, both EOKA and TMT.

For more details, "A Partial List of Special Thanks" and "Principal References":

<http://www.bandler.com/venus/>

<http://www.bandler.com/venus> Archived by Wayback Machine, January 13, 2022

Related Work: *Let The Japanese Do Kamikaze* by John Bandler is a [Finalist, Writers' Union of Canada 2006 Short Prose Competition for Developing Writers. \(Archived by Wayback Machine, 2009.\)](#)

Let The Japanese Do Kamikaze <http://hdl.handle.net/11375/27362>

Between a Polonaise and a Nocturne <http://hdl.handle.net/11375/27352>

Between a Polonaise and a Nocturne (In Greek): <http://hdl.handle.net/11375/27248>