



The Rebirth of Pan

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Published: 1997

Categorie(s): Fiction, Fantasy

Source: <http://www.zorinth.net/bluejo/books/pan/pan.htm>

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Also available on Feedbooks for Walton:

- *The Prize in the Game* (2002)

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ATROPOS

Not mine to cast the lot or spin your life.
Not mine to set the count or sew the shape.
Not mine to say how you may fill it out.
But mine to watch, and cut the final thread.

Chapter 1

NO GOOD FRIDAY

(Raymond)

The dust, the crowd, the heat, the hill, the cross;
the trees, the waiting knife, the nymphs' lament;
the empty tomb; the petals white, still white—
The death of gods is not a trivial thing.

The cross looks authentically heavy. The man carrying it has the beard, the tattered loincloth, the crown of thorns. Scourge marks are visible from time to time when His short cloak pulls away. Even His expression is convincing, exhausted, strained, suffering. His soulful brown eyes are familiar from centuries of religious paintings. This might have been Rembrandt's model. He looks exactly like the pictures on the walls of my grandmother's house, in school, in the illustrated children's Bible I won for good attendance in Sunday School. He isn't terrified like the others. Nobody is making him do this. It isn't hard at all to believe in Him.

Only the crowd spoils the illusion, too few dressed in the fashions of Palestine two thousand years ago, too many in the fashions of today, jeans, sweatshirts, baseball caps. They wear their technology dangling visibly about them, black plastic curves of cameras, telephones, walk-mans. Sweat trickles down my back. I try to concentrate on the man, the man who is taking upon himself a martyrdom more truly than he can imagine. He is a Christian, chosen from the most devout in the region. Or so it says in the book about the re-enactment I bought back home in Lyons and read on the train south. It gave his name too, but I ignored that. I want to think of Him as the Son of Man.

The incidents along the way are re-enacted faithfully. Veronica wipes His face with her handkerchief, and holds it up to the crowd, showing the photographic likeness. A clever touch, it is a photograph. I cannot feel impressed, cannot see it as a miracle, though a fat woman is weeping over it. She wears a black dress, splitting slightly under the arms, and

has a faint moustache. Her tears are genuine. For her it is real, but to me it is only a trick; photographs are too familiar. For a moment the gimmick jars me from the state I have worked so hard to capture and this hot and dusty town is Siena, not Jerusalem. Everything has too much focus. Lest I should look at Him and ruin everything, finding Him only a man, I glance away, into the crowd. My gaze catches on the bare neck and covered breasts of a suntanned woman in a white dress. She is close, almost touching me. A small gold cross dangles around her neck and rests on her skin just above her neckline. Her brown hair has fallen forward and I cannot see her face. I concentrate, to get back into the right state of mind.

Around me tourists are taking photographs. The locals do not. I do not touch the camera that hangs around my own neck. It is not yet time. We process up the street, following in His wake. The Wandering Jew refuses to carry the cross. He is a stereotyped Shylock, with a long nose and a rueful expression. I wonder if he is really a Jew, or a Christian in disguise, or a rationalist for that matter, and what he thinks of this anyway. He slinks away. Most of these people have been involved in the re-enactment since last Sunday, from the triumphal entry under the palms of Siena. They repeat this re-enactment every three years, the book said, since Medieval times. It says the faithful come from all over the world. The streets are crowded, but there are not so many faithful as all that these days. Every three years for more than half a thousand years. There is a power in that, and this will be the last time.

Joseph of Arimathea staggers up the hill under the cross. The thieves are strung up waiting. I suppose it would have spoiled the drama if they had walked up the hill beside Him. The Romans are ready. He takes His last steps towards them. They take His cloak, leaving him standing in a loin cloth. It all happens very quickly. He lies down on the wood, and they bind Him as expertly as I might, knock in the sign "INRI" and stand the cross upright. They clearly have experience at this sort of thing. It really isn't as easy as they make it look. The press and Italian television focus on the cross as it is raised. It is silhouetted on the top of the hill, the thieves' crosses a little below, one on either side. It looks perfect.

My only regret is that they did not use real nails. I remember holding the nail still above his palm that first time, while Miriam pounded it through. I remember how I was afraid she'd miss the nail and hit my finger, and how the nail shook in my hand to the hammer blows. The nails went right through his palms, that time, between the bones. I remember the agony on his face as the nail went in. That was wrong, even though

we used the exact place shown in all the paintings and in stigmata throughout the centuries. The palms are not strong enough to support a man's weight. They tore. He fell. The next time we knew better, and nailed him through the wrists, being careful not to touch an artery. We lashed him on as well, after that first time, though it took a few more times before we grew as expert at it as these Romans. I sigh, looking at the lashings. Nails are authentic. But they're not enough. It didn't work any of the times we tried it, even though we used Christians. Nails aren't what matters. Nor is the pain and suffering. It has to be a willing sacrifice, and none of ours were. It took us too long to learn that. I could have been here three years ago if we'd only realised.

He hangs from the loops of rope around His hands and feet. The thieves' crosses have little ledges to support their feet, but the central crucifix has none. It must be sufficient agony, even without nails. I fervently hope so. The way a man dies on the cross is by suffocation. With the arms in that position, it isn't possible to draw enough breath into the lungs. The sun beats down. It is noon. Three hours now, the Stations of the Cross. He won't suffocate in three hours. It often took a day and a night. In the mass crucifixions after the Spartacus slave revolt some of the stronger slaves were observed still alive three days later. Crucifixion was a normal way of killing criminals then, it wasn't something peculiar and godly. It took a long time for the cross to become a divine symbol. People would no more have worn a crucifix around their neck than anyone but a mad fool would wear a gallows or a guillotine today. But now it is a potent symbol, perhaps the most potent of all. Now it has the mana of two millennia of worship. I'm secure in the logic of what we have worked out.

People sit down and begin to take out food. Somehow the Italian peasant families with their strong smelling garlic sausage and bread seem less offensive in this than the tourists.

A priest is leading a prayer. I look at His face, the suffering, the willing suffering. "Oh lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world..." intones the priest. The crowd implore God to have mercy upon them, to hear their prayers, to grant them peace. That's not what's coming. I stare into His brown eyes. It's not what we've had, either. Precious little mercy, or peace, or prayers answered in this last age. Now it is over. Time for something new. I am confident. In control. I know I can do it.

I finger my camera, raise it, look at Him hanging there through the view finder. Too soon. We worked it out completely rationally. I lower it again. Claude is always right about this sort of thing. The sayings first,

the Stations of the Cross. How many Good Fridays growing up, listening to the same thing over and over? I have to stick to the timing, to the exact plan, if I want it to work. Most of the crowd are kneeling, but some stroll about, some talk, some eat and drink. That is authentic. Not everyone would care. That's something we did wrong, too, everyone was focused, everyone cared. The little knot of women stand at the foot of the cross. They are actors, they don't convince me at all. I try to ignore them. The Romans dice for His robe. One of them has a brutal face, and a spear. He has His exchange with the thieves, and then they are taken down and walk away. That doesn't matter.

I watch Him, silhouetted against the blue sky, and try to concentrate on his suffering. When I fear I may lose focus, I look at the crowd. The locals are still for the most part now, but the tourists still mill about. The crowd is silent for the words and prayers but mutters restlessly the rest of the time.

I notice the woman with the white dress and the gold cross again. She catches my eye because she is still among these other fidgeting people. She has a pleasant face. I don't think she's Italian, her hair is too light a brown and she shows too much skin. I notice only now that she is pregnant. I probably didn't take it in before because half the women I know are pregnant, hoping. I've become accustomed to it. But maybe her baby will be the new All Holy. I'd like that. She has a big mouth and she looks relaxed, as if she laughs a lot. She is sad and serious now, looking towards Him. Somehow I can tell she is a Catholic—maybe it is the style of her cross. I am too far away from her now to see it clearly now, but I remember it, gold against her tanned skin. I can tell she is a true believer. She cares. She will do to stand for the three Marys who should be here, much better than the actors. She has a man with her. He holds the same guidebook I have, in French. Somehow I do not think they are French, though. She might be, but not him. He has dark tousled hair falling into his eyes, and a wide grin. He puts his hand on the woman's arm. Unlike her, he doesn't have the look of a Christian. He might almost be one of us. I look away, back to the cross.

More prayers. Vinegar. More suffering. A convincing plea to have the cup taken from Him. Well might He waver, but I am inexorable. What about the sins of the whole world? I almost laugh, thinking this, for my role here is that of Fate, of God. To think I doubted whether I was worthy, when I was chosen, whether one of the others might be better. This is what I am for, this is the focus not only of these past months of preparation but of my whole life. More prayers. No hesitation. The

television cameras are still rolling. I'm sure they've recorded me, sitting here. It doesn't matter. I'm not expecting to survive this, one way or another.

Now. I raise the camera. "Lord, into thy hands, I commend my spirit." I am ready. I focus, my finger on the trigger. This is the time and the place we reasoned it would be best to do it. The Son of Man is in my sights. I can already picture how the bullets will tear into his chest, spraying blood. Everything is balanced on this moment. The new age starts here. I move my finger—but nothing happens. It doesn't respond. What the hell? I try to move, to stand, but I can't! I'm paralysed. Completely paralysed, frozen in place. God? You bastard! Where did You get that power from? You shouldn't be able to do this! It doesn't make sense! It's not fair! You'll pay for it! I hate You! I'm here to kill You and I shall.

"Wait." The voice in my head is male, a gentle baritone, with a soft Irish accent. I don't believe this. I should be panicking, but I can't move.

"Who are you, you bastard, let me go!" I'm only half expecting heavenly trumpets, now.

"My name is my word." I knew it wasn't any god really. Only a man with magic would say that, a god wouldn't mind being bound by their name, their names are part of what they Are. I don't know much about magic. I try to run through everything I've heard about it quickly. The power it must take to hold me like this! He surely can't keep it up for long. But how did he know the need?

"Let me go!"

"I can't. You're going to kill him." He sounds so reasonable. He must be a fanatic.

"You can't keep Christianity alive by stopping me!" He can't hold me for long, not against my will. Or at least, I don't think so. This is the first time I've ever felt real magic in the realised world. It is strange.

"Keeping Christianity alive is the last thing on my mind, believe me." The voice chuckles in my head.

"Then what the hell do you want?" I demand, confused. "It is so nearly dead anyway. And killing it now, like this... "

"Will serve no ends but that of violence. Violence here, and now, like this, would set the pattern for the new age as bad or worse than even this past age has been. You would give us an age of hate. I am taking away your choice, for this moment, in the hope of an age of choice."

"Nothing could be worse!" I insist, though his soft ironic voice sounds in my head so very sure. And then I am free, I can move. My finger tightens, and hesitates again. It is too late, the moment has passed, He has

lowered His head, my bullet unfired, killing him now would only be murder, not decide. Like all the other times. It would achieve nothing. The voice does not reply. I look around frantically. Nobody is looking at me. They are praying to the blood of the sacrificial lamb again. It is over. Too late. I am weeping. That doesn't look strange, plenty of people are weeping. I could still kill him. But I don't. I can't see the wizard, whoever he is. I stand up.

The actors by the cross are wailing. I glance about for the woman with the gold cross, not that it matters any more. I don't see her. People are crying, and praying, and some of the tourists are starting to leave. The priest goes up to the actor on the cross. I've persuaded myself so well that I still more than half think of Him as the Son of Man. His head hangs limp. He's very convincing. Too late. The others will cast me out and curse me. I expect I'll die. Someone can try again in three years. All my focus is gone. I don't know what to do. I stand up and take a few steps away. I never thought I'd leave this place alive, not by my own will.

There is a cry behind me, and I turn. The priest is calling for the doctor. People are fussing over the man on the cross. The body on the cross? They are cutting him down and he is hanging very limp. Nobody could act that well. He must have fainted. I walk back, slowly, through the fine yellow dust that sticks to my shoes. The crowd are confused, I among them. A siren in the distance, drawing closer, an ambulance. "No pulse!" a young woman whispers loudly to a companion, in English. Then the cry goes up: "Mortos!" "E vero! Mortos!" Dead? Dead in truth? But how? I didn't—it doesn't make sense. I walk towards the cross, pushing through the crowd. My head pounds. How can he be dead? Did he die anyway? Did I do it by force of will without knowing? Or was I not needed? Does this count? I want to speak to Claude and see if he can work it out.

The ambulance arrives, screeching to a halt with a disdain for road safety I've already picked up in two days as typically Italian. People leap out of the way. The crowd are weeping and wailing on a much more authentic note now. The medics push through with a stretcher, and pick up the body. An arm hangs limp over the side as they carry it back. Again I am reminded of religious pictures, pietas. The bright afternoon sunlight is too much for oils, but just right for the illustrations to children's stories. The men close the doors and drive away, leaving a stink of exhaust cutting across the smells of dust and sweat. Modern medicine will not close him in the tomb if he is not dead, nor leave him with a stone that may be turned if he is. I can hardly take it in. Across the crowd I see the

woman with the cross enfolded weeping against the chest of the man with the guidebook. He looks at me over her head, and grins. Grins? Is he the Irish wizard? I need to talk to him. I try to move towards him, but the crowd is in the way. Soon I stop, surrounded by people. I can't move or see him any more. Was that magic? I shake my head and scuff my feet in the yellow dust. I'm still confused. I don't know what to trust, I'm not even sure what's real.

One of the ubiquitous old women in black is standing near me, tears streaming down her face. "He will rise again!" she is repeating over and over to a bawling child. I don't think so, madam. I really don't think so. Not this time.

But I don't feel safe until I get the news on Monday morning that he is still dead.

Chapter 2

LORD OF THE VINE

A world is more than days and place and folk
a world is dreams and vision, thought and word
a living thing that breathes, and grows and dies
and once the thread is cut will wake no more.

Yanni was not the best shoemaker on the island of Ithyka, but he was the one who made sandals for the gods.

Ithyka was an island famed throughout all of Greece for its shoes and shoemakers. There the old craft of shoemaking was kept alive, and the old families of shoemakers handed down the trade secrets to each new generation. Some said that the sandals made on Ithyka were the same as those worn by Homer himself. It was true enough that their like could be seen on many an old vase and bowl. The same was true of sandals made up and down the Aegean, but somehow the reputation of the shoemakers of this little green westerly island stood above the rest.

As everyone acknowledged that Ithyka was the best island for shoe-making, so everyone acknowledged that the very best shoemaker on Ithyka was Yanni's uncle Spiro. Spiro could make shoes that would almost walk on their own, as the saying was, with stitches so tiny they could hardly be seen. Spiro was so exclusive he made shoes only for shoemakers. Yanni was not the most expensive shoemaker either. That was his cousin Kosta, with his airy wood-panelled shop and his long waiting list of rich Athenians longing to wear his handcrafted sandals. Nor was he the cheapest, the cheap cobblers all worked down at the far end of the harbour near the stinking tannery, in the part of the whitewashed maze of streets known as the streets of the leatherworkers. All the good leatherworkers had long since moved from those little cramped workshops and found little cramped workshops scattered around the town in more salubriously scented areas. Yanni's workshop was only two streets back from the harbour, on a corner opposite the whitewashed dome of Ag. Nikolaos's chapel and the priest's house. The little shop

smelled of new leather and leathergoods, and of the jasmine which grew wild up the side of the iron staircase at the back of the building.

All the people who came into Yanni's shop paused, blinked and sniffed. Outside the sunlight was like a solid wall of heat and brightness. The contrast of stepping through the hanging bags and sandals into the shadowed interior was too much for human eyes. At the same moment the newcomer would pause, inhale the characteristic fresh leather and jasmine smell of the shop and sniff to catch it again. Yanni sat in the back of the shop, at a little table with his set of lasts, working with leather. Whenever anyone walked in he would glance up and watch them blink and sniff. Mostly it was someone he knew, a regular wanting another pair of sandals or a leather bag. Often enough it was a tourist, who would gush enchantedly over everything from the donkeys tied up outside to the quality of workmanship. Whoever it was, Yanni would sum them up in one rapid glance. It was his only hesitation in his work, and it was very brief. Even before his youngest sister Taxeia bustled up to the customer and tried to sell them something, Yanni would drop his eyes to the grey iron of his last, the pale gold leather and the tools in his hands.

Just occasionally someone would come to the door and step inside without pause, blink or sniff. That was Yanni's signal to put down his work, dismiss Taxeia with a smile, and step forward, attentive to his holy patron. What happened after Taxeia scampered up the iron ladder to the upstairs room, what size and style sandals the gods wore, and what coin they used, were things he never told anyone. Indeed, he was a very close-mouthed man, even for a shoemaker.

When people asked him questions about Them he just smiled, or agreed that he was indeed a fortunate man and tried to turn the conversation aside. When Yanni had inherited the mantle of holy shoemaker at his grandfather's death there was some surprise and muttering among the other shoemakers. Spiro in particular was jealous, and quarrelled bitterly with his sister, Yanni's mother Dafni. Though as time went on Yanni's status and his discretion became known and accepted things. Everyone became used to the state of affairs which was after all in no way remarkable.

When his neighbour, Pappa Andros, the local priest, asked him about his visitors he was careful to refer to them always as "Agios"—"the holy", a word in common use for saints and gods alike. Pappa Andros did not press him. He was a local man, and the gods had always had their sandals from Ithyka, for longer than anyone could count. There was a tale that it was here that Ag. Hermes had run down Ag. Hephaestos'

runaway cow, and Hephaestos, coming up behind, had taken the hide from the creature, dead of exhaustion. After pondering for a moment he invented both leather-working and tanning, and taught the crafts to the ancestors of the islanders, who were crowding round, interested in this new thing. Whether one called them gods or saints it was much the same.

The priest had grown up, as all the islanders did, hearing the stories of how Ag. Pavlos went around Greece converting the gods. Some would bow a knee to Christ and some would not. Those who would not Ag. Pavlos cast out to exile, and those who would became saints. Pappa Andros knew that such stories were frowned on in the seminary in Athens, and by those bishops who complained that their church had never had a reformation and was still riddled with pagan superstitions. He had been too slow and too shy to speak up then and ask whether something was a superstition if it was true. That slowness and shyness was probably why he was back in his home town dealing with its problems as well as he could, and not in Athens or Thessaloniki at the heart of church politics and the affairs of the world.

He was well content with his life. He had joined the church to devote himself to Christ and to Ag. Nikolaos. He knew Ag. Nikolaos had been Poseidon. When the people said that he would one day be Poseidon again when the world was reborn he reproached them, but not with any sense that they were really wrong. He could not take birch twigs dipped in holy water and cast out the spirits of sloth, idleness and malice from the houses of his people if he did not believe as they did. So they trusted him and came to him with their problems and not to Pappa Thomas in the big church of Ag. Paraskevi. This sometimes caused bad feeling with Pappa Thomas, who was young and well educated and a great believer in logic and progress.

"Don't encourage them," Pappa Thomas would say. "It's the twenty-first century, not the fourth! We're in the European Community. This is the modern age. We have electricity. Computers. Everything is changing and going to be different. Just because we are out of the way we must not get left behind." He would frown sternly at Pappa Andros whose little house had neither electricity nor computers, and who did not find this century all that different from those which had preceded it, in the important ways.

Pappa Andros was getting old and his belly under his big priest's beard was getting big and loose, and he liked to laugh. He still loved Christ and his saint, and he loved his people. He could cope with their

oddities. Choosing not to dispute with Yanni the reality of the gods or saints he shod was just one among many things that made perfect sense in his daily life. It only seemed strange when he found he could not talk about these things to Pappa Thomas or to the bishop, when he made one of his rare visits to the island. He got on well with his flock, including the taciturn Yanni. He appreciated the discount Yanni gave him when he or his wife needed a new pair of sandals. He didn't think the matter of making sandals for the gods was worth mentioning to his superiors.

So it was that when Yanni invited him to dinner at Stellio's taverna he made nothing of it and agreed cheerfully, taking it for a bit of neighbourly kindness. He enjoyed his food, and he enjoyed eating and drinking with his friends. He didn't suspect anything strange until he arrived and found every important person and every single shoemaker from the island of Ithyka waiting for him.

Stellio's taverna occupied the ground floor of a large cream-painted rectangular house near the centre of the town. Upstairs, where Stellio and his large family lived, there were many balconies jutting under a red tiled roof. Downstairs was one single large room, the taverna. One end was the kitchen, with the big open fire, little stoves, and methane-powered refrigerator. Spread throughout the rest of the room were the tables, arranged to seat as many people as possible. The kitchen was open to the guests, who would wander in and select what they wanted, often trying a mouthful from the pans first. The food in Stellio's was good. He often spit roasted a whole lamb in the large fireplace, or occasionally a pig, and on any day two or three chickens would be turning and sizzling over the fire.

On the day of Yanni's meal, half a pig was crackling over the fire and all the tables were arranged in a semi-circle. Every place was filled but one. There was an air of hushed expectation. Pappa Andros slid into the empty place, looking about him to see who was there. Before he could begin to talk to his neighbours, Yanni stood up and began to fill glasses from a wineskin. The wine was dark red, not the usual thin yellow pine-flavoured retsina Stellio served. Yanni filled each glass almost full, and gave them to Stellio's daughter Katerina who carried them round to the guests.

When he started there was the usual cheerful hum and chatter of a roomful of people, but as he continued the taverna grew quieter and quieter until before half the people were served the room was so quiet that Pappa Andros could hear each footfall on the wooden boards as the girl crossed to the tables. It wasn't until Yanni filled the last glass with

the last drops from the now empty skin and sat down again that Pappa Andros realised what it was that was strange. He had seen the shoemaker fill glasses for more than sixty people from a wineskin that should hold no more than half a bottle of wine. A whole bottle would fill only five or six of the fluted but chunky glasses Stellio favoured for their solidity. Pappa Andros glanced at his neighbour, Yanni's cousin the shoemaker Kosta. He was about to open his mouth to say something when Yanni again stood up. He drew breath as if to make a speech, looking awkward and uncomfortable.

"Colleagues, friends and neighbours," he began, in a rehearsed, formal and stilted tone. "I have invited you here tonight to explain something that someone told me and to ask for your help." He shuffled from one foot to the other and cleared his throat. "As you all know, since the death of my grandfather, Elias, I have had the privilege and responsibility of making sandals for the holy ones." Yanni hesitated, looking round, and catching Pappa Andros' eye. The priest smiled encouragingly. Yanni had said no more than everybody already knew, but it was more than he had ever said before. The priest leaned forward, consumed with curiosity as to what the shoemaker would say next.

"Last week I had a visitor. It was—it was Ag. Dionysos." Yanni looked acutely uncomfortable, and twisted his glass in his fingers. "He wanted sandals. But that wasn't why he'd come. He stood in my shop, leaning on the bags, by the door, his face half in sunlight and half in shadow, smiling, like he does. I couldn't help noticing he's as golden as the cured leather I use for bags. He told me that we were going to need a lot more shoes. As many shoes as it would take me a year to make, doing nothing else. More shoes than I can make. Children's shoes, too, especially. Shoes all sizes. And other things too, food, clothes. He said we'd need them whatever happened and we should start now to have a store of them when they were needed. I said I couldn't do all that, and he told me to ask you all to help. If we all gave one day a week to making things for when they're needed, there'd be enough. He said there'll be a lot of children coming to the island. A lot of them, and a lot of people coming. Because—because Great Pan's going to be reborn." Yanni's eyes returned guiltily to the priest.

Pappa Andros felt a weight of gazes on him. He sat still for a moment, wishing clever Pappa Thomas were here to set these people right. But Pappa Thomas wouldn't believe Yanni, wouldn't even believe the evidence of the wineskin. Pappa Thomas thought that there was a new world coming. What if he was right, but not in the way he expected? The

silence lengthened as Pappa Andros thought his slow way through it. There was a clatter and a hiss from behind him as Stellio began carving the pig. Yanni bit his lip.

"Go on, Yanni," Pappa Andros said, at last.

"That's all, really, Pappa," Yanni smiled a little. "Great Pan's to be reborn, and we're to get shoes ready."

"How many shoes?" asked Spiro, his gold tooth catching the light as he spoke.

"A lot. All sizes." said Yanni. "He said we should all start work on them straight away so we'd be ready."

"Why shoes? Doesn't Pan have goat's hooves?" asked Lambros the baker. There was a gust of nervous laughter at this. Pappa Andros looked down into his dark wine, and saw the reflection of his own face, his dark eyes, his greying beard. He did not hear what reply Yanni made. He alone among them knew Pan was more than that, more than another holy one with goat's hooves and an urge for lechery who'd long ago died on a hillside on this island. As a growing boy he had walked often up to the pine grove scented with sage that still bore the name Pan's Grave. Then he had grown and gone on. He remembered them talking about the death of Pan at the seminary. They said his name meant the World, and Everything, Holiness, and What is Essential. If Pan was to be reborn then it meant the world being made anew, and really it should be his duty to tell his superiors and do what he could to stop it. Pappa Andros gazed unhappily round at the assembled men and women. More than a few of them were looking at him expectantly. What could he do? Maybe a great deal, or maybe nothing. He didn't know enough. He understood the day to day problems of the island and that was enough. The bishop was in Nafplia, he should make this decision, or the archbishop at Athens or even the Patriarch at Constantinople. But none of them were here.

Yanni raised his glass. "Great Pan!" he said, and drank. Pappa Andros hesitated again, looking round. Then his eyes caught on a pair of figures lounging in the doorway. One was a slim young man. He leaned one hand casually on the doorframe. His beautiful face fell half in the taverna's light and half in the shadow of the night—or, no, Pappa Andros realised with a start that he had a halo. His eyes met Pappa Andros', and slowly and deliberately he smiled. Behind him and entirely in shadow stood another figure, older, bearded, but equally ringed with a faint light of God around the head. He slowly raised a hand in salute to

Pappa Andros. Equally slowly, Pappa Andros raised his glass to the holy saints, and sipped.

The red wine was smooth and warming as it went down. As he swallowed all the colours seemed brighter, the scents of the roast pork and the stewed mushrooms reached him clearly and his mouth watered. He stood, and he saw that everyone else was standing too, and raising their glasses. "Great Pan!" they chorused, and all drank together. The holy saint in the doorway drank too, and then stepped back out to join his companion in the shadows. Stellio and his children served the food, and all ate and drank well. Gaiety reigned for the rest of the evening, until all the important people and shoemakers staggered home delightfully drunk, to suffer no hangover. All the conversation was on how best to make the shoes and whatever else might be needed. Dispute grew quite heated about where to store them. Once the glasses were drained, nobody, not even Pappa Andros, questioned the necessity.

Chapter 3

MARIE, MARIE, HOLD ON TIGHT

(Marie)

Beware the worm, beware the truth it speaks
Beware the craven's lie, the serpent's tooth
and all that makes your heart a frozen stone
you bury far away and can't forget.

Lord, in thy mercy, hear my prayer. Through the grimy window of the tube train as it hurtles along in unaccustomed daylight, I can see endless backs of endless grimy streets and factories, sprawling out in all directions into the distance, ugly as despair. Everything is grey, the sky, the streets, the tube line, and my heart. I cannot pray for her. I swore to you that I would never ask another thing if you would forgive me, and I keep my word. I keep my word. That's the only thing I have left.

That fierceness, that's pride, I will confess that to Father Michael tomorrow. He will give me penance. I almost always have to confess pride, Lord, it is my one remaining besetting sin. But such penance is little enough, compared to the one I will be doing all my life. I stare out of the window at the grey backs of houses, a huge black glass factory making audio tapes and designed to look like a cassette box used to ten years ago. How modern it must have looked when it was new, how ridiculous now. Without meaning to I find I am twisting my cross in my fingers, the little gold cross my godmother gave me, the one I always wear around my neck. I am desolate, utterly desolate, and I cannot even pray for her. Have mercy upon us.

As the brakes on the train squeal, coming into Kilburn I find that once again I am blinking back tears. I will not think of him, or that will be another sin on my soul. Lord God of Hosts, you are very great. I will keep my word. I have renounced my powers utterly, they are beyond reach, I could not use them if I would. But it is very hard to watch her die when once a word would have been enough to cure such a thing. The doctors

and nurses talk to me about red blood cells, about T-cells and lymph, and I nod and do not scream at them that cancer of the blood and bone answers well to magic and badly to man's medicine. She is my child, they do their best, and tears slide down my cheeks once again, and the other passengers look away, embarrassed. It's not done, not English, to weep in public. Grief should be hidden. They think me mad. It would not be so in Europe, this fear of caring is a Saxon thing.

I wipe my eyes and blow my nose. I stare out of the window at the desolation that is the back of Neasden. Even the name is ugly, well suited to the rows of chimneys, the gardens where nothing grows but broken bicycles and flapping icy washing. Everything is grey or black. Even the trees are grimy grey-green. The little scattering of snow that is left here and there in shrinking patches is grey. The train passes over a dirty canal. A child wearing a thin grey anorak is kicking stones into the water. So many of these lives are all futility. I should be thankful I have known some joy, thank you God, among the pain. But if she dies, my Eleanor—I always thought I would have the child. I never thought you were so cruel, God, as to play such a trick on me. Father O'Malley said that I shouldn't try and bargain with you. But I did, and you in your infinite mercy saw fit to treat me like this. I never thought you'd hurt her. She's innocent. Even Father O'Malley admitted that, that summer, before she was born, the first time, in Farm Street. Remember, God? I am not reproaching you, Lord, I know better than that, forgive me my sarcasm. But my daughter, my only child, is dying, and you know how it feels to watch your only child die, Lord, how about a little compassion?

I have already offered you everything. Even if you'd accept a bargain—which you won't. The old gods will, although they'll twist it and trick one if they can, but not you, oh no, never. Not in any circumstances, eh Lord? Anyway, Lord, I'm not proposing that this time. I've nothing left to bargain with, I've given you it all already. But don't you hurt her, God, hurt me instead. I don't mind dying, or giving you my life if you prefer. I tried to have her adopted and become a nun, you know that. Father Michael said that in the Middle Ages they'd have had me like a shot but these days they don't look for grief and religious mania in nuns, there is a sanity requirement. How Colin would have laughed. He always laughed to hear that I wanted to be a nun in my childhood. He would stroke my body until I shuddered, and say I wasn't cut out for it. But he was wrong. It was my true destiny, and he stole it from me, which is why I thought to return to it after. Oh, that's not all the truth, Lord, to whom all hearts are open and from whom no secrets are hid. Forgive me

for bargaining with you. I thought when I fled that I could make myself the sacrifice for both of them. For Eleanor, who is innocent, and for Colin who does not understand what guilt is. I don't know why he doesn't. It's as if he was made with that left out. Shame, he feels, and pain, and love—oh God forgive me, I've thought of him, that's more to confess tomorrow. I call it improper thoughts, Lord, so I don't have to explain too much.

Father Michael doesn't know everything, Lord. He hears my confession every week, and I confess my sins each time, everything for the week that's gone. But he's just a parish priest, he isn't Father O'Malley, SJ, he didn't accept me back into the Church, in your name. He doesn't know what I was. He is careful of me, he thinks me mad. Maybe I am. Maybe that's why I sit here clutching my old bag so tightly my knuckles are white against the soft brown leather, with tears running down my face so that all these English people are embarrassed.

Wait, that one isn't. That one sitting opposite. He isn't like the others. He's looking right at me, seriously. He's wearing a crumpled sweatshirt with letters on, and jeans, and he has a straggly dark beard and long hair. I look away from him. I'm embarrassed myself now, trying to stop crying—but I didn't know I'd started! The other men are all wearing pin-striped suits in formal colours, grey, like everything, black, navy. Their ties hang straight down on white shirts. Their hair is short. The women all wear blatant make-up in the same style, and their clothes match their shoes and their bags. Their hair is groomed. They all read the same paper "The London Evening Standard" and their faces are all the same. I would know they were English anywhere, by the way they hold their heads. French people would never hold their heads like that.

I glance back to the little man opposite. He's still looking at me, with an expression of concern and caring. He reminds me of someone, or I have seen him before somewhere. I can't tell if he's English or not. The train is coming in to Finchley Road, already. Soon it will plunge down into the darkness. People are shifting about, getting ready to get off, changing for the Metropolitan line. He smiles at me, and stands. He puts out a hand towards me, almost hesitantly, and I see the mark on the palm. Oh Lord Jesus, here? Now? I don't know what to do. Should I kneel? I start to slip forward from the seat, as I would in church. The man next to me pushes past me impatiently, muttering something angry. I almost fall, and He catches me for a moment in His arms, and I feel—I don't know what I feel, it is so strange, so unaccustomed, over too quickly. Bliss. Love. Joy. Then He is gone, whether onto the platform or

back to heaven I don't know. I am sitting again, and the train rattles down into the sudden darkness of the underground tunnels.

All the way to Baker Street I think about the strangeness of it. He didn't speak, I'm sure of that, but I know what He meant, in His compassion and His embrace. He meant that I must love Him. He meant that I must do more than fulfil my part of the bargain I made with His father. He meant that it was wrong to bargain, but he forgave me anyway. I must not just obey Him and give myself to Him, I must also love Him. It was easy to love Him while He touched me, and even now, sitting here in the close memory of it, it is easy. But I know this feeling will fade. I change to the Bakerloo Line at Baker Street, walking fast, feet clacking on tiles, past walls lined with hundreds of silhouettes of Holmes with his pipe and deerstalker, changing from grey to brown as I change platforms. Already my worry about Elly is flooding back against the rapture.

I push onto the tube train. I stand, hanging onto the rounded brown plastic bulb at the end of a coiled metal strap. In the Metro in Paris, do they still have leather straps? I'll probably have to stand all the way to Waterloo Station. I usually do, but often I have a pole to hold, which is better. I am pressed around by strangers, I shall not fear. They do not see me. I am anonymous. I clutch my bag tightly under my arm. Jesus loves me. I sound like one of those ridiculous evangelists we saw on television in California. But it is true. He loves me, despite what I am and what I have done. He forgives me. That is different from the hard bargain I made with God and Father O'Malley. Hanging here from the strap, lurching with a practised shuffle every time the train corners, I feel finally forgiven my sins, as I did not at Farm Street.

Father O'Malley was horrified at my confession. He was just one step away from driving the demons out of me, I could tell. "Why would I have come, if not to be shriven and give it up?" I asked. He held out a big silver crucifix and spoke in Latin. It was then he cautioned me against making bargains with God, then he began to set out conditions.

The first was simple, that I should give up worshipping all other gods. All false gods, he said. I agreed, easily. I had come to the Church for protection. If the old gods could have protected me I would not have had to turn away from them. I knew the stories. I knew that for what Colin and I had done there was only condemnation there. They could not protect me from what came to Oedipus, to Jocasta, to their children. Only the encompassing forgiveness of the Church could do that. Next, Father O'Malley refused my plea to accept all the guilt and have Colin forgiven on my behalf. He was implacable. He said he could only forgive him if

Colin came and confessed. I knew he would never do that. I begged and pleaded with Father O'Malley, but he would not be moved. He said that the child, only a mound in my belly then, still unborn, still safe, was innocent. But he looked at me as if he thought it would have two heads. I did not say that I knew she was whole and perfect, free from blemish or defect. It did not seem wise to emphasise to Father O'Malley the extent of my powers, even as I swore to renounce them in return for forgiveness.

"There were lots of people like me in the fourth century, Father," I said. "People who believed in other gods or none and came into the church to be good Christians."

"You want the shield of the Church between you and your sin," he said. This was true, so I bowed my head. "It was done in innocence, you say?" he asked. I nodded. I had been through all this with him. "You were adopted, both of you? So how was it discovered?" I told him, and he shuddered, crossing himself. It was then I promised my whole self, my magic, everything I was, and never to ask for another thing in my life, if God would only forgive me. And Father O'Malley forgave me in God's name, and set my penance.

The train jerks to a stop, almost throwing me to the ground, people push of, push on, the doors slide together with a hiss, the train jerks off on it's way again. I am tightly pressed by people all around. So many people, so little air. It's hot. A man behind me rubs against me. I try to move away. This often happens. Once when it was like this, the train stopped in a tunnel, for a long time. It was very quiet. Then after a while a woman started to scream. They took her out at the next stop. I know just how she felt. Today I am brave in Jesus' love. Many days I stand here and tremble. These people would tear me apart if they knew about me what in the human world only Father O'Malley knows, that I was a witch and bore a child to my own brother.

At last, at last, the train draws in to Waterloo. There is marching music in the bright concourse. I march to its rhythm past stalls selling doughnuts and burgers, filled baguettes and racks of brightly coloured ties and socks, out onto the Embankment. Already it is almost dark. There is a man selling papers. "Standard!" he calls, but it sounds like "Stannard!" He sees me then, and his eyes burn as he takes money from the commuters. He does not look at them or at the papers he hands them. He stares at me. Then he calls out again in a loud and passionate tone, spitting the words. Without looking I know what he says has no echo in the headlines of the papers in his pile.

"Children lost in tragedy. The war's on again in the Middle East. There'll be no more holidays in Greece. And one more thing. It's not going to be nice any more." People pause without paying attention, buy his bad news. I do not.

I walk away, fast, trying not to listen. I am cold, the icy wind cuts through my thin coat. I try not to think. I have promised to have no contact with anyone of his kind. I clutch my coat around me and walk through the wind beside the river, through crowds moving the other way, towards the station. I make my way towards the hospital. Soon I will see her, soon. Oh please, sweet merciful Jesus, save her life. I will do more than believe in strict duty, I will love You, and do all I can to keep You alive, as I have these seven years.

The hospital has its familiar smell, antiseptic laid like a film above the smell of unhealthy overcooked food. The walls are painted beige to waist level and pale green above. There are prints pinned up at regular intervals along them, mostly Monet and van Gogh. I have been here so often these last months I do not have to ask, I know the way through the maze of corridors without looking at the blue and yellow signs. I turn at the Sunflowers and come down the short hall into the Critical Children's Ward, past the empty reception desk to the bed where she—*isn't*.

I blink, and I can feel a scream rising from somewhere deep inside me. Did He come to tell me He had gathered her to Him? That is not the mercy I asked for, Lord! A nurse comes running. Why aren't there any children here? The room is ominously silent, under my rising scream. "Mrs. Deneet!" the nurse says, over and over. Why can't English people ever manage my surname? Denuit isn't hard. I've seen this woman every day for weeks. The room is a blur of tears—where are all the children? It was full of terminal children, too quiet and too pale, heartbreakingly good, with faces lined with pain which would never be lined with age. They can't all have died, not all at once. Loving Jesus, did you come to tell me she is gone? I can't bear it, it is too much. "Eleanor! Eleanor!" I scream. The nurse shakes me, calling her mispronunciation of my name. Then the doctor is there, Dr. Carol. One of them touches my face. I don't feel it. Dr. Carol is talking, but I can't hear her voice clearly or understand what she's trying to tell me. "Terrible thing... " "Breach of security" "Police". "Inform relatives".

"Eleanor!" I call, again and again. Dr. Carol stops trying to shout and speaks quietly and calmly, and I hear her.

"Mrs. Denuit, please! Your daughter's—we don't know what's happened to her, but she isn't dead as far as we know!" I draw breath,

and stop screaming. For some reason my legs give way and I slide to the cold floor. The nurse bends over me anxiously.

"Can you understand me, Mrs. Denuit? Marie?" Dr. Carol asks, she is crouching beside me, her white coat and skirt crumpling, her face concerned. I nod, afraid to speak in case I start to scream again. "Somebody—we don't know who or how—broke into the ward earlier this afternoon and kidnapped the patients. Just this ward. All the children were taken. Nobody saw anything. The electricity went down and it must have happened then. The alarms went off, and the nurse on duty vanished too. The children still have their tags—Mrs. Denuit?" I nod again. I have heard things about hospital security. "It's such a terrible thing to do. What sort of people would—We're expecting some kind of ransom demand. The police have been here. They expect to recover all the children safely. We contacted all the relatives straight away, except those we couldn't reach. Do you understand?" I nod again, and try to stand. Dr. Carol helps me up. I sit down on the edge of the bed, both knees together, shaking.

"Kidnapped?" I hear myself saying, sounding echoing and strange and far away. Dear Jesus, who would kidnap sick children? Possibilities instantly flash through my mind. If Colin knew somehow that she was dying he would have come and cured her. He might have taken her. If he had—tears are streaming down my face again, or still, I do not know if they ever stopped or ever will. Jesus Lord, did Colin come for her? She would be well, but I would be failing my promise to bring her up in the church. Jesus, answer me! Is she with her father? Once I always knew where Colin was, now I have closed myself to him and can do nothing. If it was Colin then I must find her and rescue her. If it was not, lunatics maybe, who else would take her, take my dying child?

A face swims before me, the weasel-faced man wearing a mottled grey cardigan in the heat that was Siena at Easter years ago, the camera that is a weapon around his neck. He would take Eleanor if he could, or any child, to try to kill what I most desire to keep alive. Is that memory of his face just memory or a message from God? No way to tell, any more. I am disarmed, helpless, I have surrendered all my weapons. I lie across the bed, weeping, and feel Doctor Carol's arm around me, hear her words of useless comfort. I know nothing, I have no way of knowing, no way of finding out where she is, who has her, whether she yet breathes. Oh Lord God, who gave your only begotten son to die for our sins, I gave everything to you for her sake, and all I can do is remind you of it. Doctor Carol is telling me to wait, sending the nurse for a sedative. This is

my punishment for my sin, my unwitting sin, and I knew I should be punished, Lord, but let it all fall on me, only on me. Think of those other children, Lord, and their parents. Let them all be safe, and live. And let my cry come unto thee.

Chapter 4

LADY OF DESIRE

Half lit by darkness in the flickering cave
your smile looks past desired gold and white
to touch upon the substance, only touch
the searing sunlight shrinks the scope so small.

Katerina crossed the square cautiously. She tried to look as if she were going to the cafe at the centre under the trees, and not to the big church of Ag. Paraskevi which stood at the eastern side of the square. It had a blue-painted dome and the walls were white. The sanctuary itself was big enough to hold twenty people at a time, and the courtyard where the services were held could hold the whole town, and often did at the great Easter service. Then everyone would hold a candle and when light was rekindled in the darkness the light would flow from one candle to another around the courtyard, and the people would walk out from there around the bounds of the town, carrying the little lights.

Katerina loved Easter, she always had since she was a small child. She loved cupping her hand around the flame to guard it from the wind. They said that if your candle went out before you reached home it meant bad luck in the coming year, and if it went out and was not relit you would die. People stayed together with their lights burning as they went home after the walk, to ensure that there would be light there to rekindle the flame if necessary. Fat old Pappa Andros and his wife always brought up the rear of the procession and escorted people who lived a little out of the way, making sure nobody must go alone. They were always the last home. Her candle had never gone out. But once her best friend Taxeia's candle had, and although they lit it again straight away she had had bad luck all that year, her grandfather died, her mother quarrelled with her uncle and the boy who was courting her lost interest. That was six years ago when they had only been eleven, but Taxeia and Katerina understood. Everyone was careful with their Pascal candle in the procession, but nobody more than these two best friends.

Although it lay so near her father's taverna, Katerina rarely visited the church of Ag. Paraskevi, apart from that big Easter service. Usually they walked through the streets to the little church of Ag. Nikolaos. Her father, Stellio, like most of the islanders, preferred Pappa Andros's style to Pappa Thomas's. Ag. Nikolaos' church generally had far more visitors, despite its smaller size and inferior position in a maze of workshops and houses. Today it had to be Ag. Paraskevi's. Katerina had a particular favour to ask of that saint. She smiled at her own daring, feeling with her fingers in the front pocket of her dress. It was still safe, she felt the rounded corners of the copper figure of a woman. These copper plates were generally made in the shape of body parts. People hung them in shrines as an offering to ask for healing, or a special blessing. Hers, in the shape of a whole person, was probably meant for someone ill all over. She'd just chosen it from the selection hanging at the kiosk. It was the closest she could get to what she wanted.

She slipped through the gates of the church, past the free-standing bell tower and into the cobbled courtyard. The walls of the courtyard, priest's house and the sanctuary were all freshly painted white. It was almost dazzling as she walked across the cobbles in the sunlight. It was an hour after mid-day, and the heat was intense as it beat on her bare head. The doors of the sanctuary were closed but opened to her touch. The cool air inside the thick walls was very welcome. Katerina's eyes took a while to adjust to the dim interior. There were only two small windows, with deep recessed sills angled to keep most of the light and heat out. There were candles on the altar, and in front of the various shrines around the room. The church was empty, as she had hoped, at this time of day. Katerina picked up an unlit candle from the waiting pile, and walked across to the shrine of Ag. Paraskevi.

There was a statue of the saint there, a plaster copy of a marble original. Behind it there was an icon. Ag. Paraskevi was very beautiful, whichever one looked at. Behind her head in the icon were doves. She was the patron saint of love and peace. It was love that brought Katerina here now. She lit her candle, and hung up her plaque on its little piece of ribbon, beside all the others. Then she stood up straight before the shrine to pray, looking the statue in the eye.

"Agia Paraskevi, my name is Katerina, I am the daughter of Stellio, who keeps the taverna in the square. I am seventeen years old, and nobody loves me. I am not ugly, but I am not beautiful either, not like models in magazines and not like you either. I have left school and I am working serving tables in my father's taverna. I have three older sisters,

and they are all married and living at home with the family. Ag. Paraskevi, I don't want to grow old working in the taverna all the time, without anything ever happening to me! I don't mind if I get married or not, but I want love, I want excitement, I want someone to care about me. I don't just want to marry somebody my mother picks out and carry on working at home like my sisters." This was what she had prepared, but she added a thought that had just come into her mind. "Ag. Paraskevi? If it is true what Yanni said about Great Pan being reborn, then you will take off your cloak and be Aphrodite again. If that happens, and I pray it does, I want someone beside me when the world changes! Holy saint, hear my prayer" she finished, in a completely different, formal and empty tone.

She left the church walking with a jaunty air. She was surprised to see Pappa Thomas in the courtyard as she came out. He had come in to her school once a week to teach religion to the older children. All he ever talked about was God the Creator and the Passion of Jesus. She almost giggled to think how much he would have disapproved of her prayer. She smiled at him and tried to go past. He raised an arm to halt her.

"Katerina!" he said. "I'd like to speak to you, if you don't mind. Would you like to come into my house?" Katerina had, of course, often been warned about being alone with men. She could not work in the taverna without getting used to seeing lust in men's eyes. It repelled her as much as the consuming love she longed for attracted her. She looked closely at Pappa Thomas, and did not see any lust or danger in him. Her mother always warned her especially about priests, whose lechery was proverbial. Pappa Thomas had no wife. Priests must be married before their ordination, if they are ever to marry. It is forbidden for a priest to marry but not for a married man to become a priest. Pappa Thomas had clearly decided never to marry, although he was a young man still, perhaps ten years older than Katerina. She could tell he still thought her a child. She followed him across the courtyard into his little house. Inside it was cool, almost too cold. He shut the door quickly. "The air conditioning," he explained. Katerina felt goosepimples on her arms. She hadn't been anywhere this cool for months.

He led her into a small book-lined room, gave her lemonade and a dishful of sheep's milk yaourti drenched with honey, cold from the refrigerator. When she had eaten a few mouthfuls of the sticky treat, and answered a few dull questions about her education and employment, Pappa Thomas came to the point.

"You were working last night at Yanni's party?" he asked, as if casually. "Tell me what happened, please. I have heard rumours, but nothing for certain from anyone who was there." Katerina knew that one must never lie to a priest. Yet she wasn't a fool. She knew that it would be a terrible idea to tell Pappa Thomas what had happened. She didn't know what he would do, but she knew there would be trouble. He wasn't stupid, but he had trouble understanding things that everyone else found perfectly obvious. It was probably because he was from the mainland. She tried to find something to say that was not a lie but not too revealing either.

"Why, we roasted half a pig," she said.

This did not seem to satisfy Pappa Thomas. "What I heard," he said, "was that pagan gods were mentioned. Is that true?" Katerina thought fast.

"Pappa Andros was there," she said. "He would surely have said something if anything was said that was inappropriate. You should ask him." Pappa Thomas frowned. Katerina spooned up the yaourt as quickly as she could, hoping he would accept that answer.

"But did you hear pagan gods named?" he asked, looking at her carefully. Katerina thought of that toast to Great Pan. It was surprising that it hadn't echoed out of the taverna and woken the whole town.

"Only one god was named," she said, thankful that it was true. To avoid having to answer any more direct and searching questions she asked one of her own. "Pappa, working in the taverna I hear a lot of things. Is it true, as some men were telling me last week, that Ag. Dionysos found a sprig of vine growing, and put it in a bird's skull to keep it safe, but it grew and grew so he put it in a dog's skull, but it spilled out of that so he put it in a lion's skull and it grew out of that too, so he finally put it in a donkey's skull. And that's why people when they get drunk first sing like birds, and then quarrel like dogs, and then get brave as lions and finally as silly as a donkey?"

"It is the rankest superstition!" Pappa Thomas' frown creased his whole face. "These stories are everywhere in the islands. Sometimes they are pagan traditions which have lasted from Homer's day. That one may well be, it has the ring of it. Sometimes they are harmless folk tales, sometimes they are pernicious. But all of it pollutes the true religion, the worship of the One God and his only son, Jesus Christ."

"Thank you, Pappa," said Katerina. She had finished her yoghurt, she stood in one movement, trying not to look as if she was shivering with the cold. "I understand that now. Thank you very much. I will come and

visit you again, but right now I must go because my mother will be expecting me home."

The little priest looked at her suspiciously, but he did not try to stop her leaving. As she ran home she wondered if she should warn Yanni, or Pappa Andros. If everyone was making things, then sooner or later somebody was bound to let something slip to Pappa Thomas. She sighed. If she warned them she'd have to explain what she'd been doing in the church. They could look after themselves.

The next morning Katerina woke before the dawn, thinking she heard someone calling her name. She got up, hearing the birds singing. There was one cloud in the eastern sky, a single wing of flame. She dressed quietly and slipped out of the house, down the stairs that led to the street. It was pleasantly cool. Nobody else was about yet, she had the town to herself. She headed down through the crooked streets towards the harbour. The fishermen would be coming home, and the passenger boat from Kerkyra came in at eight. It was always interesting to watch the unloading. She liked to see the shiny silver fish as the men hauled them out into boxes. She liked to see the fishermen's faces, with the different look of men who have not woken to it but come to morning through night. But somehow this morning she found her feet took her away from the harbour towards the shingled strip of beach. To the north of the town were cliffs, falling sheer into the sea, but to the south the land was lower, until it rose again a few miles along where there was another tiny harbour and fishing village.

The shingle crunched under Katerina's feet as she walked past the olive oil factory, still and silent now in June, when all last year's olives were golden oil already and next year's were still ripening on the branches. She walked far out along the beach, not knowing where she was going or why, but feeling a sense of excitement stirring. As she walked South along the shore the sun rose over the sea to her left. At last she was out of sight of the harbour and the town, at an outcropping of rock. The sun was clear of the horizon now, shining on the glittering sea, which was already wine-dark blue.

The day was beginning to be warm, and Katerina had walked fast, she was hot and sticky. The sea looked cool and inviting. She wished she had thought to bring her bathing costume and a towel. Then she looked around her. Nobody could see her. Nobody would ever know. She took her clothes off, rapidly, and put them safe on a rock weighting them with stones against the possibility of wind. Completely naked she made her way carefully to the water's edge. The shingle was unpleasant underfoot.

The first touch of the water was icy. She almost changed her mind and went back to her clothes. It was only the memory of how much she loved swimming and how rarely she had the chance these days that made her carry on picking her way across the underwater rocks. She walked out carefully until the sea was around her waist, deep enough to let herself fall forward, plunge in, start to take deliberate strokes and swim. Then the water felt wonderful, cool on her neck and head and breasts, refreshing beyond belief. She swam out along the sun's track, sometimes turning on her back to make sure she had not gone too far.

She had just decided to turn back when she felt something brush against her leg. Looking down she saw a large dark grey shape, nudging her. For a moment she feared sharks, but then as it came out of the water she realised it was a dolphin. Dolphins in the Aegean were always friendly to people. She had seen them occasionally before, but never so close as this. She swam away, it followed. She turned and swam towards it, it bumped her again, and quickly swam away. She started to laugh. They played together in the calm blue sea for some time, heading slowly shorewards. At last the dolphin would come no closer in. Katerina paused, treading water. She raised her arms, drops of water glittering like diamonds in the sunlight. The dolphin swam towards her, and she dived under it. When she came up again it was nowhere to be seen. She shook her head, scattering drops that broke the water. She still could not see it. Then a head broke the surface of the sea nearby, but not a dolphin's head, a man's head, a stranger, full bearded, hair sleek with water. Katerina started to swim away, panicking.

"Katerina!" he called. She hesitated, paused, looked again. His hair and beard were very dark, almost blue black. A stranger. Yet he said her name with love. Then she looked into his eyes, and saw they were the dolphin's eyes. "Don't be afraid." he called, and the words hung on the water. He floated there, not moving, then a wave rose in the water between them, pushing at her gently, playing, as the dolphin had. She had heard stories of this sort of thing all her life. But she'd never really thought that it could happen any more. It was more than she had ever dared dream of. She would have been afraid of any man, however much she prayed for love to sweep her away. But of a god who had come to her as a dolphin in the early morning sunlight she had no fear. She swam towards him into the wave's embrace with no hesitation.

Chapter 5

THE BROKEN MAN

(Deirdre)

Thou art the best of men if thou canst know
thy part, and seek to fill thy shape entire,
but do not seek to step beyond thy bounds
and only I may see where they are set.

A particularly loud and sustained rumbling crash startles me out of a daydream. Before I have thought I am on my feet, crossing to the kitchen window to watch it. I can't remember when I last saw a storm like this. The lightning tears the sky open, the thunder following close behind with a crash that is a surprise even when I am holding my breath expecting it. Somewhere behind the rent and scudding clouds there is a full moon, and every now and then she sails clear for a moment. The power is down, and the candle is just a flicker behind me. At every flash the huge black silhouettes of the elms and oaks on the ridge, bare branches reaching out, stand stark against the sky. Between the flashes it is very dark. It is magnificent. I feel an urge to sing loudly, to cheer on the passion of the elements, but I keep silent. I do not want to risk waking Emrys. If he can sleep through this I definitely shouldn't disturb him. At last the clouds break and I hear the rain come hissing and pattering towards me. There is some hail in it. It has reached the trees but not the house when there is another flash, and I see a shape on the road, a man's shape trudging along, collar pulled up against the driving rain and the wind.

I know at once it is nobody I have ever met. I cross to the table and pick up the candle, bring it back to the window and set it up on top of the speaker. There, the light will show against the darkness. I have done my share. If the man wants shelter from the storm, or sanctuary he will see it. When the next flash comes he is nowhere to be seen. Nevertheless, two flashes later, there is a knock at the front door. I pick up the candle

and walk across the room carefully, trying to avoid stepping on Emrys' toys that have been left around. Despite my care something small and plastic crunches underfoot.

I open the door and hold the candle up, to see his face. He is standing against the light of the moon, which is clear for the moment, and I can see that he is tall, clean-shaven, his hair slicked back under the rain, but that is all. He does not speak.

I draw breath to ask who he is, and find my breath taken by another, who speaks through me in strange old-fashioned words. Every time I think I will get used to this when it happens, when one of the indwellers acts through me. Every time it is a surprise. I could take back control if I would, but when I bade the spirits welcome I knew there would be strangeness. Mostly they just mutter advice in my head, but sometimes they know to speak or to act when I do not. This is an old, old voice, but new to me, old beyond naming, reaching me from times long gone. The words echo from my own mouth.

"Is it sanctuary you're seeking this dark night when the gods are thundering and storming in the sky or only a little bit of a place to lodge you out of the rain and the wind?"

He comes a step closer, peering into my face as another flash of lightning rends the sky. Part of me that is me wants to cover my scarred cheek from that gaze, but neither I nor the indweller who is speaking through my mouth make any move to do so. I see him clearly for the levin's instant of light. His is the saddest face I ever saw. He has dark hair and dark eyes and his face is etched with the lines of deep grief. When he speaks his voice surprises me, and surprises those who watch within me. Somehow I expected this stranger to be a foreigner, but his voice is gentle with the soft accent of the West of Ireland.

"I was only seeking a dry place out of the storm, but if you can offer sanctuary I'd have you know no god would stretch out a hand to save me from a falling bolt or the driving hail." I am minded to let in any man who can answer an indweller so, with matching words. Such are rare in this age and I should greatly like to talk to him, be he a godless man or not. The indweller herself knows better, and does not budge.

"And what should I be calling you? Have you blood on your head, or something worse, that the gods should seek you out and you under my roof?" She's right. If he is blood cursed then I can't risk having him inside in a storm when it would be so easy for a bolt to strike. There is more than myself at risk here.

"You're right, so, though it's looking for peace I am these seven years now. My name is my word, and I'll not speak it aloud here in the wild world where any might hear me. You're right, and I'll be going off now and not pollute your hearth at all." He starts to turn away back off the porch into the driving rain, which is coming with the West wind almost straight against the side of the house. I can't bear it.

"Didn't I say I'd give you sanctuary?" I blurt, although I had not, and the indwellers all reproach me insistently. "Come on in out of the rain and let me close the door." I turn and lead the way inside. I wait at the door to the front room while he takes off his soaked jacket and shoes. I feel awkward, embarrassed. He leaves them dripping on the hall floor. The indwellers have no good advice for what to say to a possibly blood-cursed man who knows the proper words of address and to whom one has just granted sanctuary. *Fool of a girl* says the one who took my breath, fondly, as she retreats back into the muttering at the back of my head.

When he is done I lead the way into the front room, put the candle on the coffee table and sit down. He waits until I offer. "Sit down." He perches on the arm of one of the suite chairs. I feel compelled to apologise. "I'm sorry it's candles, but the electricity was blown out by the storm about an hour ago."

"Don't worry," he says, in his mellow voice.

I leave the candle with him and go to the kitchen, treading on more toys in the dark. I light another candle by the stove, quickly find what I need and set it on a plate. Then I grab a bottle of wine from the fridge and two thick tumblers that Emrys uses for juice—I can't risk reaching up in the dark to the high shelf where I keep the wine glasses. I put it all on a tray, the candle as well. It isn't long before I am back in the front room. He has moved from the chair and is standing in front of the shrine in the corner, the candle held in his hand. Ah. I hadn't remembered that, when I brought him in here, I was just thinking that it was tidy.

He turns to me, and in the light of two candles I can see his grief-lined face clearly. "Could you tell me, Lady, do you serve the High Gods or the Mother here?" *He knows you're not a Christian from the words we welcomed him with, and he recognises holiness, which is a good sign.* I smile, and inside me the indwellers chuckle. What could a man tell after all, from some shapes of stones? But another speaks a warning deep inside *What manner of man will know your allegiance before he gives his name?*. So I simply smile, and set down the tray wordless, sprinkle the salt on the bread, break it, stand again and offer it to him. He accepts it, looking at me.

"It's safe you are under my roof, and none to harm you," I say, old ritual words. "My name is Deirdre MacAran and a hundred thousand welcomes to you at my hearth." I bite the bread. It tastes salty and yeasty, the taste of being a host.

"Thank you for your welcome. I will uphold the peace of your hall whatever comes to me. My name is Colin O'Niall." He bites into his bread, chews, swallows. He has not moved from the shrine.

I pour the wine, fumbling with the bottle and the thick glasses on the tray, making a little time to answer his question. The storm is still loud outside. I am not sure how much I can trust him, though he has sworn to the hall-peace. There is a gap of strangeness inside me. It seems perfectly natural to the indwellers, my ancestors, that a man might come asking sanctuary using these words, and know how to answer me. Yet to me who live yet in the twenty-first century and know that nothing like this happens in the world any more, it seems very strange. It is hard to know on what level to react. It is almost like a dream, with a dream's certainties. Unlike a dream, reality has consequences. I must be careful. I finish pouring the wine, and walk over to stand beside him at the shrine. He has finished his bread, but not moved. He must have been hungry, I'll have to make him a proper meal.

Most people would only see a pile of rocks a voice reminds me. I look at the rocks, the patterns laid out in them calm and strengthen me.

I clear my throat, feeling awkward, hoping some competent voice will speak for me. They laugh together behind my eyes, and hold their peace, leaving it all to me. "My altar is to the High Gods." I say. That would be enough, but I feel compelled to add, "I worship them all there, though chiefly the Lord of Light, the Lord of the Vine, the Lady of Love and the Lady of Silences. I praise also the Maker, the Sky Father, the Lord of the Waves, the Lord Messenger and the Lady of Wisdom. I do not forget the Lord of the Dead and his Bride. I honour the Mother as Life Bringer, and Giver of Plenty, in the proper season. It would not be right to neglect her. But she is not the owner of my heart, nor has she particular cause to love me."

He relaxes suddenly, I can sense it as a tension goes out of him. He bows his head to the shrine then turns, sets the candle down beside the one I brought on the tray and sits full on the chair whose arm he perched on before.

I touch a smooth rounded stone, the sea's gift, nod to it, then sit on the sofa. I take a glass and hand it to him, take the other. When I would sip

the indwellers restrain me *Wait for his toast*. In seven years, so much I still have to learn.

"A safe house!" he toasts, and raises the tumbler. We both drink. Then the Knowledge comes to me, a bright flash, like lightning, as if I were at the loom and looking down on the shape of his life. As swiftly as lightning it is over, and exactly the same it has its illuminating effect. I know who he is and what he has done, and what his purpose is. No wonder it is the Mother he fears. I have no more fear of him, and while the indwellers are all awed by what has come to us I am made fierce by knowledge. I speak calmly, looking him in the eyes.

"A safe house, maybe, for a while." I say. "I've granted you sanctuary, Colin O'Niall, but I'll not let you endanger me, or my son."

"I wasn't thinking you were old enough for children," he says, raising his eyebrows. I smile to myself, and look down, turning my cheek to the light so the god's touch shows clear. I know he knows, or can guess from that. He should learn that flattery won't get him anywhere with me.

"I hear your sister is called Night?" I say, carefully. He freezes, tense again, the glass half way to his lips. Then he relaxes, deliberately, then raises the glass again, and looks at me considering. That is enough.

"It is true, so," he says, not asking how I know. "And your son? What is he called? If I might be asking?" *There, the pretences are down He deserves the truth, girl, in pity's name.*

"I have given him his father's name, I call him Emrys Louis, which is a good name for a boy in these times."

"It is indeed," he says. "A Welsh name, and a French. Unusual." The candles flicker, as a gust of wind creeps in through a crack in the window, casting his face into shadows for a moment, but I think he smiles. "I know his father."

"Likely enough," I say, and again the strangeness of this conversation almost overwhelms me. We understand each other. This living man is one of my own kind, the first such I have ever met. I don't know whether to rush towards him or back away "Are you hungry?" I ask.

"I am, indeed," he says. I take a candle and go into the kitchen. This gives me a little breathing space. With the electricity down I can't give him anything warm, and there isn't much. Some cold potatoes, some cheese, the rest of the loaf, an apple, but it will help. *Better than nothing for a man who has been out in a storm* I take it back in to him, and after thanking me he eats in silence. I watch him. The storm is still raging and crashing around the house. I consider what I might ask him.

"It's lucky you found this house, out of all the village," I say, as he puts the empty plate down.

"Luck indeed," he says, "Chance, Necessity, or some god. I've no power left as I think you know."

"Why are you here?" I ask.

He sighs. "If I'm here and not somewhere else it's because all places are alike to me now. I've been wandering a long time, ever since I crossed the line fate set about me. My feet fell this way, that's all."

I didn't expect that. That wasn't what I saw. "You've been wandering aimlessly?" I ask.

"In my boat and out of it, seven years now."

"Looking for your sister?" I ask.

"She's praying." I can't help glancing at the shrine. Colin laughs, a short harsh laugh. "There's no solace for her but the Church. She's gone to them wholehearted, and I've not seen her or sought her. She'll have none of me and she's crying to their bloodless god and his dead son for forgiveness of her sins."

"Seven years. Seven years and yet the world has not been reborn. But being the midwife to that rebirth is what I saw as given you to do."

"Don't blame me," He stares into the candle. "I thought I knew everything. I thought I knew how to make a new world, a better world, an age of choice. I was so confident. But now there is nothing. The White Christ is dying, and Reason is dying, but the oracles are still silent and Pan has not been reborn. What can I do now? I am no man at all. My powers were lost when she renounced hers. I am nothing without her. I thought to make the world anew, but instead the world broke me, because she would not trust me." He drains his glass and sets it down beside his plate on the tray.

"Nobody can outstep the bounds of fate, but it is a grief to me." I say, carefully. Just then there is a flash, brighter than all the others. For a moment I think the Sky Father has struck him down where he sits, as the noise follows, louder than any thunder I ever heard. In the darkness and silence that follows, I tremble. Then I walk to the window and draw back the curtain. One of the great elms on the ridge has been struck, riven down the heart. It is burning brightly.

"That's sacred fire," Colin says, quietly. He is standing beside me, very close. I did not feel him move.

"No use to you, or to me either," The storm is moving away now, westwards. We stand there a moment in the light of the burning tree, understanding each other well enough. Then I drop the curtain and take a step

away from him. This is all too strange. I need to think and talk with the indwellers, find some balance. In the morning it will be easier.

"I think the storm is moving away," I say. He nods. "It'll be quiet enough to sleep soon, if you want to stretch out on the sofa here, I'll bring some blankets down." He nods again, and sits down. I take the candle and find blankets in the airing cupboard. Emrys wakes to hear me moving around, and I have to go in and hug him, find his bear, settle him down again. When I come back, my arms piled high with blankets and pillows, Colin is standing by the window again, gazing out at the burning tree.

"A hundred years to grow that tall," he says softly, without turning. "Struck down in an instant for growing taller than it should, for something done without knowing, trying its best to be the best it could."

"That's the way the world turns," the old spirit says, using my voice. "But it's no excuse at all for you, or anyone, not to try their best to strive to do their share."

He turns from the window, and I can see the tears plain on his cheeks. I feel an urge to put out a hand to him in comfort, to embrace him, but my arms are piled full of blankets, and the moment passes.

Chapter 6

LORD MAKER

By regulation of the heart and will
by discipline, obedience and dearth
a hard road lies to what the holy seek
but other paths lie open, straight and true.
"You said you were going to decide!"
"And I will decide. Dafni—"

"It is time now. Gone time. Pappa Andros, there is a great pile of children's shoes toppling over in the back of Yanni's shop. It is the same with every shoemaker on the island. Eleni can hardly move in her spare room for all the clothes piled up there. I said I would look after the food, and I will, but how can I until there is somewhere to keep it?"

Pappa Andros sighed heavily and ran his hands through his hair. Dafni stood firm in front of him, her feet firmly planted well apart and her hands on her hips. Every angle of her body spoke of her determination. Behind her black clad form blocking the doorway he could just see the little pomegranate tree that grew against the white wall that separated his garden from Yanni's.

"Come in and sit down, Dafni," he said, wearily. "This isn't an easy matter." Dafni took a step into the room and pulled out a wooden chair from where it was tucked under the table. The heavy red cloth fell down into the space where the chair had been. She sat, heavily, propping her elbows on the table. Pappa Andros pushed a blue plate of fresh and sticky dates towards her, smiling. Dafni took just one, ate it in three swift bites, and spat the stone through the doorway and into the garden. Then, having fulfilled the basic requirements of hospitality, she raised a quizzical brow. Pappa Andros smiled.

"To you it is all simple, isn't it? There are all these things to store, and nobody can agree about where they should be kept. Spiro is squabbling with Costa over plans and everyone who has a warehouse wants to offer it." Dafni nodded, waiting, not relaxing. She smoothed her black dress

over her lap. "Very well. But the other thing to be remembered is Pappa Thomas. He's not going to be happy about this. Not at all." Pappa Andros frowned, sighed unhappily and absent-mindedly ate a date. "He's been asking people what is going on. He's asked me. I just couldn't think what to tell him. Dafni, you're a sensible woman, the mother of grown-up children, a grandmother, you must realize that Pappa Thomas won't understand any of this. He's not one of us. He's from Athens. He's young and clever, but also foolish. He wants everything to be logical and make sense."

"He will have to learn that life isn't like that." Dafni frowned. "But even though I don't like him much either, he is a priest. Are you saying he doesn't believe?"

"I'm saying he's not going to believe this. He's going to call it superstition and blasphemy. Superstition is what he calls everything that is not explained. Fortunate for him that he lives after the days of Ag. Pavlos and those wise fathers of the church Origen and Thomas Aquinas who managed to explain so much so cleverly, or he could not be a priest at all. He won't be able to explain this unless he is cleverer than I think. He is trying to find out what is going on. As soon as he does, or as soon as he has a real suspicion or proof of anything at all he's going to write to the new bishop. He's done that before about various customs of ours, and the old bishop always took the very sensible position that traditions are traditional and ought to be upheld. I don't know what the new bishop will say. He can't say that about this, anyway. Nobody could say that it is traditional to make children's shoes for Great Pan."

Dafni grinned, and took another date. "It may be one day. Like Easter eggs and Christmas stockings." Pappa Andros groaned. "Go on," said Dafni, reaching over and patting his arm.

"Well. In any case, the bishop is in Nafplia, and he's not due to come here for months yet. I don't think he'll take Pappa Thomas seriously, not at first. He won't believe it either, and he'll have a file of letters so he can see that Pappa Thomas complains quite often. But sooner or later he will start to pay attention. Or he'll think that Pappa Thomas has gone mad, or that I have. He'll write to both of us, I expect, and I shall have to think what to say. Whatever I say, he will come then, I think. He is a good man and a wise man, the new bishop—"

Dafni laughed. "I hear he's too fond of figs and spiced meatballs to be a truly holy man."

"The same could be said of me," said Pappa Andros, taking a pale brown date from the plate and turning it in his hand. "I am fond of food

and wine, and of my wife. But also I love Christ and Ag. Nikolaos and all the Holy Saints and I do my best not to be a bad priest to all of you on the island."

Dafni nodded. "That is true, Pappa, you're right. You are a good priest, and a good man. It is Pappa Thomas who would set the church apart from the world."

"That is the Roman way but it has never been our way in Greece. I wonder sometimes if Pappa Thomas thinks too much of Rome. But, well, in any case," Pappa Andros ate the date in two swift snaps and tossed the stone through the open door. "The bishop is not a fool, and I am bound to tell him the truth. Anything could happen then. But he is not likely to be happy, I don't think. Change is a frightening thing to a lot of people. A great change like this especially. All the world will be different, and we can't say for sure how. All we can do is our best to make it a good place, as always."

"Yes, Pappa. But what does this have to do with storing the things?"

Pappa Andros smiled. "Nothing diverts you from your purpose, does it Dafni? Well, it's like this. We do not know when Great Pan will be reborn. Your son's visitor neglected to give him this important information. So we do not know how long we have. The longer the better for making shoes and clothes and preparing things. But the shorter the better for Pappa Thomas interfering. While the things are a few in one place and a few in another they are not visible to him as things on their own, only as part of people's lives. He does not pay much attention to details like a pile of clothes, a pile of shoes. But once the things are collected somewhere special however careful we are he will become aware of what is going on. This is probably true however good and hidden a place we find to keep them."

Dafni nodded slowly. The priest stroked his beard. "This is why I have been delaying all this time, hearing the claims of one warehouse and another."

"But sooner or later you will have to decide. If you leave it too late then everything will be scattered when we need it."

"That is another thing that makes it difficult to decide where to keep it. We do not know where we will need it."

"Why—" Dafni leaned back in her chair, rocking the front feet off the red flagged floor. "Surely Great Pan will be reborn where he died, in the grove on the mountain they call Pan's Grave? I have not been up there since I was courting my Elias, but I remember where it is."

"It would seem likely," agreed Pappa Andros. "but it is by no means certain that it is there that the shoes and things will be needed. They could be needed here in the town, or over in Stavros." Pappa Andros wondered why Dafni frowned at the mention of the little fishing village on the other side of the island. "We don't know why they're needed after all. If we knew more, we could make better plans. I think for now it is best to keep them in the town."

"In one place," said Dafni firmly.

"Soon."

"Soon might be too late. They might be needed tomorrow."

"I don't think so." Pappa Andros rubbed his beard thoughtfully and stared at the reddening fruit on the pomegranate tree outside. "There are various times it could be, but I do not think it will be a day of no account. But there are few days of no account, so I don't know. Most likely would be Easter, I think. It was Easter that he died, after all. Easter is a time of Spring, and of rebirth, resurrection. It is a long time before another Easter. Or it might be Panaghias. The Feast of the Assumption of the Holy Virgin. August 15th. That was an old festival to Pan the Most Holy before it became associated with the Holy Mother." he shrugged "Or it might be Christmas, certainly a time of birth—"

Dafni raised a hand. "I have a thought. This is all just speculation. I shall tell Yanni to ask these questions when next he has a visitor. But thinking about Panaghias reminded me. Manoli and Evadni, the boat-builders, you know them?"

"Of course."

"Well that reminded me of them, the boat they're building for then. Never mind now, the important thing is that they have a warehouse on the beach, down near their workshop. A large one, which they use for storage, mostly for seasoning wood. It was more than half empty last time I was in it. That is a warehouse on the shore which does not stink of fish, which anyone might have a reason to visit, away from prying eyes and yet near to wherever the things might be needed."

"It will still make it easier for Pappa Thomas to work out what is going on, and maybe try to stop it." frowned Pappa Andros. "But you are right, that is a very good suggestion, and one which will go down well among those who are squabbling to have their plan adopted, because it is nobody's plan but yours. Well done. I will go down there now myself and speak to Evadni and Manoli about it." The priest got to his feet decisively.

"Good, very good," said Dafni. "And if we should find out that after all they will be needed away in Stavros, my youngest, Taxeia, seems to be courting a boy from that village, and maybe his mother will know where they can be kept."

"That is good news, my best wishes to them both," said Pappa Andros.

"Oh, I still have hopes she will see sense," said Dafni, grimly, pushing back her grey coils of hair as she followed him out into the sunshine.

The shingle of the shore slipped under Pappa Andros' sandals as he walked out to the boatbuilders' workshop. He did not often have reason to come down on the beach. The sea sparkled, blue and ruffled in the little breeze. There were tourists sunbathing and swimming, and a single red-sailed yacht anchored far out in the bay. Pappa Andros stepped over the wooden runners that led from the workshop to the water's edge. He noticed several fishing boats, keel-up in the stones, waiting for repairs of different sorts. A well-muscled fair haired man he did not recognise was applying a double fold of fibre-glass to one of them. He was stripped to the waist and wearing cut off jeans and leather sandals. He must be someone the boatbuilders had hired to help in their busy time, Pappa Andros thought, approving how neatly he worked.

At the side of the workshop, on a kind of wooden scaffold, stood the skeleton of a wooden sailing ship. Evadni was perched up on a cross-beam intently working on it, specialised tools which the priest did not recognise in her hands and hung about her. As he approached, Manoli came out of the workshop, holding up a small can in his hands.

"I've found it!" he called up to his sister. Then he saw Pappa Andros and came forward, smiling a puzzled welcome.

"What brings you here, Pappa?" he asked.

"Excuse me if I don't get down!" called Evadni from her perch. "But I can't until this is done."

"I wanted to ask you both a favour," said Pappa Andros. "But there is no hurry. What are you doing?"

"Ah, I thought you'd come to see the ship that saved Christendom from the Turk," laughed Evadni. "That's what we're doing. We're building one of the galleases for the Lepanto re-enactment this summer. We're to build another when this one is done."

"There were six in the real battle," said Manoli, handing Evadni the little can. "But they're going to manage with two. It will all be done on a smaller scale. And it will be right out there." He gestured. "The Turks will come from there—" he pointed to the bay of Nafpaktos across the water, "And the Crusade will come from there." He pointed South. "Our

two ships will be part of the Crusade, of course. The Turkish galleys are being built in Algeria. Boat builders all round the Mediterranean are giving thanks to Ag. Nikolaos for the opportunity."

"I thought I'd seen you in church more often recently," said Pappa Andros, smiling. "Who is paying for all this?"

"Some American millionaire, apparently," said Evadni, "But it is being organised by some Roumanian Church." She laughed, taking the lid off the can and filling the air with a pungent odour. "Mad idea, isn't it? But it wouldn't be a Greek one. Nothing to us, really. Even though the battle was fought right here whenever it was—" she glanced down at Manoli.

"1571," he said, sighing as he picked up a chisel. "Why do you always forget?"

"Well, 1571, by then Greece was pretty thoroughly lost to the Turk already." She spat. "Four hundred years before we were free of them. My grandfather used to tell me about when they pulled down the mosque in the town. He said when he was a boy he used to go outside the mosque when they were praying and jumble up their shoes. Or maybe that was his father did that, when he was a boy. He knew Byron, you know."

"If the Turk had won at Lepanto there would have been no Byron. No help from the rest of Europe in 1832, if it had all been Ottoman." said Manoli, in the tone of one who had said the same thing before.

"We would have won free anyway," his sister said. "That was destiny, that we would lose and then win free again. Battles, dates, details, what is all that to us? The good thing about this battle is that they are playing at doing it again and paying us to build the boats for it. But people will come from all over the world to sail on both sides. A great Christian victory, they are calling it. The Last Crusade. And afterwards the ships will go to California, to San Francisco for another re-enactment there." Pappa Andros looked out at the quiet waters of the gulf in front of them. It was hard to imagine them full of ships fighting each other. He looked back, and saw the hired stranger limping back towards the fishing boat from the warehouse, another fold of fibreglass lying across his arms.

"In any case," said Manoli doggedly, catching Pappa Andros' eye. "It was an important battle. It proved that sailing ships were better than rowed galleys. These—" he slapped one of the timbers of the ship. "won the day for Don John of Austria. After that nobody built any more galleys, and all the slaves that used to toil rowing them were free." He looked up at Evadni. "A change in the style of ships! Is that important enough for you?" Evadni laughed again, leaning forward into the framework.

"It must be nice for you to have a chance to build a wooden ship in the old way," said Pappa Andros diplomatically. This time it was Manoli's turn to grin up at Evadni.

"I have been saying that," he said. "But she doesn't like it so much. Ever since she went to Athens to learn it she has wanted to work in fibreglass all the time."

"It is the way of the future," she said, firmly and decisively, leaning back and handing the can back down to Manoli. "Fibreglass and steel."

"She's just frustrated because she wants to design battleships and she only ever gets the chance to build fishing-boats. It's in the blood. Our father was exactly the same, and so is my younger son, who wants to make a submarine. I am happy to build what it is possible to build on this beach. I tell him if he wants to make submarines he will have to go to Athens."

Evadni snorted. "That's done. Now I shall come down, Pappa, and we shall all have a break and sit down and talk. And you shall meet our new assistant, who is also fond of fibreglass. And I shall find you some refreshment. This, you will notice, my lazy and so practical brother has neglected even though he has had his feet on the ground the whole time we have been talking. We will sit and be civilised and you shall tell us what it is that brings you all this way out here to honour us with a visit."

Chapter 7

THE BURNING TREE

(Deirdre)

All lit within but never burning up
you know the answer to the sun's embrace
to stand so firm, an equal, unafraid
to keep the hearth alive though ash grow cold.

Emrys wakes me to tell me there is a burning tree. I have slept long and it is late. Rubbing sleep and the latest of my dreams from my eyes, I pad through to look out of the window of his bedroom. He's right. Clear on the slope in the fresh and rain-washed morning, the stricken elm burns with the familiar clear glow of wood that burns and is not consumed. A burning tree, real before my eyes, no dream at all. The sky is palest blue, and the grass has fresh green beginning, thinking of spring. The other trees reach bare towards the sky. Emrys pounds my leg.

"It's magic," I explain, staring at it. "It is a wonder. Sky Father sent the lightning in the night." Everything seems different. It is at once more real and mundane than last night, and also stranger. I swallow, my hand rising to my cheek. My dreams were confused, always on the point of resolving into some point of clarity and focus but never finding it. The burning tree had been in them all. If there was ever any doubt that it was sacred fire, or a divine lightning strike, it is gone. Emrys sits on the windowsill and gazes out, turned serious.

"Will other people see it?" he asks. A good question. *A very good question.*

"I don't know." I reply, honestly. We watch it for a while, then I remember Emrys doesn't know about Colin. "There is a man downstairs."

"I know." Emrys says, in the familiar tone of a six year old being told the obvious. He twists on the sill, looking away from the tree and up towards me. "The broken man. I saw him in my dream. He has come to take me away."

"That he has not." I am startled, and find I am bending down and holding Emrys tight. He wriggles away, as so often. *Don't think of him as half a child and half a god. All child, he is, though godlike.* says the old indweller who came to me last night. *And the dreams come from our side of the family* adds my grandmother, with a touch of pride. *If he must go, he must* says another voice, wistful. I smooth his blond hair. He's too young to leave me. In a few years, maybe that's what he saw. Colin. *The broken man* a voice echoes. I shiver.

"Let's go down and see him. And eat breakfast!" suggests Emrys, scrambling down.

"Dress first!" I insist. I hand him his clothes from where they are flung over the back of a chair. I go back to my own room to dress. I pause to try the light. Good, the electricity is working again. Doing these routine things, the things I do every day, washing, dressing, everything seems stranger than ever. My clothes don't feel right. My shirt has the shadows of different shirts and blouses and jerkins and plaids and I fumble with the buttons.

My windows look West and South, I can't see the tree. *Why are you worried, girl? You always knew it was real, as if the child wasn't proof enough for you* Yes, but even so, if it's all going to come alive again in the waking world? There is excitement in the muttering I can't make out, and the same excitement begins to swell in my heart too.

Emrys is ready first, but he waits for me finish brushing my hair before we go down. I go towards the kitchen, deliberately making a clatter on the stairs. Colin opens the front room door, awake and dressed. Well, he had nothing to change into, dressing can't have taken long. *What is he thinking of to walk the roads with nothing? /Grieving, most like/ He thinks too much on his grief /And how long has he been wearing those clothes? Past time he washed./*

"Morning," I say, awkwardly. The spirits hide behind my eyes and don't prompt me. He looks up at me, equally awkwardly. Emrys thrusts himself forward.

"Hello!" he says. "I dreamed about you."

"Did you now?" Colin asks, looking at him closely.

"Have you seen the tree?"

"The tree struck by lightning? I saw it in the night." Ah, he has not seen it.

"Come and see!" says Emrys, excitedly. I walk into the front room. He has folded the blankets neatly on one of the chairs. Good. I draw open the mottled brown and gold folds of the curtain. Clear on the slope

above us the tree still burns steadily. One thing only have I seen burning like that before, the sun's chariot.

I look away from it after a little while. Emrys has climbed onto the chair so he can see better. The look on Colin's face is beyond understanding. Not quite wonder, nor yet longing, but something powerful is moving him in that direction if I can judge at all. He catches me looking at him. "Fire from heaven. A sign, but who sent it, and with what intention?" he asks.

Does he expect me to be able to answer? *What would he know of the Sight?*

"It is a wonder." Emrys says, repeating the words I told him.

Colin looks down at him where he stands, the pale winter sunlight reflecting from his golden hair. "A wonder indeed." he says, looking from the child to the tree, and then straight into my face.

For an instant I think the indwellers will speak through me again, but nothing comes, and I just look at him. Now his hair is dry I see how it is coarse and heavy and dark, like mine. The lines on his face show clear in the daylight. He needs a shave. "Come into the kitchen and eat breakfast." I suggest. *Yes, feed them, always a good thing to do first.*

"Mam!" Emrys says, indignant. "I want to go and see the tree. I want to go and see the tree *now*." I never give in to that tone of voice, but the way Colin is looking at me tells me he wants to go and see the tree *now* too, and I laugh. I could not in truth eat just yet, without seeing the tree close up myself.

"Put on your boots and coat, then," I say, smiling, and Emrys hugs me as he runs past.

Colin turns to me. "A good child. I'd like to have the fostering of him." My mouth opens, but no words come out. "What's wrong?" he asks.

"You—I —That's not—" my own voice sounds weak and choked and catches in my throat. "That isn't the sort of thing people say in this day and age."

To my surprise he laughs. It makes his face look quite different. "Neither are the things you were saying to me last night." I can't help smiling back, a little. Upstairs Emrys is singing as he pulls on his boots. "We're neither of us quite of this time, or quite otherwise," he continues. "and how old is little Emrys Louis?"

"Six, two weeks ago," I say.

"Born on Imbolc? And conceived on Beltaine?" I nod. "Beltaine seven years ago?" I nod again, strangely shy. A spark of hope has woken in his eyes. It shines out at me. "Then that is a child growing fast. He is not like

a child of six but one of eight or nine. He is a god's child, and you know what that means. He needs teaching. I have no power, but I have knowledge still. I know what he must learn and I can help him towards it. If the gods have sent me into your path here, maybe that is why."

I do not answer his words, but the glow in his eyes. "You think my son is the new Necessity?" Emrys is coming downstairs again, clattering in his boots. Colin does not answer, but looks at the burning tree, and his own face seems to be burning. "There have been others such." I say.

"Others, yes, the Holy Ones have sons and daughters in every age. That is what I thought it. But he is different. How was it? You have made a bargain. Did the Lady of Love lead the Lord of Light here?"

I cannot answer him. He glances over at the shrine. "Would you be content to stay here and teach him?" I ask instead. Emrys is who he is, that will be his choice. But part of me would like Colin to stay here. I do not often acknowledge it, but I am lonely, despite the indwellers. I live between two worlds I only partly understand. Some people say I am a witch, and others call me mad. My own mother walks past me in the street and does not speak. I swore to keep the hearth, and so I will, but it is hard alone. I was so young then, with the voices new woken inside me. I did not fully understand all it meant, to be the bride of the god.

"My head says I would stay," he says, as Emrys comes in, pulling on his yellow raincoat. "But my heart tells me I have far to travel."

"And your soul?" I ask, picking up on my own coat. "Get Colin's jacket from the hall." I tell Emrys. He goes, obediently.

"My soul is broken," he says, taking my coat and holding it for me with rueful courtesy. "Between us we had one and a half souls. We could have done anything. We had more power than ever anyone in this age of the world. Without her—" he hesitates, as Emrys comes back in. I fasten my coat. He pulls on his jacket. From the way he touches it I can tell it is not quite dry yet.

It will be quicker to go through the kitchen and out of the back door. I lead the way. Emrys stops me with a wordless exclamation.

"My Batman! You broke my Batman!" His tone is accusing. He holds up a black plastic figure, cracked and crushed.

I remember it breaking under my foot in the dark. Why did it have to be that one, of all his toys? "I'm sorry. It was dark. You shouldn't have left it on the floor."

His bottom lip sticks out and begins to quiver. "It was my *favourite*."

"Was it now?" asks Colin, gently, from behind. "And why was that?"

"Because his arms and legs move." Emrys holds up the ruined toy to demonstrate. He still sounds peevish, but I do not think he will cry.

"Once I could have mended that with a touch," Colin says, stroking it gently. "You could learn to do that, Emrys."

"Mend plastic?" Scornfully.

"Anything that was once alive. And plastic was alive once, it was oil and before that it was fish and swimming things."

"Fish?" The spirits and I are fascinated to see the man begin to teach the boy like this. I open the back door, and we all go out into the watery sunlight. Emrys leads the way. The grass is very wet. The burning tree is directly up the slope that shelters the house to the East.

"You may stay and teach him, if that suits," I say, quietly, as we walk. "But he is too young to leave me yet."

"In the Brehon laws it is written that a child is ready for fostering at seven. Whatever he grows to be he must learn the way of the world. I admit I might hope he will be the one to set the pattern." He looks at me, for the first time slightly uncertain. "I have raised no children, nor fostered any, but I feel I know enough."

He looks like a man who has found purpose after too long without. It will do Emrys much good and no harm to learn from him. *No matter how much you love them, every child must be let go when it is time.* "He will be seven in a year."

"Does he go to school?"

"To the school in the village. The priest knows about him. People talk, of course, they have nothing better to do. But they can do no more than talk. The house is mine, left to me by my grandmother, with a little money. I make a little more doing embroidery on linen for a firm in—" we are interrupted in these practicalities by Emrys reaching the top of the slope and shouting. I rush forward, Colin beside me. It is strange to walk beside someone whose stride is as long as my own, after so long.

"Come on!" shouts Emrys again.

From nearby the tree is even more impressive. The flames dance on the wood, flickering and changing, red and red-gold and orange and yellow and blue. They give no heat. The whole tree burns, every branch and twig is limned with fire. I extend a hand to the flame's edge. There is still no heat. I raise both arms, palms flat towards the tree, as if warming them before a fire, or as if about to commence an act of invocation. I move closer, and press my palms against the smooth bark of the bole. The flame licks around my hands, without any harm. It flickers round my wrists, but no farther. I never thought to see my hands like that

again. Colin reaches out, strangely timid for a man who has done so much, and touches a branch. A touch is enough, he steps back.

Then Emrys comes up beside me. "Mam?" he asks. I look down at him. "Can I?"

He has no fear, but he waits for my decision. I nod. It cannot harm him, child of fire, and he should share in this wonder. He copies what I did, raising his hands and then pressing them forward. As he touches the tree the fire suddenly leaps out and engulfs him, so that for a moment he is truly godlike, like his father, ringed about with flame. He and the tree are one, burning brightly together. Then, abruptly, the fire goes out. The tree is just a stricken elm, blackened by the levin-fire that fell in the night. Emrys slowly steps away. I wonder if he will cry, but he does not. He looks up at me, his blue eyes unfathomable. I take my hands off the tree and bend down, opening my arms to him. Colin touches the branch he touched before, and with a crack I hear clearly it breaks in his hand.

Emrys hugs me, and then sudden as a change in the wind runs off down the slope, yelling "Breakfast!" Colin and I look at each other and shrug, then follow him back down the slope towards the house.

It is more like lunch than breakfast by this time. With all the bread and cheese Colin ate last night there isn't much left. I scour the cupboard. He and Emrys eat cereal and yoghurt while I boil eggs. I take them from the packet and slide them into the pan, the indwellers remembering how they feel warm in the palm and messy from the nesting box. I should start keeping hens myself, there is room. I make a pot of tea, putting on the cosy to let it brew. Emrys finishes his cereal and brings the milk in. He takes his responsibility seriously, and walks slowly with the bottle, reaching up to put it on the table.

"I wonder if the milkman saw the burning tree?" he asks, as he slides into his place.

"I saw it with plain eyes," replies Colin, which is as good an answer as I could give. I set down the eggs in front of them, and pour the tea and Emrys' milk. *Hospitality again in this pouring out.* Then I sit beside Emrys. Colin takes an egg, I take one. Our fingers do not touch, we have not touched at all. He is smiling sadly at me as he sets the egg in the cup. I do not know what he knows. On the table in front of him lies the broken branch. He didn't have to ask my permission to stay. I have given him sanctuary. He could stay forever if he wanted to. I want to ask him lots of things, but none of them seem right in daylight, with Emrys here. Luckily Emrys chatters, covering my silence.

Colin answers his questions, leading him to knowledge through his own direction, patient and sure. It will be good for them both if he stays. Good for the boy to learn more than I can teach, and good for the man to have rest and a little peace for a while. He looks as if he has been wandering alone seven years, weather-beaten, tired, dirty, his hands and face roughened with sun and wind even now, at the very end of winter. Good for me too, to have company. I leave them talking and go in to the shrine, as I do every morning. Moving the stones restores my peace and brings a balance I have not known since I first saw him on the road. It is given to me to stay in this place, to keep the hearth, to wait. All will be well. As I finish I remember the charred branch Colin brought in. I go back to the kitchen to fetch it.

Colin is standing by the sink, washing up, Emrys is putting dishes away. *What sort of man would turn his hand to women's work?* Hush, grandma, a good sort.

"Shall I set this branch in the shrine?" I ask, picking it up.

Colin turns, and nods, then dries his hands. "Come and see," he urges Emrys.

They follow me through into the front room. My sewing waits beside the chair near the window. They stand behind me and I set down the piece of wood in its place. I am turning away, about to speak, when vision strikes me, terrible and clear and very far away. This is not like the flashes I am accustomed to. It is searing and terrible. I stand in a place only the Fates can bear. The images pile on too fast, I can not endure it, my mind will break. I think I cry out nonsense as I fall "No more niceness! No more doom! Three dead mice in the womb, tomb, room!" Then He is there, in the mind's sight, standing protectively between the vision and me. *Ah my beloved, you have come!* He smiles fondly at me, holding back the flow until it is bearable. I know even so I cannot endure it very long.

Although He is all around me, Colin is bending over me. I catch my breath, and try to make sense of what I see. The kaleidoscope images are still whirling. Clearest is the child, thrown over a shoulder.

"They have taken the child!" I say, urgently. Colin glances at Emrys, puzzled. "Not my child. Your child. Your daughter. And other children. Lots of them. Dying children, children of power, and the children of gods. They won't wait. They will kill their own faith too. They will water the tree with the blood of dying children. They will make a compost of corpses." I hug Emrys close in my arms, and for once he does not resist, he lets me. His father is still guarding me. Even so I am weeping and

rocking to and fro. The indwellers are frightened of me, of the force of the vision, cowering together at the back of my head. I want to laugh and weep and scream. Without His help I would snap.

Colin kneels beside the sofa where I am, perched on the edge. How did I get here? I was standing by the shrine? "Where should I go?"

"I see you," my voice sounds as if it comes from far away. "I see you gliding in your wooden boat, passing between green islands in dark blue sea, under hot sun. Emrys is with you, and a woman."

"Marie?" he asks.

I cannot help laughing, almost choking on it. "Oh no, not Night, she has given up doing and being both. You will not speak again in this life." I draw breath and try to straighten myself up. "I do not know where they are, Colin O'Niall, you know if I did I would tell you. I know where they will be. They will be in the islands, in Greece, at Lughnasa, and they will try to kill them then, on the stone, a dark stone under the trees. Do you know who they are?"

"I—" he hesitates. "I know who they might be. There are many impatient to see a new world." Emrys pats my face and gently pulls away. His eyes meet his father's for a moment. Then the Lord of Light begins to close the gates of vision. He draws away, and I fall back on the sofa, my eyes closed.

"You have to go," I hear myself saying, in my grandmother's voice. "Look after him!" With a great effort I force my eyes open again.

"I shall." Colin is looking at me straight and serious, then he puts out a hand to touch my scarred cheek. He holds it there a moment, still, his palm and fingers covering the palm and finger prints set on my face. Then I raise my hand to touch his face. I hold it there for an instant, and we look at each other. Then I am falling again, falling deep down into darkness and know no more until I wake again in my own bed, utterly alone in the empty house in the cold dawn light.

GIVER OF FRUITS

In purposes you cannot hope to guess
they listen to your words and heed your prayers
and strive to fill their shape and bow to me
yet to the wise they speak with double-tongues.

Spiro liked to close up his shop before sunset and walk down to the harbour. Almost every day he would find his friend Mikalis there, sitting on one of the mooring bollards talking to the fishermen. Then he could persuade Mikalis to come and sit down in one of the many harbour front tavernas. The two men would sit and drink cups of hot thrice-boiled coffee metrio, with glasses of clear water. Mikalis would turn his amber kombouloi, worry beads, over and over in his gnarled old fingers and talk slowly to Spiro. They would take bites of the little dish of meze the waiter brought them without asking, strong feta cheese and salty black olives. Without any hurry at all Mikalis would listen to Spiro talk about his day, and without saying much the old man would somehow smooth out all Spiro's problems and put everything in perspective. After spending sunset with Mikalis, Spiro could cope with going home to his beautiful demanding Athenian wife and their children, could cope with another day's need to prove himself the best shoemaker on the island even if he was not the one chosen by the gods.

On days when he closed up late, Mikalis would be gone before Spiro reached the harbour. He wouldn't go into the taverna alone, and he wouldn't linger longer than the time it naturally took him to chat with his friends. Mikalis had a lot of friends. He was a contemporary of Spiro's dead father, Elias, and many people looked to him for advice. Spiro had never told him how important that hour they spent together was to him. Mikalis naturally thought that on days Spiro didn't appear, Spiro had something better to do than spend time with an old man. He didn't know that on those days Spiro spent a discontented evening, and sometimes beat his children and shouted at his wife. He didn't know that

the days after those evenings Spiro's work never went well. Spiro didn't want him to know. Nevertheless, Spiro knew. That was why he was always in a hurry to close up the shutters and lock the doors. It was why he fidgeted when customers came in late. It was why his heart sank into his finely made boots when he saw Pappa Thomas come into his shop just as he was finishing the tiny delicate stitching around the straps of a pair of children's sandals, as the shadows began to lengthen.

"Spiro!" said Pappa Thomas, walking into the middle of the shop.

"Pappa?" Spiro slid a sheet of uncut leather over his work, and stood up.

"How are you doing, Spiro?"

"Fine, Pappa, fine. And you? What brings you here? Surely you're not looking for shoes?" The two men laughed jovial false laughs. The next natural move would have been for Spiro to invite the priest to sit down and take some refreshment. To do anything else would be to deny him hospitality. But it was nearly sunset, and Spiro wanted to be going. "To tell you the truth, Pappa, I was about to shut up the shop," he said. "Did you want something here, or would you care to walk down to the harbour with me and have a coffee there?"

"That would be very pleasant, Spiro," said Pappa Thomas. "It is a very hot day, and there is always a breeze off the water." It seemed no hotter than any other day in Ithyka, to Spiro, but he saw that the little dark-bearded priest was sweating in his robes. Spiro did not clean and put away his tools, as he usually did. He just straightened the sheet of leather on the workbench and started to pull the shutters tight and latch them. The young priest watched him. When the shop was locked up the two men walked together down the narrow street.

The white painted houses were close together here, and there was only just room for the two men to walk together under the shade of the vines. Spiro noticed the priest stealing glances up at him as they walked along in silence in the quiet street. It made him feel uncomfortable. He tried to think of something to say, but could settle on nothing. They came out into a wider street, bustling with donkeys and people. An old woman with a basket of flowers on her head pushed between them to offer a red rose to Stellio's youngest daughter, who was just coming out of the electrical repair shop. As she took the rose, Spiro saw the swell in her belly that meant she was expecting. He turned to Pappa Thomas, smiling, but he saw that the priest had seen and was looking shocked. Come to think of it, he couldn't remember the girl marrying. Oh well, these things happened. Maybe not the thing to talk about to a straight-laced priest

from the mainland, but nothing to make a fuss about. He kept quiet, but led the way forward. They turned again, onto another narrow lane that led down to the harbour.

The reflections of the sun on the water were dazzling. The wind blew straight of the bay. The fishing boats bobbed at their moorings, and a little water slopped over here and there onto the cobbled quay. Most of them were still deserted, it was a little earlier than the time Spiro normally came down. There was no sign of Mikalis. The two men seated themselves at an outside table at one of the tavernas. Spiro ordered met-río, and Pappa Thomas ordered an iced coffee.

Until the drinks arrived they talked of the wind, and the conditions for fishing. Pappa Thomas seemed uncomfortable. He kept tracing the edges of the red and white squares that made up the tin table-top. The waiter brought the drinks on a tray held high. He set them down with a flourish, each accompanied by their own large glass of water, the glass bigger than Spiro's cup. Spiro paid, and scanned the harbour. The old woman with flowers was making her way along the front, selling posies to passers-by. There was still no sign of Mikalis.

"There was something I wanted to ask you, Spiro." Pappa Thomas began, after they had each taken a sip of their coffees. "It is about Yanni."

"Yanni, Pappa?"

"Everyone says you are the best of the shoemakers?" The priest smiled, expectantly at Spiro.

"It is true that people say that," Spiro said, "They are very kind."

"But Yanni holds some special position among shoemakers nonetheless?" Spiro felt very uncomfortable. He had heard Pappa Thomas preach many times, and he knew he wouldn't be happy hearing about the sandals of the gods.

"It is true, Pappa," he said, cautiously.

"And so there is a little rivalry between you and Yanni?" asked the priest, still smiling kindly.

"One might say so." said Spiro, wondering where this was leading.

"Well, then, will you tell me about Yanni's party?"

"Yanni's party, Pappa?"

"You were there?" Pappa Thomas eyes narrowed, looking at Spiro.

"I was there, yes. What about it?"

"Nobody will tell me what happened." Spiro took another sip of his coffee, then set the cup down carefully.

"Why is that, Pappa?" he asked.

"I don't know." The priest held up a hand. "I am not asking you to tell me if you have sworn an oath not to. The way nobody has said a word after it was first let slip to me, tells me that something like that has happened. And I do not want you to lie to me. Not because, as you will have been told, that it is bad luck to lie to a priest. That is superstition. You should not lie to me, or to anyone, because lying is breaking the Ninth Commandment."

"I wasn't going to lie, Pappa." At last, Spiro spotted Mikalis coming along the quay.

"Good. Good. I didn't think you were, Spiro. But you weren't going to tell me what happened, either, were you?" Spiro said nothing. He squirmed a little under the other's beady gaze.

"It would be very difficult to explain, Pappa," he said at last.

"So there is something disgraceful and disreputable and possibly heretical going on on this island of Ithyka, right here in the town where I have my church, and nobody will tell me about it."

Spiro looked away. What on earth could he say? Mikalis had paused by the boat *Eleftheria*, a third of the harbour away, and was exchanging words with the old man aboard her. The sleepy harbour was slowly starting to wake up as the sun slipped behind the hill. He looked back. Pappa Thomas was still waiting.

"It isn't as bad as that, Pappa." he said at last.

"As bad as what?" the priest said, jumping on Spiro's words. "Spiro, I came to you because you are not a close friend of Yanni's. And because you and Eleni and the children come regularly to Ag. Paraskevi's on Sundays. I know you are good Christians. None of this makes sense. I am worried that Pappa Andros has gone mad. He just laughs at me and babbles nonsense. I shall have to write to the bishop. There will be an inquiry. I need to know what to say—if I am vague it will sound terrible. They will come to investigate. It will all come out sooner or later, and sooner is better than later." The priest tugged at his neat black beard as he spoke.

"It's not as bad as you think," repeated Spiro. There was nothing for it but to explain. "Don't feel hurt. What it is, it is not heresy or disgraceful. It is simply that Great Pan is to be reborn, and the world will change. We are just preparing some—some charitable supplies, ready for that."

"Nonsense!" snapped Pappa Thomas. "Absolute twaddle. You expect me to believe that poppycock?"

"It is the truth, really." Spiro took another tiny sip of his drink. "I expect God will send you a dream soon to tell you, or something of that kind."

"What nonsense. All these island superstitions. I thought you were a rational man, Spiro?"

"That is Eleni, she is a rational woman. I am just a shoemaker, I don't think about these things. I have lived here all my life." Spiro turned his empty cup unhappily in his hands, looking at the thick brown sludge lining the bottom.

"I shall have to tell the bishop. We will have to remove Pappa Andros. I shall have to preach a special service."

Spiro looked up and drew breath, when Mikalis passed in front of the taverna, and raised a hand to them. The old man looked tired. Spiro stood up. "Mikalis!" he called. "Come and join us." The old man came over and stood by the table.

"Pappa," he said, nodding his head to the priest.

"Pappa Thomas, you know my good friend, and my father's good friend Mikalis?"

"I think we have met," said the priest, standing up. "You are one of the builders who carried stone for the sea defence?" Mikalis nodded, and they all sat down again together, Mikalis pulling up a wooden chair from the next table. Spiro ordered more coffees. Mikalis looked quizzically at Spiro. Spiro sighed.

"I was just telling the Pappa how Pan is to be reborn, and he doesn't believe me." Spiro explained.

"Rank superstition. Completely contrary to reason." Pappa Thomas almost ignored Mikalis, focusing on Spiro.

"Does God answer to reason?" Mikalis asked, sitting back and crossing his legs.

"God can be proved to exist, certainly. St. Anselm—" Pappa Thomas paused, took a sip from his glass and set it down. "It is a difficult argument, but one which convinced me without any doubt as a young man."

"It seems to me you are a young man still," said Mikalis, his eyes twinkling. "Do not bother to explicate the proofs of the existence of God to an old peasant like me, or a shoemaker like Spiro. It is quite certain that we wouldn't understand." The priest blushed, looking from one of them to the other.

"That wasn't what I meant!" he protested, feebly. Spiro laughed.

"Let us take it as proven," Mikalis said, taking out his kombouloi and beginning to turn them in his fingers, "As the holy ones and wise fathers

of old have demonstrated, that God exists. I do not think any of us here will dispute that today. What I asked was something different, whether he answers to reason. Is he bound to behave by the laws of reason? For surely reason is his own creation."

Pappa Thomas looked at Mikalis, and frowned. "Reason? All things must obey reason."

"Reason, mind itself, the ability to construct arguments, all are created by God?"

"Of course. But—"

"So must God obey his own creation?" Mikalis sat back in his chair, and the waiter, as if on cue, brought the tray of coffees, glasses of water, and a little dish of meze. Mikalis helped himself to an olive, and licked his fingers.

"I see you are a philosopher," said Pappa Thomas, taking up his glass. Spiro laughed again, and slapped Mikalis on the shoulder. It was good of the old man to rescue him like that. Of course he was a philosopher. Although he had worked as a labourer in Ithyka since before Spiro was born, everyone knew that he had been educated in Athens and Paris, long ago. He had come back to his native island saying that there was more wisdom here than anywhere in the world. The islanders boasted of it still.

"I would not go so far as to say so. Though you are right that I have studied such things. But will you answer the question?"

"The question? Must God obey reason? Yes, of course he must." The priest looked a little flustered. Mikalis ate another olive.

"Even though it is his own creation?"

"I—that is to say, yes." The priest was staring intently at Mikalis.

"Why?"

"Because reason... reason—" Pappa Thomas was sweating and shifting in his seat now. "Reason, that is to say, rationality, logic, the word, is part of God." He gave a sigh of relief and took a large mouthful of his iced coffee. Spiro ate a piece of cheese.

"Ah, so it says in the bible," agreed Mikalis, amicably. "And so it has been for this latest age of the world, the age that was born with Luther, both The Word and The Flesh have been in the ascendant. But what of what stands beside them, the Mythos, the web of story out of which arise these despised superstitions you mention? That has been neglected, though less so in places like these islands, as you so rightly note. Now maybe it is time for a new age in the world. I have heard you say so."

"I have said so—"

"Indeed you have. And maybe it is time for another Age of Faith to replace this Age of Reason?"

"I am surprised to hear you say so. Reason is the way of the future, beyond dispute. Televisions. Satellites. Microwave dishes allowing us to speak by telephone to the mainland. Computers. Air conditioning. Spaceships. All these are the inventions of reason." Pappa Thomas was becoming agitated and leaning forward, ignoring Spiro completely to focus on Mikalis.

"They are indeed. And they are the inventions of this past age. But I see no reason why a future age should lack them, though it be an age of wonder."

"You talk as if the present age is ended already," muttered the priest. Just then the old woman with the basket of flowers came into the taverna. Spiro watched her as she sold a rose to a tourist couple. The man paid for it and the woman fastened it into her hair. He wondered if he should buy one to take home to Eleni. He gestured to the woman, then walked across to her, leaving the other two men in thought. The old woman swung down her basket and set it on the ground in front of her, offering him a choice. Spiro chose a pink rose, and paid. The old woman grinned her toothless grin, and turned to another customer. Spiro went back to the others.

"So," Mikalis was saying, as slowly as ever, "So if reason is part of God, then it can be killed?"

"Killed? No!" protested the priest.

"But Christ was killed and rose again, and he is part of God?" said Mikalis. "Let us see whether we can do the same with your god of reason." He smiled at Spiro, then raised his voice. "Zoe!" The old woman turned, and came towards them, balancing the great wicker basket with one hand as she swayed through the tables. "Zoe, set down your flowers and show them to Pappa Thomas. Obliging the old woman swung her basket down again.

"I do not want anything," said the priest, unhappily.

"But observe the colours," said Mikalis. "Consider the profusion and shape of the blossoms, even in the last rays of the sun. God's creation at its most splendid, the dead generative organs of plants. Consider the lilies." He picked up a yellow rose, and nodded to Spiro to pay. "Do you trust your eyes?"

Pappa Thomas nodded. "I trust my eyes, yes, I see the flowers."

"Very good. Now see this rosebud I have bought, or rather Spiro has bought for me, to go with the one he has bought for his pretty wife."

Mikalis, Spiro and Zoe laughed, but the priest did not. "A cut flower, yes, wrapped up? By reason it is dead, though it is beautiful and people will pay to own it. Now, I want you to cut the stem so that you might be sure it is dead."

"I know it is dead already," said Pappa Thomas. Mikalis unwrapped the stem of the plant, and Zoe took out a bone handled pocket knife and handed it to the priest. He took it, hesitated a moment, then slit the bottom few centimetres of the stem. A few drops of sap oozed from upper part of the wound. "I do not know what this proves," he said, handing back the knife to the old woman. Mikalis took up the flower.

"You have stabbed it. It is dead. Reason lives and thrives. But here, I shall place it in the ground by this pole, which is the pole that supports the trellis that keeps the sun from the customers in the taverna. And I will pour some of this water—we have sufficient, do we not, Spiro?" Spiro nodded, as puzzled as the priest as Mikalis took one of the glasses of water and poured it onto the flower. "Now Zoe, what else?"

Zoe swung her basket up onto her shoulder, and came and poked at the flower on the wet ground. Then she cackled, and walked away, calling out: "Flowers, who'll buy my flowers? Pretty flowers for the ladies." They watched her go. Outside, a tourist stopped her and bought a posy.

"See?" asked Mikalis. Spiro and Pappa Thomas looked back, then leaned down to see. Spiro smiled with delight. Where the rosebud had been, a creeping rose tree wound its way up the pole. It entwined itself across the trellis, spreading all across the taverna. There were no open flowers, but the buds were as yellow as the one Mikalis had selected. The sprays were waving gently, and while they did not move as Spiro looked at them, when he glanced away the branches seemed to have spread farther.

"A trick!" said Pappa Thomas.

"No trick at all," said Mikalis, sitting down again. "Reason lies dead, by its own laws, and we wait to see if it wakes again. But if you don't believe me, nothing will convince you unless the Divine or the holy ones send you a miracle. I shall pray to Ag. Varvara and to her owl that your eyes be opened before you do harm."

The priest stood up, spluttering, and a branch of the new shading rose dangling from the trellis caught in his hair. He brushed it aside angrily, and without saying a word of farewell to the other men, stalked away.

"A dangerous fool, there," said Mikalis, watching him go. Spiro looked up at the roses, then back at his friend. Mikalis looked at him, and then suddenly both men were overcome with gales of thigh-slapping

laughter, and the sound of it followed the priest as he made his way off along the harbour.

Chapter 9

WATERED WITH BLOOD

(Elly)

A creature caught and caged may die or fight
according to its nature and its will,
a wolf will lose a leg and limp away
a dog caught young can learn to love the leash

I'm scared, Maman. I want you. I'm being brave, I don't cry, not because of what he did to Stewart but because you told me only babies cry. I'm nearly seven, I'm not a baby. But I'm thinking about you, Maman, and talking to you in my head, is that all right? You always say I should talk to Our Father when I need someone. But when I reach out for Our Father he feels so far away and distant and I don't think he cares about me at all. Maybe Father Michael's prayers reach him, and yours Maman, I'm sure yours do, but he never seems to listen to me.

I'm all right, Maman. I bet you're worried about me. It's not so bad here. Nobody's hurt me, in fact, I'm better. They haven't hurt any of the children from our hospital but Stewart. Stewart's dead. He wouldn't stop crying when we were on the boat. It was a big boat, Miriam said. I didn't see it, they made us stay inside the van. Raymond stayed with us and made us keep quiet and not cry. Lots of us were asleep, it was very hot. I think the medicine made us sleepy. Oh Maman, don't be cross, I know you said never take medicine except from the trolley and the nurses unless you were there, but they didn't ask me. I couldn't help it, Maman! I didn't even know what it was until later. Miriam told me. Miriam's nice Maman, she speaks French, like you and me. She's a Frenchwoman too, like you, and she's from Lyons, in the South of France. Nearly all of Them are French. She asked me where you were from in France but I couldn't remember. Something that sounds like a bear, I said, and she laughed. She's got a nice laugh. I think you'd like her. When I first woke

up and I was very frightened and didn't know where I was she gave me a hug.

Not like Raymond. He isn't nice. He looks very hard at everything all the time, twitchy. He's got a sharp face, and he's small for a grown-up. I don't like him at all. He scares me. I keep away from him. In the van I sat as far away from him as I could. Laura says he's a monster, and Beth says she hates him. He doesn't hit people, like Jean-Luc does sometimes, and Monique. But I don't like him. I just keep out of his way.

Mostly I work, or play with the kids. There are lots of kids here, all ages, and both sorts, purple *and* gold, loads of them. More than I can count. At first it was just the gold ones who always live here and the ones from our hospital, who were all purple of course. Oh Maman, I'm scared. Nobody ever changed before, and now I have and I don't know what it means. It should mean I'm safe. Gold kids never, never disappear. Nobody hits them. They don't have to work so much, and they get more food. This is a nicer room, it's got a window, little and high up, and there's only four other people in it. But it's so scary. I want to think about safe things. Do you remember how I'd rock on my rocking horse too and fro, with my arms around its neck? And you'd say that when you were a little girl you had a rocking horse? You used to tell me stories about how you were a little girl all on your own just like me? I always used to wish I had brothers and sisters. Now I've got all these children to play with. I should feel glad. Miriam says that we're all brothers and sisters here.

It's hard to feel close to them though, when they bring more kids every few days. Often Raymond goes to get them. I'm glad when he's away. Miriam usually stays, and sometimes Alys and Monique, and Daniel, and Jean-Luc. They're OK, but they scare me sometimes. Their eyes are cold. They look at us funny. I like Miriam best. I don't like it when she goes away and Raymond stays. I'm careful then. But now he's gone, and he won't be back for days. We had apples with our tea, and Adam whispered in my ear that it was because he'd gone away. You remember Adam from the hospital, Maman? He didn't have any hair then, because of cancer, but now he has pale hair, and it's getting long. He was in my room, until they moved me here today.

There are other grown-ups too, local people who work here. I can't understand them. They don't speak any languages I speak. Most of them are guards. Nobody ever says, but they're here to stop us trying to run away. But I know that wouldn't be any use anyway, even if we could get past the dogs and the wire, because it's too far home. All those days and days in the van, nearly a week of driving to get here. I couldn't walk that

far not even now I'm strong. And I don't know the way. We crossed the sea too, the Channel. I thought for ages that meant we were in France, but Laura told me yesterday that I was silly, if we were in France everyone would speak French. Locals don't, though They do. I don't know where we are then. Maybe Africa. It's warm and sunny and there are lots and lots of trees and mountains. I think I'll ask Cloud, no, Miriam what country we're in. She likes me, she might tell me. I wish I knew. I wish I could sleep.

I climbed up a hill this morning with Joel and Laura and Yita. You don't know them, Maman. You'd like Yita. She's Turkish, and she's the only one, the only one of all of us who is. She came from Germany, and she speaks a tiny bit of German and a tiny bit of French. She's very pretty with dark dark hair and big eyes. She's gold, and she sleeps in this room. She has the bed under the window. We climbed up through the trees. Yita held my hand. Jean-Luc was with us. He said he'd take us fishing tomorrow. But when I asked how long until we went home he turned away. Sometimes I think I'm never going home. I've been here a long time already. Miriam said to start with, in the van, that we'd be here until we were better. But I am better, I know I am. I'm going to ask her again after breakfast. I do want to see you Maman. Sometimes in the day working or playing with the kids I forget, but at night I feel so lonely for you.

Did I tell you I'm better? I am. I can run and skip, and nothing hurts any more. I don't even get tired all the time. Daniel took me to see a man in the forest called Cloud, and he did magic and mended me. Don't be cross, please don't shout Maman, I know you don't like magic. I told him you don't. He talked about Jesus. He asked if Jesus had helped us, and if we'd asked him to help us. I thought it must be OK if he talked about Jesus. He said Jesus was dead on the cross, I knew that was right. And he got us all to pray to Jesus to heal us, and then when nothing happened he came and healed us himself, by magic. He mended me straight off, and I feel so well and strong since. That was straight after I got here. Was that wrong, Maman?

Cloud does lots of magic. But I didn't do any, I didn't. Well, only a little tiny bit. I'll tell Father Michael about it when I get home and say I'm sorry. I know you said children don't have to tell the priest like grown-ups do, but I will anyway if you think it's right. When I'm home. I wish I was home. I don't wish I was in hospital because this is nicer than hospital, but I wish I was home in our house with all my toys and you asleep

across from me in the other bed. If I shut my eyes I can pretend I am there. Maman, I love you. I miss you.

Cloud is a funny man. And that's his real name, I asked. I saw him again yesterday. I was cleaning candlesticks on the kitchen steps in the morning and he came along. It wasn't like the time when he mended me, when he didn't really pay attention to me. This time he looked at me straight on, and I could see he had magic bubbling inside. He could see I did too. He was dressed like a priest on Sunday, but with different pictures on his clothes. Last time he was just wearing black. His eyes are very pale, and so is his skin. He talked French, but he said he's not French, he's from right here, he said. Wish I'd asked him where that is. He just looked at me, and I wriggled. He said in his funny deep voice, "You're the little girl whose mother doesn't approve of magic?"

He asked me lots of questions about you, then, he was very interested. It was nice to talk about you. It made you seem nearer. I told him how we go to St. Joseph's, and how I go to St. Joseph's Girls' Primary School. I told him about Father Michael, and God. He seemed to like me talking. He gave me a chocolate biscuit and I went back with him into his little house in the forest, outside the wire. That was the first time I'd been outside the wire since I got here. It felt funny. I did it again today, with Jean-Luc and the others, and it felt funny then too. We went to Cloud's little house. It's strange, full of odd things made of copper and beads and feathers. Things like toys only not toys. I don't know what they are, except I think some of them are magic. He talked to me for a long time. I sat in a big chair and ate my biscuit. I told him a lot of things. I told him I like Miriam and I don't like Raymond.

He asked about my Papa, and I said he was dead. He frowned then, like he thought I was wrong about that. But I knew I was right, that's what you told me, my Papa was dead before I was even born. Years before, I told him. He played the flute then, and Daniel came in and asked if it was time to go. But it wasn't. He brought a pigeon in a cage, and Cloud took it and rang its neck. Just like that, one minute it was a bird, grey and purple, preening, the next it was just dead meat, even the colours were dead. I'm more upset about it now than I was then, somehow.

Then Cloud played the flute some more, and I could see pictures in the music and in the smoke from the smoke-stick. There are always smoke-sticks here, Maman, in all the big rooms. They're messy when they crumble but they smell good. I like them. Maybe we could have some when I come home? I'd clean up after them. I do that here, that's one of my jobs. We all have jobs, and we do them. I prefer cleaning to making

things, and Miriam lets me help in the house most of the time, with the golds. Now I am a gold, so I'll probably carry on doing that, but I don't know. Golds do different things, but they all work. Lots of the kids weave baskets and things, and paint on eggshells. Laura's a big girl, and they let her paint cards. She says they sell the things the kids make and get money to pay for food. Well, they're always saying we eat too much.

That's what I was telling you, Maman, how I got to change to gold. I was with Cloud, and the pictures were moving, and Cloud and I watched them for a while. He was looking for something, I think. I saw horses, lots of white horses, coming out of the sea, and a man in black sitting on a stone chair with his head on his hand and the other hand on a dog, and the dog had three heads and one of them looked right at me out of the smoke and winked. Then that was gone in a swirl of clouds and I saw a man and a woman dressed in armour kneeling on the deck of a boat in front of a priest. Then I saw a wooden boat with eyes on the sides. The same man was on her, with the woman and a little boy, only they were wearing normal clothes. Then I saw myself with a knife in my hand, a sharp curved knife, and I was leaning over something. And then a man all fire all over and smiling, and he put his hand over the end of Cloud's flute. Then the music stopped, and he was gone. But the flute was starting to burn, Maman, the end of it. And that's when I did a little bit of magic, because I stopped it, or it would have been burned up. That would have been worse than doing a tiny bit of magic like that to stop fire, wouldn't it, Maman, for the flute to burn right up and be gone? But I'm sorry anyway, I know magic's a sin. I try to be good, but it's very hard on my own. I say my Our Father and I try hard not to do anything you've told me not to. I don't want you and Jesus to be cross with me.

I do what everyone tells me. I do my work, and I'm obedient, like you said. I say "please". Only mostly in French, because mostly we talk in French. Even the kids who came with me from London mostly understand it now, they don't often have to ask me what the words mean any more. To start with they did. But Miriam speaks English. And German. And Cloud says he speaks all languages by magic.

Tell you what Maman, when I see Cloud again I'll ask him where we are. I'd like to ask him if I can go home, but I'm scared to. I'm scared he might say no. I think I will see him again soon. He asked me if I wanted to learn magic. Sitting in that big chair with all his funny things all round and the flute still smoking a little bit. I told him you wouldn't like it. He took a gold patch out of the drawer and leaned over and pinned it on me, taking my purple one away. It was sewn on my jumper, but when he

touched it it just came off. He fixed the gold patch with a pin, but now that's sewn. Then he talked and talked about magic, and I'm so confused. That's why I'm talking to you so much tonight, Maman, and not falling asleep. I talked to you like this a lot right after I got here, but I haven't been thinking about you so much for a while. I know magic's a sin and all wrong, but in some ways it would be really nice to do it, I think. But it would have to be a secret from you, like he said. I've never had any secrets from you.

The thing is, it's better to be gold. Safer. We're not supposed to talk about it, but purple kids disappear sometimes. I'd like to think they go home to their parents, but I don't think they do. I think if they did they'd tell us so. Nobody knows when they go or where they go, just one day they're not there any more. I don't know how many kids have vanished like that since I've been here. But they were all purples, every one. I thought I knew what it meant to be purple, it meant you'd come from a hospital not been stolen specially or born here, like the golds. But that must be wrong if I've changed, because I came from a hospital. Raymond said they took us because we were going to die. When I think about Miriam I can try to think that means they stole us to make us well again. They have made us well again, all of us. But when I think about Raymond and Cloud I don't know. Cloud's been nice to me, but he's not a nice person, I don't think. Oh Maman, I wish you'd come and take me away. I think they brought us here because we were going to die and we're still going to die.

When I think about what Raymond did to Stewart in the van just because he wouldn't stop crying, then I know they're dead. They always go at times when everyone's here, all the grownups. All of Them. There are so many kids here, and nobody talks about the ones who have gone. I think they take them out in the woods and kill them. That's what the older kids whisper. I wanted to ask Miriam, but I don't dare. Oh Maman, I don't want to die like that! I don't want to die at all. It's not so bad here, really. But I think about the pigeon, just dead like that in a second, and blood coming from its eye. And Stewart, poor Stewart. But if I'm gold and I learn magic then maybe I'm safe, but I'm different from my friends. And it makes it seem as if I've made friends with Them, gone over to Their side.

I am crying now, Maman, just a little. I'm sorry. I don't know what to do. I think maybe if I say I won't learn magic they'll kill me next, when Raymond comes back. But if I die now I'll go to heaven, unless that little bit of magic I did yesterday with the fire counts. And the time I stole a

slice of bread when I was buttering them with Monique and then lied about it after. Oh Maman, will I go to hell for that? Will I go to hell for being a gold? I don't want to go to hell. When I was dying in the hospital I thought I'd go to Jesus' arms, like Father Michael said. If I died now maybe I still would. But if I learn magic am I damned? What was that knife in my hand? I think they'll make me kill someone, Maman. I don't want to kill anyone. I really don't want to. But I want to live as long as I can. I'm not going to give up and give in. I'm going to learn magic and maybe I can use it to escape and take the other kids with me. Maybe Cloud will listen to me if I ask him to let me go home. And if I do, and if I've learned magic, then I just won't tell you about it, like he said.

I'm going to sleep now Maman, good night.

Chapter 10

LADY OF WISDOM

And all the time since fish first breathed on land
is yesterday to you, but now to me
we mark divisions in our different ways
mine shifting shapes but yours a moving line.

There were a lot of people eating in Stellio's when Laerti and Dimitri arrived with the monster-fish. It took both of them to carry it, staggering slightly under the weight. Everyone moved back as they came in, and a silence spread through the taverna as they plopped it down on the marble counter-top next to the till.

Then Stellio came forward, a wooden spoon in his hand, and poked at it where it lay. "What *is* it?" he asked, and a babble of questions rose up from everyone. They pushed back their chairs, abandoned their half eaten meals and came clustering round to see it better.

The two fishermen who had hauled it in stepped back grinning. The fish was as long as Laerti was tall, with a long jaw almost like a sword-fish. It was silver, speckled with silver black, the colours of a mackerel.

"But who ever saw a mackerel that size?" someone muttered. It had translucent fins, and a black tail, like but yet unlike other fish. Its mouth was open, showing huge formidable teeth. Pale fish blood showed against on the marble. A very strong fishy smell rose from it.

"We were out in *Eleftheria*," explained Dimitri, sitting down and accepting a glass of wine, "Fishing as usual, and we caught this in a net. We thought it was a dolphin at first and were ready to let it go, but when we saw what it was we hauled it in." He slicked back his curly greying hair with a fish-scaled hand. "It was heavy! We could have sold it with the rest of the catch. But we thought Stellio would give us a good price for it."

"If I know how to cook such a thing—" Stellio roared, and everyone waited, "Would you come and eat it?" Everyone laughed, jostling closer. Some called out "Yes!" The fishermen nudged each other, grinning.

Stellio brought out a tape measure, and measured the fish. Five centimetres short of two metres. He weighed it on his big scale, but it was too heavy. "More than fifty kilos!" he said, coming round the counter. "Ten thousand drachma, and I cook it tomorrow, in lemon sauce, a portion for each of you, what do you say?" The fishermen laughed, and began to haggle.

"But what is it?" Katerina asked quietly. Old Mikalis turned from the fish to look down at her.

"Something very unusual," he said, smiling, his old face wrinkling up in creases. "Something nobody has ever seen before."

On the other side of the counter some tourists were taking photographs. Two men and a woman were involved in a very fast argument in English in which the Greek word "museum" was being thrown around. Most of the customers were simply marvelling over it. Katerina left the clump of people and went through the room collecting empty plates. A few people were still placidly eating, untouched by the excitement.

"Come back tomorrow!" Stellio promised jovially, wiping his hands on his apron. "Come and see how it eats!" The two fishermen were beaming, clearly they felt they had done well in the exchange. One of the men who had been arguing was trying to argue with Stellio, but Stellio brushed him off. "I do not care if it is a unique specimen, we are going to eat it."

Everyone promised they would come tomorrow and eat monster-fish. Cameras flashed and clicked. Suddenly there was a party atmosphere. Wine was ordered, food, and more wine. People began pouring in from outside, having heard rumours of the fish. After a while Laerti began to dance, dragging Katerina in to join him. She liked to dance the old dances, and made only a show of reluctance at dancing with a young fisherman in a fish-slimed t-shirt. After all, he had caught the monster-fish, today he was a hero. The gold plug in his ear glinted and caught the light. The crowd clapped their hands, and someone threw a plate. Stellio beamed, every broken plate represented not only good luck for the taverna but a hefty profit. Soon Mikalis hauled out his bazouki and began to play and sing, and then other people were on their feet dancing. From traditional tunes Mikalis wound into the popular song "I'm going to throw away my digital watch and buy some worry-beads," and the dancing spilled over into the square outside. Katerina leapt, grinning, lifting up her skirts, as shards of plain white plates shattered round her feet.

In the morning light, after the bustle of clearing up and getting the little ones off to school, Stellio settled down to the business of preparing

the fish. He called Katerina to help, taking no notice of her feeble protests.

"So, you dance and you drink and get up early and swim, your head will hurt, you will feel sick, what do you expect? Fetch the big blue bowl." Stellio heaved the fish from the big fridge and set it back on the marble top. It was so heavy he could only lift it with both arms. Katerina handed him the sharp cleaver, and stood ready with the bowl. He slit the fish along the line of its stomach. The guts spilled out quickly and neatly into the bowl. Stellio began to cut off its head. Katerina looked down into the bowl of pale blood and dark fishguts.

"Throw them to the seagulls!" her father said. "We will have so many people here tonight to eat the steaks of this fish that last night will look like nothing. Marco the potter will live like a king, I have ordered another hundred plates from him."

Katerina turned, her stomach churning, and the guts sloshed in the bowl. In among the dark-red mass, something shone. A scale? But it was gold, not silver.

"Father?"

"What?" Stellio paused, half turning to his daughter, caught by her tone. Katerina dipped her hand into the bowl and felt about in the slimy soft guts for the thing she had seen glinting, something hard and golden. She drew it out and held it up to show her father. There, heavy in her hand was a ring. It was a large heavy lion-headed ring, made of pale gold, all slimed with fish blood.

Stellio dropped the cleaver on the counter-top, came forward and lifted the ring from Katerina's palm. He held it up to the light, turning it slightly.

"Gold," he said. "Gold. An old, old gold ring, from a fish's belly, like something in a story. A ring Odysseus brought home maybe? See the lion? Look at the colour of it, straw-pale, only old gold is that colour." Katerina took the ring back and ran it under the tap, rubbing it clean of slime and blood.

"They had lions in Mycenae," her father continued. "Perhaps it is Agamemnon's ring, a ring he gave to Odysseus to bring home to Ithika. Or I heard a story once about some great king, or tyrant, who threw a ring into the sea to break his luck, but the sea gave it back in a fish for the table, maybe this is that ring. Maybe it is lucky for us, the monster-fish and now this ring come from old times."

Katerina turned the ring too and fro in the light, not listening. She slipped it onto her finger. It was too big, much too big, it must have been

a thumb ring for a big man. If it had been a dolphin, if it had fitted her hand, she would have thought it sent for her. It would have been a confirmation of the sickness she felt at rising, her swelling belly, the blood she had missed now at four full moons. But a lion's head like this, what could it mean?

"Now whose is the ring?" Stellio asked, taking it from her and setting it on his thumb. It slid round, loose. "I bought the fish from Laerti and Dimitri, quite fair, paid a good price. But did I buy the ring? Don't tell anyone about it for now, and we'll see later. You keep it, you're a good girl, Katerina, we'll ask somebody, somebody who knows what it might be."

All day the whole family talked of Agamemnon's ring that she had found. It eclipsed even talk of the great fish. Stellio cut it into steaks and marinated the steaks in lemon juice and rosemary, and made a sauce to go with them. He set up the grill to grill them over low coals. All the while everyone talked of nothing but the ring, the ring out of Homer, come to them from the sea.

Stellio could not decide what to do with it, whether it should be sent to Athens to the museum, or sold, or kept as an heirloom. At last, as the afternoon drew near to evening, it was decided that they could trust Pappa Thomas to know what it was and not to tell anyone. "He won't even ask where we found it," Stellio said. "He has very little curiosity, for a learned man." Katerina and Stellio walked over to the priest's house. The ring hung around Katerina's neck strung on an old shoelace. She was aware of it at every step as it swung against her breasts.

Waiting at the door she remembered the last time she had been in the priest's house, the day she had been to make her prayer to Ag. Paraskevi, her prayer that had been so amply answered. She smiled, hugging her arms around her stomach. Her father glanced down at her, smiling, and then his face changed. He saw how she was standing and the shape of her body, the shape she had been disguising with loose clothes for weeks now. He drew breath to speak, when Pappa Thomas opened the door.

"Come in, come in," he said, smiling broadly in greeting. For some reason he seemed to be relieved to see them. They followed him into the house. It was as chilly as Katerina remembered from last time. "I was just talking to a most interesting lady professor of archaeology from Athens, she is here on holiday, do come in and see her, and take some tea."

They followed the priest into his study. Katerina could feel her father's eyes looking daggers into her back as she preceded him. The room seemed rumpled and untidy, there were books lying open on the desk, a

cushion on the floor, and piles of papers on top of the computer. As she came fully into the room she saw that there was a woman sitting in the chair under the window. The shutters were open and sunlight streamed in, setting her in bright light and leaving the rest of the room in shadow. She was slim and grey-eyed, with sleek dark hair arranged in a chignon. She wore a dove grey suit with a mauve silk scarf around her throat, fastened with an oval bronze brooch embossed with a writhing gorgon's head. She did not look old enough to be a professor.

"Varvara, this is Stellio, who keeps the taverna across the square, and this is his daughter Katerina." She rose. Stellio bowed over her hand. Katerina moved a book and sat down on the leather sofa. She had no idea why Pappa Thomas was so pleased to see them, unless he wanted to be interrupted in his conversation with the archaeologist. Cold as it was, she wanted to stay as long as possible to delay the inevitable confrontation with her father. "I think I know why they have come to see me."

Stellio sat down, and frowned at Katerina. "I don't think you do, Pappa," he said.

"Well let us see if I can guess." The priest poured two cups of tea, without asking, and handed them to his guests. "You want to arrange a wedding, hmmm?" In order to avoid looking at either her father or the priest, Katerina looked steadily at Varvara. She looked steadily back, smiling slightly as the awkward silence lengthened. At last Stellio broke it, leaping to his feet with a bellow.

"Does everyone know but me?" Katerina looked at him horrified. He sat down again, looking abashed. "That is not why we came, Pappa, if there is any reason to arrange a wedding, or any groom for one, nobody has seen fit to explain it to me."

"Then why have you come?" asked Varvara, calmly, cutting across Pappa Thomas beginning splutter.

"I found a ring," said Katerina, and suddenly she wanted to giggle, in the midst of the embarrassment, the idea of a ring, when marriage had just been dismissed so emphatically. She swallowed hard. "An old ring. We thought it might belong to Agamemnon."

"To Odysseus," corrected Stellio. Katerina drew out the ring and handed it to the priest. He took it without touching her fingers, walked to the window and turned it doubtfully in the light.

"It is certainly gold," he said, "And there is a lion on it, with lines, no writing, no mark, it could be any age. Mycenaean, maybe, as you say, it is large enough, but I don't know, gold has always been worked and I am far from expert in these things." He addressed his words to Stellio and

looked at Katerina as if she was an empty chair. He did not seem to like to look at Varvara either.

"Can I see?" Varvara asked. She stood, and Katerina was surprised how tall she was, much taller than Pappa Thomas. She held out her hand and the priest gave her the ring. He did not meet her eyes, but walked back across to the desk. She squinted at the ring, and rolled it in her fingers. Then she smiled and handed it back to Katerina.

"It is almost pure gold, I think. Hard to say without testing it, but I would say that it is gold from Macedon. The lion's head does look Mycenaean, in a way, but I think this is Macedonian goldwork, and much later than that. I think it is Hellenistic, possibly from the time of Alexander but I would guess a little later." Katerina could feel her face fall, and saw it echoed in her father's face.

"Almost new." said Stellio, regretfully. Pappa Thomas laughed.

"You thought it was three and a half thousand years old, and when you find out that it is only two and a half thousand years old you are disappointed?"

Stellio drew himself up in his chair. "Alexander the Great is like yesterday. Better than the Romans or the Turks because he was ours, but he is not History." Varvara giggled, unexpectedly, sounding much younger. Katerina turned to look, but she was as grave and composed again as if the sound had come from someone else. All the same, the laugh had given Katerina courage.

She looked at the ring. "It came to me from the water." she said. "From the guts of a monster-fish. I think it was sent for my son. I shall call him Leonidas."

"After the king of Sparta?" asked Varvara, speaking into the horrified silence of the two men.

"He was very brave. And after this lion." Katerina threaded the ring back on the lace.

"Bravery is not everything in war. One should also have a sense of tactics." Varvara was smiling a little. "But may he have both. I think that will be an excellent name for your son. In the name of all that is holy." The two men looked at each other speechless. Then as they both opened their mouths, Varvara stood, and lifted a hand in blessing. She sketched a sign in the air that might have been the sign of the cross, or possibly some more curved sign. Then the sunlight was brighter where she stood, and brighter still. Katerina covered her eyes, and Stellio looked away. Pappa Thomas rushed forward towards the light. Katerina put out a hand to stop him, but he blundered past her. When he reached the

window, there was nobody there. The priest knelt in the patch of sunlight, sobbing. Stellio and Katerina looked at each other, then each took an arm and helped him into the chair by the desk.

"I am blinded!" he said.

"It will wear off, Pappa," Katerina said. "You should have looked away."

"Agia Varvara was in my house, and I did not know until it was too late. I must write to the bishop again. He will believe me now. There'll be no more talk of little holidays and overworking."

"I think you should lie down, Pappa," Stellio said. He helped the priest to the sofa. "Do you want a cup of tea?"

"No, nothing thank you. I can see colours, wonderful colours." Tears were streaming down his cheeks, unheeded.

Stellio turned to Katerina. "You're going to have a baby?"

"Yes, father." She looked straight at him.

"And the father is—is—Ag. Varvara knows who the father is, and gave the child her blessing?"

"Yes, father." Stellio frowned.

"You should have told me!"

"Yes, father." said Katerina, because there was nothing else to say. Then she laughed, and her father laughed too, and embraced her.

On the sofa Pappa Thomas continued to sob. "What is the world coming to?" he asked.

"A new time, Pappa," said Stellio, gently, patting his shoulder "A new time, like you told us was coming. I think you ought to rest and calm yourself down as the bishop says. If you are to be ready for it."

Chapter 1

XENIA KOPELLA

(Jenny)

The distant fleeing coward's sails are black,
my knife is ready for his father's life
and she alone will walk forsaken shores
and grow, awaiting other loves or none.

I sit on the side of the harbour and drink retsina. It tastes like turpentine, but it helps me sleep. Sometimes I don't know why I bother to go on living from one day to the next, pouring this vile stuff down my throat so I can live to wake up and do it again. Just another piece of jetsam, washed up by the sea. I drink to avoid self pity, not to wallow in it. Raise the glass, keep smiling, the world's still turning and I'm still turning with it.

Gah, summer, the place is getting crowded. There's a brash American couple sitting at the next table, going on and on. Not sure I can stand much more of this. They're stuffing their faces with garithes, making vast piles of empty shrimp shells on their tabletop. Their voices grate on me. I said I'd eat a sardine, and it should be nearly done, but the bottle's empty and I'm tipping back on the wooden chair looking for Yorgo. He spots me waving the bottle, but he's busy dashing about. I hate it when there get to be so many tourists, cluttering the place up, leaving no space for the locals. Molivos is a good place, I know everyone and everyone knows me. I even have a few people I call friends here. But it's May already, and already time to leave. This is a good place to winter, but winter's over.

"Retsinaki, Yenni?" says Yorgo, coming behind me with another bottle, good. "Not out with the boats tonight?"

"It is a calm night, no need," I reply. He laughs. I'd like to banter with him a little, but he has no time. He dashes away, pretending to be a waiter in the European mode. I pour more wine, more wine, to wash

away my cares. Time to leave, definitely time to be elsewhere. Could wish there was somewhere else I wanted to be, but can't have everything. I drink deep, and stare out over the dark water. Far out to sea I can see the red and white lights of fishing boats bobbing. I take a piece of bread from the wicker basket that sits on the table. It is grey and hard. Stale bread, it must be Sunday, or Yorgo would have brought fresh down from the bakery. I put it back without tasting it and take another drink.

I wish Americans didn't have such piercing voices. It's impossible to ignore. If they hate everything so much, if they find it all so inferior to Hometown, Idaho, why did they come? They're carping and criticising, and eating huge mouthfuls—they look repulsively groomed and cared for, upholstered, red and bulging. They ooze health without vitality. They make me ashamed of my nationality. Oh, wonderful, now they're talking about me. Mr. American thinks I'm German. Not a bad guess, but no cigar, my mother's family were Danish, from Wisconsin. Mrs. American has heard me speaking Greek to Yorgo. Yes, madam, I'm well aware I can't pass for Greek, it's the hair. Yes, it is my natural colour, though I think the ten years of sun on my bare head has brought out more light in it. I inherited it from my mother. If she hadn't had naturally flaxen hair my father would never have noticed her—he had money but she was working in the yacht club bar. That's why she's such a terrible person now, she always feels she isn't quite good enough for him, so everything has to be perfect to make up for it. Of course, nothing ever is. Shame I'm such a disappointment to them.

Mrs. American just *knows* I'm European. Ha. My fish arrives, Yorgo puts it down with a flourish and whirls away. We look at each other, its dead eye meeting mine. Six inches of silver sardine, lying on a bed of parsley. Did I actually want to eat this, a bottle and a half ago, when it was raw and I was sober? I take up knife and fork and cut a careful mouthful, avoiding the bones. The Americans are still making personal remarks, they're so sure I don't understand. Arrogant pigs. I don't care what they say about my eating habits, but I wish I didn't have to listen to them saying that I'd be quite pretty if I fixed myself up a bit. That reminds me all too much of my adolescence. What can they see in the lights strung up around the restaurant anyway? That is *not* an attractive tan, that's my skin like leather from working on boats all year round.

It's time to leave—not just leave the restaurant, leave the whole island. I take another bite of my fish. There will likely be a boat moving tomorrow, and if not I will get a ride in a fishing boat up to Mitilini, where

there will be bound to be something moving. One more bite of the fish is enough. I drain my glass. I'm drinking too much, that's another sign I should be going. Working helps me sleep, too. Suddenly I long to feel a boat creak under me—not a tiny wallowing fishing boat high at the stern, a big sleek yacht cutting the waves by windpower. The *Jenny*. I still miss my boat so much, so very much.

So the next morning I am up early. I tell my landlady I may be moving on. She clucks and fusses, as always. She's a good person, but she's never sure how to deal with me. I drink tea with her, and eat a piece of bread—good fresh chewy bread. Then I lope down towards the harbour. The sun is hot already, and I'm glad of the wisteria shading the path as I walk through the narrow sloping streets of the village. As I come out onto the shoulder of hill where the motor road starts the heat hits me with a sudden dazzle. A turkey gobbles in the field next to the bus stop. Poor thing, he looks very scrawny and thin. The Greeks are terribly cruel to animals—they overload donkeys and then hit them. I've almost got used to it in ten years, but not quite.

I turn away from the road down the track that leads to the harbour. They keep talking about surfacing it to make it easier to get the fish out. They've been talking about that for years, I don't think they'll ever get round to it. I look up at the village, hanging above me from the side of the cliff and sprawling up the hill towards the castle. The grey stone castle looks somehow incongruous. The Crusaders built it, someone told me. I don't know why they needed to. I feel slightly homesick for it all already, even though I haven't left. I'll come back in October or November when I can feel comfortable again. Everything looks particularly beautiful this morning, the light is even clearer than usual and everything is glowing with it.

I walk round the harbour, looking at what is there. The place is quiet, very few people are about, don't know why, it would usually be much busier than this at this time. Apart from the usual fishing boats, I'm not in luck. There's a three masted catamaran, *Albatross* out of Mitilini. Hmm. A charter boat by the looks of her. She'd take me up to the city, but no use beyond that. Even if she needed crew I've no desire to hang around the island in tourist season. There's another boat at the far end, I saw her mast from above. I walk out around the mole, and stop still with surprise. She could almost be the *Jenny*, risen from the deeps. Just like *Jenny*, she's a hand-built wooden ketch, gaff-rigged. A surge of reminiscent backache, helping Dad and Ralph build *Jenny*, so long ago, hauling

the timber. Someone must have built her the same traditional way. There aren't many like her in these waters, or any waters come to that.

She's in beautiful condition, someone's really been looking after her, the wood's almost glowing. She's clearly not new, though, there are signs of care everywhere. What a beauty. She has an eye painted on either side of her stern, blue, turquoise and red. Odd. I like the look of her rig, from what I can see of it. She has a reefer on the sail, that means she can run single-handed. Where has she come from, I wonder? I walk on around, and come up behind her bows. She's flying a flag I don't recognise. There's nobody about, her hatches are closed. At last I'm close enough to see her name. *Sarakina* and her home port, Cork. Irish? Weird. Though I guess they do build boats on the West coast of Ireland, I remember Dad saying something about that once. There are jackstays all over her. I think someone's running her singlehanded, either that or a couple with a kid. At 45 foot or so she's a little big for that. Maybe I am in luck, maybe her skipper will want crew.

I wander back along the mole, daydreaming about the yacht. I know precisely how she would answer lightly to my hand on the tiller. She's very beautiful and I want her. I head for the Sea Horse cafe, where I know I will find Panayoti at this time of day, drinking coffee. He knows everything and everyone and will know about *Sarakina*. He's a fisherman, I go out quite often on his little *Kerasia* when it's stormy. We're friends. He saved my life ten years ago when the *Jenny* went down.

I don't see anyone else I know on the way over, but Panayoti is sitting where I expect him, in front of the Sea Horse, left leg crossed over right, trousers hitched up, tiny cup of coffee in his hand. His cap is on the table in front of him. I slide into the next chair and nod at him.

"How're you doing, Yenni?" he asks. I sigh.

"Looking at the boats," I reply. "How are you, Panayoti?"

"Fine, fine," he smiles. "Thinking of leaving us again?"

"It's the Summer." I explain.

"Yes, too many people here already." He spits on the ground, which would once have horrified me, but now I almost take it for granted. "It's very bad, spoiling the place, but people don't think of that, they think only of the money." I nod.

"That boat, the *Albatross*?" I ask, casually. "She looking for crew here, do you know?"

"She's a charter boat from Mitilini, with a paid crew of four. She's only going round and round the island. Maybe they need somebody, maybe not. I don't think they're short handed but they'd take you." I nod again,

my guess confirmed. The waiter brings me a coffee, and another for Panayoti. It is hot and very sweet. Turkish coffee we used to call it in the States, but they call it Greek coffee here. They hate the Turks though they are so close and so alike.

"What about the other boat, the yacht, do you know about her?" I ask.

"The *Sarakina*?" That isn't how I'd have pronounced it, but then I've never seen the name before so his guess is as good as mine I suppose. "She's English, out of Cork—I never heard of it, it can't be a very big place. Sound little boat." Panayoti knows perfectly well what I am asking him, he's teasing me.

"Did they sail her round?" I ask, still casual.

"I think so, but I don't think I'd like to, she's not big enough. You'd have to hug the coast from Calais to the Rock." Panayoti has been all over the world in boats, but only very big boats. We sailed *Jenny* across the Atlantic. That's an ocean-going yacht.

"I guess they sailed her round," I say.

"Are you going to ask for work on her?" Panayoti asks. He remembers *Jenny*, he knows what she reminds me of. I shrug.

"I don't know. Who's the captain?"

"A stranger." The word sits oddly on my ear for a moment. Panayoti only means a foreigner, the word is the same in Greek, *Xenos*. Not often I mistranslate these days. It's what people who don't know me always call me, *Xenia kopella*, foreigner girl. It's all anyone can be in this culture, who wasn't born here. "An Englishman. He sailed her here alone. He has a child with him."

"Alone!" I did wonder about that. Well, I guess it's possible to handle a boat like that alone, but it would be much better with help, they're that sort of boat. "Still, if he's an Englishman that's not so good." Panayoti laughs at this. "How old's the child?"

"I haven't seen them, only been told." he says.

"She's a beautiful boat, though."

"If he were Greek, yes, but an Englishman? He wouldn't be interested in American *Jenny*!" Panayoti rolls his eyes, laughing. Then a voice interrupts from behind us, speaking English.

"I'm not Greek, or English, I'm Irish. And I'm fascinated to hear that I wouldn't be interested in you. May I join you?" He sits down, not waiting for an answer from either of us. I look at him, utterly disconcerted. He's a big man, tall, dark haired, his face is lined and tanned—but I think it's a weather-beaten tan like mine, not an expensive tan. He has a little boy with him, fair haired and solemn. I'm no good at children's ages, he's

maybe ten. He looks me in the eye, completely serious. I like them, I decide, and I adore the boat. "I'm Colin," he says, in Greek this time, "and this is Emrys." The child sits down next to Panayoti, elbows on the table, legs dangling. He sets down a bottle of soda, and sips from a straw.

"Panos, the son of Demetrios," said Panayoti, but he does not offer his hand, which is the height of Greek bad manners. I wonder briefly why he's doing that. "This is Yenni," he adds, with obvious misgivings. Colin smiles at Panayoti then turns to me.

"You seem very sure the captain of the *Albatross* would take you, whether he needed crew or not, but sure I wouldn't. Why?"

"Because the captain of the *Albatross* is Greek, and what's more from Mitilini." He had spoken in English, so I replied in the same language, which is my custom, when sober.

"So?"

"If I asked him for a job as crew he'd either know me and give me it, or have heard of me and give me it or he'd come and ask someone on the harbour here and then give me it." This is no more than the truth, but it feels odd to say it.

"What would the men sitting round the harbour say?"

"Are you looking for crew?" I ask, because I don't want to waste my time if he's not. The child has propped his head on his arms and is staring at me. His eyes are very blue.

"I might be," he says, guardedly. I look away from the child and back to him, businesslike.

"They'd say I know boats, and I have experience, but that goes for almost anyone in sight." It's early, the tourists haven't made it down this far yet. "They'd say I know sailing boats especially, and I'm particularly experienced with a gaff rig." I smile. "Only they wouldn't say that, they wouldn't know the name."

He looks impressed but a little puzzled. Most people wouldn't recognise his rigging and he knows it. "That's good, but it doesn't seem enough to guarantee you a job. What else would they say?" he asks slowly.

"Ask yourself, Panayoti will tell you, you speak Greek."

"You have heard me do so," he says, in Greek, and turns to Panayoti, who frowns, for some reason. "Tell me sir, would you recommend that I take this girl as crew?" His Greek is excellent, which is strange. Few people have reason to learn demotic Greek.

Before I have time to consider, Panayoti barks "No!" and turns to me. "No. Don't go with him Yenni. He's unlucky."

"He has a lovely boat." I say, in some confusion. Panayoti really isn't being polite. Colin looks worried.

"The *boat* is fine," says Panayoti, some sarcasm evident in his voice. "You want me to tell him you're lucky and you can sail, but I won't. Don't go with him. Wait until a good Greek boat comes in going your way. This is not a good man. He is doomed, ill-fated, ominous." Panayoti's a good friend of mine, but this is ridiculous. He's known Colin no longer than I have. Doomed? Even in Greek it sounds nonsensical.

"Panayoti's a bit fey," I say, in English. "I'm sorry—" I'm vastly embarrassed.

"Oh no." Colin looks absolutely serious. "He's right."

"The gods frown on him." hisses Panayoti; he suddenly makes the sign of the evil eye.

"The gods may have turned their backs on me, they don't frown," says Colin. "And you say this girl is lucky. I need luck."

"She is lucky," says Panayoti, and shuts up in a typical Greek way, folding his arms and staring at the fishing boats as if we have ceased to exist. Emrys looks at him, clearly fascinated to see an adult sulking so visibly.

"What does he mean, lucky?" Colin turns to me. "I could do with some luck." Already I know that I'm not going to pay any attention to Panayoti, he's acting like a baby, and I don't believe in things like that.

"It's a silly Greek superstition," I say crisply, in English, which Panayoti can't understand. He and the boy are glowering at each other. "They say that if you're drowned once then you can't drown again, and if you're the only survivor from a sunk ship then no ship you're on will sink. They call me American Jenny, though my name's not Jenny, that was the boat I lost. And I drowned, but I was rescued." I look at him, and it looks as if he believes me, though most people wouldn't. That's good, because I don't want to have to tell him about how I lost the *Jenny*, and what was lost with her. I like him, I'm sure of it now.

"I see. That is lucky," he says, slowly. I'm glad I didn't tell him that the villagers ask me to go out with the fishing boats when there is a storm, and that it is this luck that guarantees me a place on any boat anywhere in the Aegean, but he can work it out. I didn't like that about the gods turning their backs on him. I don't know what it means, and he said it in Greek anyway where "god" doesn't mean "God" and such things sound less strange. "Do you want a job?" he asks. "I didn't know American women could sail, but still."

"They can't, I can," I say, defensive, then, "Yes, I'd like a job. I'll work for full board and passage."

"No money?" he sounds surprised.

"No money," I explain. "It's illegal for me to take any. However, if you were to present me with a gift of some when I leave your employment—"

"I see. I can't guarantee being able to bring you back here afterwards."

"That doesn't matter, anywhere in the Mediterranean I can find something coming this way." Panayoti has turned back to the table and is glowering at me now. I ignore him.

"We won't leave Greece," he said, "And it should only be for a couple of months."

"That's fine."

"Emrys will be with us." Emrys glances up briefly from making faces at Panayoti as his name is mentioned.

"I'm not taking responsibility for him. I know nothing about kids." I say, hastily. I want to work on the boat, not as a nursemaid.

"I wouldn't expect you to."

"He doesn't look as if he makes trouble."

Colin almost laughs, and rubs the boy's hair. "You don't ask where we're going?" I haven't asked because I'm not much bothered, as long as it's out of Molivos on *Sarakina*, but I can't say that. I shrug. "I want to take you, you could be useful, but it's not fair. I ought to tell you more first before you agree. Have dinner with me tonight. I'm not going anywhere until morning. We'll discuss it."

"OK," I say, knowing it's settled, and sip my cooling coffee.

"What do you think about magic?" he asks, seriously, leaning back in his chair. I almost choke, then think before I speak. What *do* I think about it?

"Not much. I don't know. I've never thought much about it. The Greeks believe in it and the Americans don't, which seems a good reason to believe in it." He gives a surprised grunt of laughter. "I've never had any experience with it."

"If I said you might get some experience with it if you came on *Sarakina* would that stop you coming?" I find myself, under the table and out of Colin's sight, making the sign of the evil eye. I have lived in Greece a long time. Unfortunately Panayoti sees, and copies me conspicuously. "Are you sure he doesn't speak English?" asks Colin. I blush. Emrys laughs.

"Positive," I say, embarrassed. "I'm sorry." Colin looks amused, fortunately.

"That doesn't work unless you believe in it," he says.

"I know that." He must think me a fool.

"So, does that change your mind about working for me?"

"No." I've worked for nuts before, and I'm not frightened of anything. He has *Sarakina* and I want to go in her badly. He looks at me, uncertainly, then smiles.

"I'll meet you here this evening, and then I'll buy you dinner in the best restaurant in town and tell you what you need to know, and you can change your mind, if you like. What's your name?"

"Everyone calls me Jenny," I say, suddenly defensive. It's not the name I have on my passport, but then I don't have the face I have on my passport any more either, so that matches. My mother, who read too many romance novels and wanted everything to be perfect, chose to name me Belinda. Ralph used to call me Belle, but even that doesn't seem a part of me any more. I always hated my name. I think there was something in me that rebelled against being what they wanted me to be, even then. I don't want to start being called that again. Ten years, ten years of being Jenny, Jetsam Jenny, American Jenny, the name fits. Even if it is the name of my dead boat and my all too living sister. I've got used to it. My father used to say that you can get used to anything, and it's not true, but you can get used to a lot of things. I don't want to explain all this to Colin, who I like even if he is peculiar. Luckily he doesn't press.

"Then so will I, for now." he says. "I'll see you this evening, about seven thirty, here." Then I am left to pacify Panayoti as he strides off. Panayoti is worried, but I can't get him to talk sensibly about it. Eventually I give up, and leave him, still worried. I have to think about where to take Colin for dinner.

Chapter 12

MOTHER EARTH

And if a world shall thrive it thrives in time
not fearing change and death, for death is life
and change is breath that makes a time connect
forward and past, my threads weave in and through.

Menelaos the shepherd lived in the village of Stavros in winter. In summer he lived up in the hills, in a tiny white house among the rocks. There he pastured the sheep and goats of the whole island, protecting them and milking them. They did not need much protecting, there were no wolves left and the eagles were a threat only in lambing season. But he made sure they moved their pastures on schedule, stopping them overgrazing. He helped them through lambing difficulties, and he kept wild dogs and human thieves away. Dealing with the milk was a more arduous task, but one which he enjoyed, sitting beside the patient nannies and ewes squeezing out the sweet warm milk. He was a skilled milker, and usually took no more than three hours to deal with the whole herd.

He brought the milk down the mountain to Ithyka town late every morning all summer. Two aluminium churns, or sometimes four, clanked in a trailer behind his little motor-scooter. He delivered it to an old woman called Vrahi who kept a milk shop. Those who knew and cared could buy fresh ewe's or goat's milk from her, along with the yoghurt she made from any milk which did not sell while it was fresh. Once the delivery was made, Menelaos would leave the scooter and the empty churns and walk through the twisting streets of the town. First he would take his money to the sleepy little branch of the Commercial Bank. There the clerk would count the bills, turning them with the long dirty nail on his little finger. This long nail showed as clearly as the sneer with which he greeted Menelaos that he despised those who needed to do manual labour. Then, this chore done and all the money carefully paid to the owners of the animals, Menelaos would drink a coffee on the

harbour. After that he would chat to friends, sometimes buy a little food, and then head back out of town to the herd.

He was a familiar sight in the summer streets of Ithyka, in his black trousers and long boots and the red-embroidered black shirt his mother had made him. In the town people only dressed like that for festivals and special days, but in the hills they still wore such clothes all the time. Shepherds have a reputation for breaking hearts, and Menelaos had strong arms, thick lashes and glossy hair. Although his hands were calloused from milking, everyone accounted him very handsome. Some of the young girls would hide their faces when he passed, and others would wait in doorways when they thought he would be coming by. Sometimes he would talk to one and sometimes to another. It was a surprise to everyone when he announced that he was to marry Taxeia, the holy shoemaker's sister.

Because her father was dead, Menelaos asked her mother, Dafni, for permission. At first Dafni was reluctant.

"She is needed here," she said. "She works in her brother's shop. What will the family do without her if you take her away off to Stavros or up into the hills?"

"It is time Yanni was married and had a wife of his own to serve the customers in his shop," Menelaos replied. "Taxeia is nearly eighteen, which is old enough to be a wife. It would be good to have her company up in the hills." They negotiated for some time, over many meetings with the aid of much wine and many presents on both sides, before coming to a satisfactory conclusion. Menelaos was a prosperous man, well able to compensate his bride's family for the loss of her labour. The date of the wedding was announced. Dafni had won on one point at least, her daughter would not marry away in Stavros. Pappa Thomas agreed to perform the ceremony in the big church of Ag. Paraskevi.

Invitations were sent out. A great celebration was arranged. Wine was bought, clothes were made. For the feast afterwards a sheep and a goat were to be roasted whole in Stellio's taverna. Menelaos brought them down from the mountain in his trailer, feet tied tightly together. The sheep bleated feebly as it lay awaiting its doom, but the goat looked around in silence through its strange yellow barred eyes, as if it understood what it saw.

The odours of roasting meat rose from the taverna when the happy couple came out of the church in showers of petals and rice. Katerina's little Leo toddled behind, carried Taxeia's train. Photographs were taken, everyone looking splendid. The bride's plain face was observed to be

quite transformed with happiness. Everyone was smiling. Then tables were set up inside the church's courtyard and the roast meat was brought out and eaten, along with quantities of wine and other food. Everyone became so happy during the feast, that the bride's uncle Spiro relaxed so far as to congratulate his sister Dafni on her arrangements. His wife Eleni danced with Menelaos. Everyone kissed Taxeia, for luck. Yanni produced his gift to bride and groom, matching pairs of boots. All went most auspiciously, and at last the pair set off for the hills on two gaily caparisoned black horses borrowed for the occasion. Dafni had insisted that the motor-scooter would be inappropriate.

It was late afternoon when they rode out of the town, waving to Dafni and Yanni and Menelaos' mother. Katerina, holding up little Leo to see, stood out in the crowd of other well-wishers. They waved until they were out of sight. Then the newly-weds found themselves alone together out on the road. They looked at each other, suddenly shy, tired and with a long ride ahead of them. A little red van swept past them, making the dust rise and settle again in its wake. It was still very hot. For so long the idea of the wedding had been so important to both of them that now it was achieved and over they felt as if there was nothing to talk about. They had both struggled to be together. Now they were together they had nothing to say to each other. They rode along in silence as the road wound up through the olive groves and then pines. The surface was very bad with regular potholes and appearing to consist largely of dust and donkey droppings.

As the road wound out of the trees and came out on the cliff, Taxeia gasped. It was a long time since she had been up on the spine of the island. From here it was possible to see that it was indeed an island, with dark blue sea all round. The hazy blue shoulder of Kefalonia could be seen far over the water, and beyond it the even more distant mainland. The road leading down to the west side of the island and Stavros was ahead, the road up to the mountain lay to the side. She drew her horse to a halt and slipped off by a little white shrine on a precipitous bend, marking a place where someone had gone off the road and died.

The air was scented by pine and wild thyme. She paused to listen to the silence and stillness. A gull soared over the wine-dark sea below but the bare cliffs of Ithyka seemed to be deserted by all life. There were no other birds, and very few insects. The sheep and goats were higher up than this. Behind her Menelaos waited, still on his horse. She could hear the breath of the man and the horses very clearly. The stillness seemed to grow and loom over her. She was almost frightened. She put out a hand

to touch the little shrine, and felt a dread sweep over her. She had promised to live in these silent hills. She had promised to spend her life with this stranger. She had an urge to turn and flee back down to the town and the things she understood. She looked out across the blueness. The dark blue of the sea was broken only by white spray where it met the cliff foot far below. The pale blue of the sky was quite unbroken. Taxeia felt infinity pressing in on her, overwhelming her.

"Taxeia?" Menelaos' quiet voice broke the silence. She turned in great relief. He was smiling, and the smile on his handsome face set everything right. As long as she had him life was good. She mounted again, and they rode uphill towards the mountain.

"Have you ever been to the mainland?" he asked, as they rose higher. She shook her head.

"I have never been off this island."

"Neither have I," he said, "and from up here one can see that it is not a large island. All the same, up here, it doesn't feel limited to me."

"Do you ever get lonely?" she asked, as the little white shepherd's house among the rocks came into sight, looking tiny above them.

"Sometimes at night," he replied, smiling at her "but no longer now you are here. There is a peace here, with the sky and the rocks. I hope that you will feel it too." She smiled back, uncertain, remembering the panic that had swept over her.

It was a little while later, when Taxeia's belly was already beginning to swell, when the stranger came.

She came at mid-day, when Menelaos was down in the town delivering the milk. Taxeia was sitting outside the house, in the shade of a striped blanket she had fixed above the door. She sat on an old three legged stool Menelaos used for milking. She was shelling beans into a dish of water. The beans would have to soak until tomorrow, and then be cooked most of the day to make fassoulia for their evening meal. Menelaos would bring back tomatoes and onion from the market, and fish and bread for today. Her fingers shelled the beans, and her mind and her eyes wandered over the landscape, the bare hills, the sheep and goats, the pines giving way to olive groves below. She looked hard at the village of Stavros far away on the edge of the land and then at the distant shapes of other lands across the water. She saw a boat moving on the sea, a great white boat passing between Ithyka and Kefalonia, heading South for the Korinth canal.

She had felt the panic of vastness a few times since the time on the road by the shrine, but less so since the baby started to grow inside her.

Now she felt calm and placid and cared mostly about food. She watched the boat, thinking of places it might go, Nafplia, Korinthos, maybe Athens. She felt no desire to leave the island. She looked at the road, to see if Menelaos was on his way home yet. She could often see the faded blue paint of the scooter before the sputter of the engine rose through the clear air.

There was someone moving on the road. But it was not Menelaos. She squinted. A woman in blue, riding a grey donkey, was making her way up the winding road. She could not see her clearly. She could not be heading anywhere but her house. There was nothing else up here. Excitement flooded through her. Down in the town she would have thought nothing of people dropping in. Working in Yanni's shop she had seen strangers almost every day. Up here it was a rare event. She wondered at once what she could give her. There was some bread left from yesterday, and some apples, and a big jar of Menelaos' mother's quince jam. She left the beans and went inside quickly to pick up what was lying around the two rooms that made up the house. When she went out again there was no sign of the visitor. The road, and the whole scene that spread before her eyes was as empty as usual.

Taxeia sat down in the shade again and continued shelling beans, puzzled. After a while she went into the house and began boiling water for coffee. As it neared the boil there was a knock on the door. She moved to open it.

A figure stood there unblinking, tall against the light.

When Menelaos came home he could see that there was something different about his wife. She had seemed so calm since she became pregnant, but now she was full of excitement.

"Fish was cheap!" he greeted her. "I bought enough melanouria for two days, I know you like them."

"Did you pass anyone on the road?" she asked. He shook his head, puzzled.

She took the fish and bread and put them away safely. Menelaos washed, and sat down.

"I had a visit from a holy ones." she said. "See, there are the cups where She took coffee with me." Menelaos raised his eyebrows.

"They came here? What did They want?"

"She came to tell me where Pan will be born again. There is a place down in the pine trees, a hollow. She explained exactly where. We have to go there and make sure it is ready. She said that I could walk that far, that it would be good for the baby. She said I should go down there

every day or so, and when I said I would, She said She'd count that a kindness." Menelaos' eyes widened.

"I know your brother makes Their sandals, but you never told me They were friends of yours."

"I saw Them, but I never spoke to Them before today," said Taxeia. "But I welcomed Her to our house. And Menelaos, when She were going She put her hand on my stomach—" Taxeia placed her own hand on the baby to show him where, "and She said She was pleased to see a child growing in love and marriage, for a change. And then she said that he had Her blessing. Oh, it is to be a son, and with the holy mother's blessing birth is sure to be easy. I feel so happy."

Menelaos picked up an empty coffee cup and turned it in his hands. He looked at Taxeia dubiously, consideringly. Then he set it down in the saucer with a decisive click.

"Let us go where She told you and examine this hollow and see what needs to be done. Unless there was anything else?"

Taxeia stood and kissed her husband. "She said They didn't know much more than we did, but on the day before the day, you'd know when it was, and we should take some milk and yoghurt down to the grove because it would be needed there. And we should take the rest of the milk to town to be there at sunset because that was when it would be needed." Menelaos put an arm around Taxeia and they walked outside together.

"What is the world coming to?" he mused. "Milk, and shoes, and Great Pan." They were walking through the grazing goats, and one of them looked up straight at Menelaos as he spoke. Taxeia laughed, and it bounded away. They walked through the rocks and down into the trees. Taxeia led the way as if she knew exactly where she was going. They pushed through evergreens for a while, somewhat uncomfortably. At last they came out in a large clear space.

The firs made a rough circle, about ten metres across. It was full of brush and scrubby undergrowth of all kinds. In the centre, deeply covered in undergrowth, was a dark stone slab. There was something ominous about it, and neither of them went any nearer to it. Although the centre was open to the sky, the tall firs seemed to cast a shadow across the whole grove. The place induced an aura of being inside rather than outside.

"It needs clearing," said Taxeia, looking about.

"I'll need tools," said Menelaos, pulling desultorily at the purple flowers of some wild thyme. The bruised plant scented the grove,

stronger than the scents of pine and sage. "I'll buy tools tomorrow and come back. If it's given to us to get the place ready, then we can do that. Do you think it feels like a good place?" He stuffed his hands into his pockets as if to demonstrate the futility of starting without tools.

Taxeia hesitated, looking about her. "I don't think it feels like anything," she said at last. "It feels asleep. Waiting. Expectant, like me. I don't know what it would be like if it woke up. But I'd like to be here when it does."

"We'll do our share." said Menelaos, confidently.

Chapter 13

GREAT PAN

(Jenny)

The broken man who seeks to break a world
and bring it crashing down in shreds and shards
and shatterings of fire, and start anew,
to mend it closer to thy heart's desire.

I sit chewing good grilled octopus, half-listening to my new employer spouting bullshit. *To Chani* is crowded and I keep glancing round to check that nobody is paying attention to us. They're not. They are the usual mixture of tourists and locals one would expect to find in *To Chani* at this time of evening. The locals know me and don't care about me or my companions. Colin and the kid got a few glances when they came in, but people looked away quickly, very polite. They probably know more about him than I do, but they won't say anything unless it's appropriate. The tourists are absorbed in themselves. They probably think we're a family. Emrys looks more like me than he does like Colin, come to think of it. But nobody is listening. That's just as well, because if they heard the half of what Colin said they'd start calling for men in white coats.

Alexi has given us a good table near the balcony. Emrys keeps peering out between the square orange-glazed pots of basil and thyme on the balustrade to see the olive groves and bare hillsides sloping down towards the sea below us in the fading light. We are too far around the curve of the hill to see the harbour and *Sarakina*. I feel awkward and uncomfortable in the good clothes I haven't worn for so long. I don't know why I thought I needed to impress him.

"Does this disturb you?" Colin asks, taking a mouthful, hanging on to his knife, European style. "You seem nervous." I look at him straight, dark hair, lined face, slightly concerned. He doesn't *look* like a lunatic.

"I'm not concerned with the mystical stuff," I say, shaking my short hair back. "You just tell me where you want the boat sailed, and I'll do it."

"But I don't know. Jenny, I accept that you don't believe any of this. But there are other people involved who do believe it. Some of them have kidnapped my daughter. If you're coming with me then it is important that you're aware of what the dangers are."

"And what might they be?" He seems so sincere. He reminds me of Ralph. Ralph always seemed sincere, the lying bastard. Colin's nothing like him physically, of course. Ralph is blond and slim, a golden surfer boy. Ten years ago. I expect he's getting a pot belly now, working in an office. I drain my glass and refill it from the bottle while Colin watches, quietly, waiting. Emrys eats his kalimari, seeming completely absorbed in his food. Not a fussy kid, thank God. I'd never have eaten squid at that age.

Suddenly Colin frowns, staring past me. I look. Panayoti is stalking in, nose in the air. He's dressed in his best suit, navy blue, a little too tight for him. He looks determined and uncomfortable. What the hell is he doing? He sees me and makes his way over to our table. Ostentatiously ignoring Colin, he pulls out the fourth chair and sits down.

"You look very beautiful," he says, solemnly.

"Are you drunk, Panayoti?" I ask. I suppose it is a long time since he saw me in a skirt. Alexi rushes over, frowning, bringing another glass.

"Will you eat?" he asks Panayoti, offering a menu as if he were a tourist. To get out here onto the balcony Panayoti must have walked straight past the kitchen without ordering anything. They'll be gossiping about this for days.

"Not with this devil!" Panayoti replies loudly. More heads turn, all tourists. The locals are carefully not looking, knowing it's not their business. Alexi shrugs, uncomfortable. He looks at me inquiringly. I tap the wine bottle.

"Another, please." He goes off in search of it, looking relieved to have something to do he understands. I look back at the others. Colin looks uncomfortable. Very uncomfortable. Panayoti looks triumphant. Emrys—Emrys is looking at me in a very disconcerting way, an unreadable expression in his blue eyes. He hardly looks like a child at all. He smiles when he sees me looking back, pats my arm and says in a tone of someone having something confirmed to them:

"Now you'll believe us." He takes another ring of kalimari and starts chewing. I look at Colin, and then at Panayoti, and then back. They are glaring at each other.

"Will somebody tell me what's going on?" I ask.

Panayoti draws breath. "You must not go with this man. I knew it, but you would not listen, you are so sensible always, so rational, so American. So I went to the Lady to ask, and to get protection against him."

"What Lady?" I ignore his insults. *Despina* he says, Lady, a formal archaic title of respect, used very rarely. The first time I ever heard it used was in Athens airport, a man in the queue in front of me begging for a place on an over-crowded flight to Karpathos. He went through a long story about how his mother was dying. The booking clerk, half bored, pretty, uniformed, quite modern, just shook her head, saying "So sad, but the flight is full." Then, almost weeping, he addressed her like that, "Please, Lady," "*Parakalo, Despina.*" And suddenly they changed, as Greeks do sometimes, they were not like modern people any more but like people on a stage in an old tragedy, going through ancient ritual actions, even though they were still in an airport and it was a boarding pass for an airplane she was giving him. I didn't speak Greek very well then, and I had to look the word up afterwards. I never worked out why it had that incredible effect.

"I sometimes forget that you were not born among us, Jenny." says Panayoti. "If I say the old maid do you know who I mean?"

I do, of course, and nod. She's an eccentric old woman who lives on her own on charity up on the slope of the island high above the bay. I've always heard her called "Gerontokore", "the old maid". She gives people charms and advice in exchange for food. Ralph would have seen her as an example of what happens to old people without family in countries without welfare. There are a lot of superstitions about her. People say she's been there forever without changing, and that she eats young girls, and that she can grant your heart's desire, the usual nonsense. It's usually the women who go and see her, it can't have been easy for Panayoti to go. He must have thought it was really important. I'm not sure what to feel.

Panayoti clears his throat to spit, then remembers where he is. "Don't call her that, Jenny, it's not respectful. She says he is dangerous, dangerous for you, you might lose your life if you go with him. And—"

Colin interrupts. "What is he saying?" I look at him in total bewilderment. I am astounded. Panayoti is speaking good clear Greek. I don't understand what's going on. Panayoti looks triumphant.

"He can't understand me. I had the Lady do a magic to protect me from his magic, and that means he can't understand me any more. Tell him so." Panayoti waits.

"He says," I say to Colin, "that he visited the local witch and she has cast a spell to free him from your spells." It sounds even sillier in English, as silly as what Colin has been saying. But why can't Colin understand the Greek? He could this morning. I feel chilled and confused.

"I see." Colin takes it quite calmly, and spears a piece of tomato from his salad. "Tell him—"

"But why can't you tell him?"

"Because he can't understand me." It doesn't seem to worry him at all, and Panayoti is positively smug, but I'm terrified.

"You speak Greek." I say, in Greek.

"Not really," he replies, in Greek. "Only by magic." I have known Panayoti for ten years, and Colin only arrived today. They would not conspire to fool me. Emrys looks up from his plate and grins at me.

"His magic doesn't work on me any more," explains Panayoti. "You see?"

"I see." I admit, half excited and half frightened. If Colin isn't mad after all then everything else he was saying, might be true as well. "The old maid—"

"The Lady," corrected Panayoti.

"The Lady, she freed you of this man's spells and told you to tell me not to go on his boat?" Colin can understand what I say, whichever language I speak, but not what Panayoti says. It explains how his Greek is so good, I suppose. I drain my glass and refill it. I can't quite believe this isn't a dream. I would pinch myself, except that that doesn't prove anything. If a huge tidal wave crashes down and washes us all away, as in so many of my nightmares, I will be relieved to have the unreality confirmed. Perhaps I am still asleep and this whole day has been a dream? *Sarakina* isn't very likely, after all. Alexi brings the new bottle. I drain another glass as Panayoti speaks. The wine feels real.

"She didn't exactly say that," says Panayoti. "She said you must go with your moira, that it is up to you, but if you go you will be going into danger. She feels sorry for him, and hopes, but I am afraid for you, Jenny." I repeat all this to Colin in English. I feel an urge to giggle when I say the bit about going with my destiny. It sounds like something in the dreadful stories Imogen and my mother love so much.

"Who is this Lady?" Colin asks. I tell him. He looks puzzled. "Tell him I won't hurt you, and that another seer saw you at my side on the boat." So

that's why he wants me. I was wondering. Mad, this whole thing. I gulp at my wine, as I translate, starting to feel it affect me at last.

"He has enchanted you into wanting to go on his boat!" declares Panayoti. I'm not sure I do want to go on his boat any more. But I wonder why *Sarakina* tempts me so much. Is it because she's like *Jenny*? Could he really have enchanted me? If magic is real then everything is different and I don't know what to trust. But I wanted to go before I ever saw Colin, it would have to be the boat working spells. Surely that isn't possible?

"Have you enchanted me into wanting to go with you?" I ask Colin. Emrys laughs. Colin sighs.

"I did not, though I'm glad to hear you want to. Tell him I am not a wizard any more, that I have no magic left, that this is my last voyage, intended to save lives and to right a terrible wrong." I say this, and Panayoti nods. Then he stands, putting a hand on my arm.

"A word in private?" I smile awkwardly at Colin and Emrys and follow Panayoti to the corner of the balcony, out of earshot. Lots of people are looking, though.

"You will go?" he asks me. I say nothing, confused, unsure. He must see in my eyes that I will. "Well, Jenny, be careful. Come back. I was hoping you'd stop wanting to go off, like we Greeks do, but never mind, If you're here next Spring I mean to tell you something."

For a moment I don't understand, and then I do. Panayoti is unmarried, the Spring is the traditional time for proposals in Greece. It will by then have been more than ten years since he rescued me from the waves. Like a widow, I think, and feel a strong desire to laugh, which I choke back.

"We're friends, but we couldn't be more, don't spoil that." I say. "You know I—"

"You can't live with the dead forever," he says, and looks at my ring. It is gold, two hands clasped, Greek. I wear it on the fourth finger of my right hand, where a Greek widow would wear a wedding ring, although the truth is that that is the finger where I first placed it and it stuck. I was never married. Ralph bought it for me on Mykonos. It is the only bit of him I have kept. It seems suddenly obscene that Panayoti, who knows as much as anyone, should think that I have been mourning all this time for poor dead Oyvin, whom I hardly knew.

"I must." I say, biting my lip. Why did he have to say that? The ring was the only thing I had on when Panayoti pulled me out of the sea after I lost the *Jenny* in the dark waters outside Molivos harbour. All that

dreadful time searching for Oyvin, all of that terrible time afterwards, and then ten years. Panayoti had never said anything until now. I never even wondered how old he was. I tend to think of all Greek men as being the same age: old. I suppose he's about my age or a little more, not much above thirty. I have shut off that side of myself for so long, never thinking of love or sex. I was so disgusted at the thought. I can see how he thought I was mourning and I'd get over it. Oh, bitter, bitter. It's hopeless for him, of course.

"Jenny?" he asks.

"You know I could never be a proper wife in any case," I say, which is true. I could be a Greek man, but never a Greek woman.

"I wouldn't care," he says. "I wouldn't want a woman like that. I want a woman who's as good as me."

"I hope you find one," I say, and mean it.

"Will you think about it?" he asks.

"I'll think about it, but I know what I'll decide," I say, anything less would be cruel. "I'll think on the voyage."

"You'll go in that boat with the man of power?"

"You said I must follow my destiny."

"Destiny." Panayoti's face twists, then he stands up. "I will be waiting, and you will find that I can outwait you," he says.

"I think not, Panayoti," I say. "It isn't Oyvin—"

"I know that!" he says, surprising me. "Not the Norwegian man who was drowned. It was the other man, your sister's husband. I've always known that. Why else would you have stayed and let them take your baby?" He looks at me for a moment and his eyes are full of tears. "Take care!" he says, and turns and leaves. I walk back to the table and sit down. Emrys has fallen asleep, head pillowed on his arms. Colin's been getting down the wine, the bottle's nearly empty.

Colin stares after Panayoti. "There goes a good man," he says. "You're a fool to turn him down."

"Then I'm a fool!" I snap, too loudly, and regret it immediately. Colin doesn't, of course, know anything about the past, and there's no need for him to know either.

"I must tell you what this voyage is about," he says, and I nod, nibbling my octopus, now quite cold. "Your friend is right, as I tried to tell you before, I am a wizard. Or I was. I have lost my power. But there are other people, dangerous people, who still have power. He's right too that this could be a dangerous trip. These people have kidnapped my daughter, and lots of other children too, I think. I don't know where they are, or

what they're doing now. But I mean to look for them and stop them. I know they will be in the Greek islands in late July or early August. I don't know if they know about me, or if they care about me. But if they do, or if they know about Emrys," he smoothed the sleeping boy's golden hair, "they will try to stop us. They have no scruples. They may have lots of children with them. They may have the child who will become Pan, or they may think they do. And they will have other children who they are prepared to kill. They are not afraid to make blood sacrifices."

"Are they Satanists?" I ask, horrified. Colin grimaces.

"Some of them may be something like what you would call Satanists. It really isn't easy to explain. And that isn't the best place to start from." It would be so great to think he was mad and not believe a word of it. But I'm not so stupid as all that. I stare out into the night. Do I really want to go with this man into real danger? There will be other boats, other yachts needing crew, maybe not beautiful hand-built gaff-rigged ketches but good boats all the same. But then could I live with myself if I let him go alone? I have to believe him. I sip my wine. It is up to me.

"How did they kidnap your daughter?" I ask.

"I don't know. Her mother has lost her magic too. I wasn't there." I wonder how he came to keep Emrys.

"You're separated?" It's a very conventional question to cause so much pain. I didn't mean to make his face crumple like that.

"I was born in Ireland," he says, looking straight into my eyes. "I was brought up in a children's home, I never knew my family. I always had a great urge to belong somewhere. I always had magic, and I taught myself to use it. I was vain and full of power, I thought it would be mine forever. I did small things, like the language spell, letting me understand and be understood in any language."

"Useful," I say, because he has left a space in which I must say something, I feel dizzy in the intensity of his gaze.

"And when I was twenty, I found a spell in an old book, a spell that would find me what I most wanted, the woman who would be the other half of my soul. It was a great magic and not many people would have done it." He has so much pain in his voice. "I wouldn't be content with girls I could find, girls who wanted me. There were enough of them, but they weren't special. I wanted the one who would be my other half in the Platonic sense."

"I've read the Symposium. And the Phaedrus."

"I called up—there isn't really a word that I can use that would give you the right idea. A spirit, anyway, and I asked it to show me the girl

who in all the world was the best suited to me in power and love. Well, in a cloud of smoke it showed her to me. She was very beautiful, brown haired and white skinned, and I fell in love with her immediately. Then she turned and looked at me, and it seemed she saw me and I knew that in her real life she was dreaming about me. I asked her, her, not the spirit. That was a bad mistake, the spirit would have been compelled to tell me the truth. I asked her her name and where she lived and told her I'd come as quickly as I could to find her. Marie, Marie, lost to me forever." He is weeping quite openly. I don't know what to say.

"She was French. I went there, to Grenoble and she was there."

"Really?" I can't help it, it just slips out.

"Oh yes, really." I can't help believing him. "She came away with me, and we loved each other. I taught her magic. She had family in France, how was I to know? She never mentioned that she was adopted. If it had been Ireland then I might have thought. But our parents must have thought they had been so clever." He is staring into the darkness now, his hand tight around his glass. "Between us we had one and a half souls. We loved each other. We could do anything. But she couldn't trust me. I did something—something happened, and someone died, not by my doing, not at all. She wanted proof that I'd done what I said, and not killed him. And when I gave her proof the spirit mocked us, and told us the truth about what we were."

He is silent for a long moment as if he can still see it in the darkness. Then he turns to me. "Why am I telling you all this?"

"She was your sister?"

"I wish I'd never found out." He searches my face for something, condemnation perhaps, and does not find it. "She ran away from me. She returned to the church. I—Do you have any faith?"

"Not really," I say, honestly, surprised at being brought back to myself suddenly from such a dark story. "My parents go to church back in the States, but I stopped believing in any of it a long time ago."

"Oh, it's all true," he says, and shakes his head. "I follow the Old Gods, and I am not the only one in the world who does, there are more than you'd probably think. But I'm glad to hear you don't particularly love the White Christ, because his age is ending and the new age is beginning. Great Pan will be reborn. And I want to make it the best age I can."

"I don't understand. If you say all the gods are real then what is one goat-footed god more or less?" He splutters with sudden laughter, then grows serious again.

"You say you've read Plato? You're familiar with that world view, with how different the sort of thoughts were that could be thought then? Or, well, in the simplest terms consider the differences between Greece and America, in those sort of terms, what people believe affecting how they act. The different customs and attitudes and expectations, the different sorts of lives people lead growing up in them. Who could have imagined Christianity and all that followed as an age, from just one more god? That age is over now, whatever happens. And what happens next—well, that is our choice. There is a story that a voyager heard the nymphs mourning for Pan on the day of the Resurrection. This cycle it will be the other way around."

Emrys stirs, yawns, and stretches. "Great Pan is not dead, Great Pan will never die." he says, in Greek, sounding as if he's quoting something. Then in English, "Can we go back to *Sarakina* now? I'm so sleepy. Are you coming, Jenny"

"Your choice." says Colin.

Chapter 14

LADY OF SILENCES

Her laurel tree, her bear, her starting hind
her veil of shadows thrown before the hounds
her sudden hedge of thorns, her arrow nocked,
her smiling silver face that knows her own.

Eleni sat among the other women, sewing a button on a child's jacket. She enjoyed these Thursday afternoons they spent together in the shaded courtyard of her house, making clothes. She liked the quiet talking, comparing their work. She liked the sticky home-made *vouvouki* Dafni always brought, packed loose in icing sugar, with clusters of nuts and fruit embedded in the sweet glutinous rose and lemon jelly. She enjoyed making lemonade and bringing it out to the courtyard on a tray with ice. She enjoyed the way everyone would exclaim over her ice and her pretty jug and glasses. All the women liked her shady courtyard, with the almond tree, the wooden chairs and the pots of bright geraniums. Eleni found the sewing itself easy and relaxing, and had a great feeling of satisfaction at seeing the pile of pretty garments they finished each week. At the end of the afternoon Evadni would collect them all, and take them with her back to the warehouse on the shore where all the made things were being stored until they were needed.

Mostly the women would gossip as they worked, exchanging news of their friends and neighbours. Eleni would listen more than she talked. She didn't always know the people they were talking about. Unlike the other women she had not grown up on the island. She had come here from Athens on holiday, fallen in love with Spiro and stayed. At first she thought she would soon fit in and learn all the island ways. It didn't take long to begin to settle. But somehow it was very hard to get closer than that. Fourteen years later, despite two children and a determined effort to participate she never quite felt a part of the island life. That was one reason why she loved these regular sessions of making clothes so much. They made her feel accepted at last.

Often enough they talked and laughed about how Pappa Thomas was trying to find out about Pan being reborn so that he could stop it. They talked about their children, and how good it was that they could take turns to care for them so that they could come here and sew in peace and quiet. Only the youngest nursing babies came with their mothers, all the others went off together to the beach with three of the women, in strict rotation, while the rest sewed. They wondered aloud what children would wear the clothes they were making, where they would come from and what they would be like. They admired each other's work, and complimented each other. They would speculate about marriages being arranged, marriages falling apart and marriages that should have happened but never did.

Occasionally one of the women would slide from gossiping into telling a story. Sometimes it was Eleni's sister-in-law Dafni, describing events as she knitted, needles moving wildly. Sometimes it was young Katerina, Stellio's daughter, beginning shyly and getting more and more enthusiastic as she went on until she had them all doubled over with laughter. But the best storyteller of them all was old Vrahi. She could make a story out of anything—an anecdote about a tourist who came into her milk shop and asked for a doughnut with the wrong word became a major work of art on Vrahi's lips. When Eleni tried to repeat it later for Spiro and the children it seemed the slightest thing, but while Vrahi was speaking everyone listened.

So when Vrahi leaned over and poked her and asked if she'd ever heard how the moon fell in love, Eleni grinned and shook her head, threading her needle to do the last button on the little quilted jacket.

"Well, you know how the moon's so cold and far away, but she never used to get lonely up there in the sky. She had the whole world to look at and everyone to see. The time never came when she'd care for one more than another, or think that it mattered who she was looking at, from so far up in the sky. She just kept right on dancing round the world, all on her own, and the far away sun warmed them both. She lived in a time that was her time, and that time was a long way from being our time, so that we might grow old and die and it would all feel like the same day to her, a day she was dancing.

Until one day she was watching the world as it turned its face towards her and she saw a fisherman setting sail under the setting sun. There was something about him that caught her eye. He had a saucy turn of his head, and a way of stepping that made her look closer. He had a way of grinning when he drew in his nets in the moonlight and emptied a good

catch into the bottom of his boat that made her want to watch him, hoping he'd grin again. He had a way of moving when he leapt off the boat in the dawn, tired and yet still jaunty, that made her want to linger past her time and see him in the day. Well, that she could never do, and she knew it.

But as the days went on she watched him more and more, until she was watching him on purpose and not by anything even she could call chance. And she came to care, to think about the way he tipped his head and the way he grinned and the way he moved. She slowed the way she saw her dancing and she spent her time in a time that was more like our time. So time came when she thought about him near all the time, when she could see him and when she couldn't. And when she couldn't she sighed cold sighs and cold tears rolled down her silver face.

For a long time she was happy as long as she could watch him, and she thought she'd just watch him always, because that was enough. Until a night when he didn't go out, and she worried and fidgeted and couldn't rest or settle to anything until she saw him again. It was then she remembered that he was a mortal man, and time would come when he'd die, and every night would be empty and desolate for her. There wasn't any way she could think of to make him live longer, not as long as he was there on the Earth. If he'd come up to the moon she could have him beside her forever.

And she tried and tried to think of a way she could have that fisherman for herself. She thought he loved her, for she'd seen him looking up at her in the dark as if he was pleased to see her. But she didn't know much, for all she'd lost her heart, she didn't know that a man would no more think of the moon as a lover than he might think of a tree that way. If moon or tree falls in love with a person it's for them to step and speak, explain themselves to the person in question, and no two ways about it. But she'd never fallen in love before, in all those years of going round the world, pulling the tides behind her.

So she thought and she thought. At the last she decided to take up a form and go down to the world to speak to the man and see if he'd be prepared to leave the world and come and live on the moon with her. She harnessed up her four stags to her chariot. She dressed herself in silver with her arms all white and bare. She set her sickle knife at her side, and put on a fillet of silver to hold her dark hair back. She looked at herself in the ocean, and she saw that she was beautiful. Then she waited until she saw him, and drove down the moon's path on the water until

she was standing before him, with the stags' hooves breaking the water and making his little boat rock, rock, on the waves.

Well, he looks up, surprised, that fisherman, for one minute he's dropping his nets in the moonlight on quiet water and the next the boat's rocking on breaking waves. When he looks up what does he see but the chariot and the moon standing up in it, splendid and shining right in front of him. And he's clean scared, as who wouldn't be, seeing a sight like that? No doubt in his mind who it was, though he didn't know what it was she wanted of him. So he flings himself down in the boat, shielding his eyes from her glory. And this isn't what she wants, not at all, not even slightly, she knows all about worship and values it in its place, but not from this lad. So she tells him to get up, and asks him straight out without pause for thought, she says:

"Get up. I want you to come back with me up the moon's track to live with me in the moon and teach me what love is."

He does get up, and he stands there trembling in his boat before her, and he doesn't know what to say. And after a while he gets his courage together and he says:

"I've got a girl at home. I'm next best thing to a married man." And she frowns, all terrible, and the lead stag paws the water, snorting, sending up the spray, and she says:

"But don't you want me? All these ages I've never once loved anyone, and now I do and you spurn me?" And he trembles again, fit to set the little boat rocking once more. But the gods don't set their sights on fools, mostly, and for sure he's no fool, though younger than he might be if he'd had time to get older.

"I've always honoured you and I always will, but I'm just a common fisherman, and as I said, I'm promised to a girl on the island, begging your pardon."

"If you come with me you could live forever." she says, tempting him now. But he shakes his head, resolute. And up to that point she'd done nothing wrong, nor him neither. But when she sees him shake his head and look sad she suddenly remembers how she felt that night she couldn't see him, and thinks about feeling that forever. And she casts a spell on him to make him fall asleep, and then she snatches him up out of his boat, tucks him under her arm and carries him away up the moon's path and up into the sky.

There he's been ever since. There he lies, asleep, in a mountain on the moon. And she can see him whenever she likes. But it isn't like she thought, because she daren't wake him because she knows he doesn't

want to be there. So she may have his sleeping form, and he's a likely looking lad as I said, for any woman or any goddess to pick out. But as for what made her fall in love with him, well, that's lost to her just the same as if she'd watched him getting old and dying. She can't see him tip his head, or grin, or walk, not when he's asleep. Sometimes he sighs in his sleep, as if he knows that far below him on the Earth his girl's married another and borne that man's children and grown old and died and her children and grandchildren have grown old and died. And the world keeps turning, and the moon moves around it, and she's still lonely because she still hasn't learned that it isn't love if you can't let go.

And I wonder sometimes, if those American men in the rockets they called Apollo, (that they should have called Selene Artemis, as I said at the time to everyone who would listen, as some of you will remember,) I wonder if they saw him asleep up there in the mountains of the moon? But I don't think they would, because they were all men and they don't know how to look. They did it all wrong, they had no imagination of what they were doing. But I wonder if we might send a woman up sometime, to walk on the moon. I think we will, somebody will, it doesn't matter who. The woman will walk away from the rocket and meet the moon walking on the moon. Then they'd ride together in the chariot and talk about love and life and what it is to be a goddess and what it is to be human. I'd like to do that! Oh, I'd dearly love to build a temple to the moon on the moon, with pillars of white lunar rocks. And then the woman—it would have to be a Greek woman. But there are plenty of those everywhere in the world! The woman would go up into the mountains where he's sleeping and sighing, and she'd lean over and kiss him. He'd wake up, and he'd think it was his lost love from long ago, because this woman is maybe the descendant of that girl, or maybe just looks a little like her, and it's been a long time. And they'd live together on the moon, and maybe they'd fall in love and maybe they wouldn't, because life's like that. Either way it would teach the moon something she could do with learning."

As Vrathi came to the end of the story, she also finished the hem of the left leg of the little pair of trousers she was making. She bit off the thread neatly in the little silence that followed. As Dafni drew breath to speak, Vrathi looked up at Eleni.

"And do you know the name of that man asleep on the moon, the man the moon loves?"

"I think—" Eleni began tentatively, and then more confidently "I think I remember learning in school, although the story wasn't the same, that his name was Endymion?"

"Ah, they had the story wrong in Athens, did they?" Vrathi laughed, starting to hem the other leg. "Good that you know it right now to tell it to your children. Children need to know that you can only love what lives and grows and moves and changes." Eleni set down the jacket in the basket of completed clothes stood and went to pour everyone more lemonade.

"That is a very good end for that story, Vrathi," said Dafni, decisively. "I never heard that before, about the woman who will wake him. I like that."

Vrathi laughed. "I am too old, and so are you Dafni, and all your daughters are married. It's past time your son found a wife, for that matter. But maybe it will be one of your grandchildren who will go and wake him. When Great Pan is reborn there will be all sorts of new beginnings. Maybe they will build a village on the moon to look at the stars and give it his name."

"I really hope so," said Dafni, smiling. "And I hope they build a temple to the moon on the moon, like you said, that would be something to see."

"I hope so too, that would be very good." said Eleni, sitting down again, picking up fresh material and a large pair of scissors. All the women smiled and nodded, heads bent, hands moving busy about their preparations.

Chapter 15

THE ASSUMPTION

(Marie)

If all you hold are dreams, and words are deeds
then you must trust your dream and make it known
for if you dare not act you cannot speak
and helpless, mute, you cannot count or care.

I do not like this enclosed mall with its pastel colours, concrete flower-pots and advertising hoardings. It makes me feel hot at the back of my neck, and cold deep in my stomach. I walk past a car someone is trying to sell for charity, brushing aside the offered leaflets. The lights are too bright, and the music is cloying, tinkling travesties of Brahms and Mozart. There are eyes on me everywhere. I smell of work, of the perfume I wear to the office. My feet ache as I walk through the crowds, trying not to notice them. They have bland blank faces but their moves are threatening. They do not see me. They do not know me. They will not tear me apart. Good Lord protect us.

There are so many people here. They crowd about me, coming too close. They carry bright bags of shopping. I avoid their eyes, slink through them, past children running, adults pushing, alone, in groups. So many. There are always too many people here. I don't like to come here. We always used to come to buy her shoes, because they have good cheap children's shoes. There are lots of broad halls, like streets, I always have trouble finding the right shoe shop. Then I would have trouble deciding what to buy. I never come here for clothes, even though there is a cheap place. It is only just possible to buy something here for her, and quite impossible to buy something for me.

She always wanted to run away and climb, and I always made her hold my hand. Children run along fast, it is dangerous, there are things to fall over and so many people everywhere. Running is for outdoors, for the park, I used to tell her. She wanted everything, when she was small,

sweets and toys and brightly coloured clothes in all the windows. We would walk along fast, as I am doing now, ignoring as much of it as possible, the same chill inside me. There are some big boys in school uniforms going round and round on roller skates, careless, confident, expecting people to move away from them. I go a long way around to avoid them.

I should have taken the letter to the police. It sits in my bag in accusation, the brown envelope, slightly torn at the corner, the little note from Eleanor folded into the typed page. Every time I open my bag I see it, the strange bright Roumanian stamp looking at me in mute guilt and hope. It is the first hope I have had, all this terrible time. The police told me if I received anything to take it to them. They did not think I would. She looked bored and uncomfortable, he looked concerned and awkward. They had seen so many parents. I think Doctor Carol must have told them I might be hysterical. They had that wary look, though I was quite calm. I telephoned them every week, but there was never any news. This might be the only clue they have. There are other children, lots of other children.

But what could they do, so helpless in this sort of world? They would give me a guard, perhaps. That would help against certain things. But if a guard was here they would not come. A guard would only be so much use. These people have magic. They know all about me, she has told them. I hope she has told them, if not they have taken it from her mind, or from mine. That is the worst thought of all. I never thought that I was making myself helpless to them. I never considered them at all, I was a fool. Deliver us from evil. If they did not know where I work and what time I finish they would not have suggested meeting me here in the cafe in the mall at five thirty. I must be wary of what they want. They may let her go and take me instead. They must want something from me, something I can give or withhold. Otherwise they would not have written, they would just have killed me or taken me. But I do not know how much they know about me. She might have told them that I hate this place. Or they might just know that it is near, and public, nobody's territory. I can only hope it is not their territory. Maybe I am stupid to walk in here unprotected. But what can I do, who can I tell? I put my trust in God. Christ is my arm and Christ my right.

"Brent Cross" it says on the sign, and there was a cross here once where a queen's body rested the night on the way to burial. Elly and I looked it up. But there's no cross now, no church, no sign of religion, only a red stone lion looking down from a plinth and the name on the

sign. The name isn't enough. I touch my little gold cross. St. Nicholas and St. Michael and St. George, slayer of the evil worm, be with me now. Here in the centre I pause, draw breath, turn to the cafe, trying to be calm.

The cafe is crowded. "The Bavarian Kitchen" it is called, but the writing is scrolled, Gothic, and Eleanor always used to pretend it said "Barbarian". The dark ceiling is low. The tables are green and white, there are people sitting at them surrounded by bags, all the same colours, the bags of the shops in the mall. There are pictures of alps and people in Lederhosen on the walls. I stand in the doorway, looking for the woman I am to meet. Dear Lord, that woman eating an éclair has the face of a ferret. And the child she is feeding is a wolf, and the man at the other table is a bear. I freeze for a moment because all of these people have the faces of animals, and they are all eating and drinking from white china as if they were not beasts. One only is a person still, a woman sitting at table between wooden barriers against the farthest wall. She is looking at me and smiling. She must be that Miriam who wrote to me, and this must be her doing. A petty magic, not real, an illusion, they will not know. But horrible, horrible because to reach her I must walk past all those slaving jaws that could rend me, tear off my arm in one motion. It seems real, there is no way I have now to tell real from false. I have no protection here. I pull my hand to my side, away from where it wants to twist the cross at my neck again. Christ have mercy.

She has done this to make me think that she doesn't look evil. And to frighten me, and to see what I will do. I try not to react. She does look evil in any case. She has the look of someone who has done so many terrible things she doesn't notice any more whether what she does is terrible or not. I fill the top of my mind with prayer, the Agnus Dei over and over again, and below that the sung Kyrie. She will not be able to see below that to the level where I may think freely. That is not breaking my word, to fill my mind with prayer is not using magic. It is not constructing a shield of the mind as I might have done once, but it will serve the same purpose. I will keep my word, always. I will not use magic. As if I *could* use magic. That is gone. Regret is a bitter taste in my mouth as I walk across past the tables of gnawing biting beast-men, wolves and bears and weasels chomping and clattering with their spoons and cups. Beasts. Feeble. They are more frightening with human faces.

I stand above her. She has poured tea for me. I sit. (Oh Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world...) She raises an eyebrow. She is

French. The letter was in French, but I did not know that she was until now. We have said nothing yet. (... have mercy upon us.)

"Your daughter said you were a Christian. I couldn't quite believe it." Her nails are painted pink, very precisely, the shade matching her lips.

"It is true." I shrug.

"I see that it is." She sips her tea. "You're not drinking, Marie?"

"I do not want your hospitality."

"No?" She looks amused. (Oh Lamb of God...) "But I have something you do want."

"My daughter." My voice sounds calm in my own ears, to my surprise.

"Elly, yes." I do not like to hear her use the pet name. "Elly is quite safe, and will remain so. We have cured her illness."

"She said so in her note. I want her back." I cannot help it that I am glad of that, Lord. (... who taketh away the sins of the world...)

"What are you prepared to give for her?"

"What do you want?" (... receive our prayer.) She laughs. A panther-headed man at the table behind the wooden partition I lean on is smoking. He holds the cigarette in his monstrous jaw. The smoke blows acrid across my face. I cough a little. She pauses, tapping her fingers together. (Oh Lamb of God...)

"Who is her father?" Miriam asks. This is not what I expected. And I cannot tell her, I have sworn never to speak of him and to do penance if I think of him. (... who taketh away...) She will know if I lie, and the comforting lies I told Elly, that he is dead, will not fool her at all. (... the sins of the world...) I say nothing, but cough again. The ceiling seems lower, the air thick with smoke. "Is she the child of a god? Is she *andain*?" she asks. I frown. *Andain* she says, she means half a god, a god's child. They take these words from stories and twist them to their own uses. So foolish of them, words have weight in the world.

"No."

"Then who is her father?" (... grant us thy peace. Oh Lamb of God who...)

"I have sworn not to say. It would be oathbreaking to tell you."

She laughs again, a little impatiently. (... taketh away...) "Then you can't give me what I want, and I shall go back. Marie, my friends and I are in the middle of organising something very important." (... the sins of the world...) "I think you know what sort of thing, or you wouldn't be praying so hard. You had magic once, didn't you? And you lost it somehow? That's not as good as Claude was hoping from what Elly told us, but you could still be valuable to us." (... have mercy upon us.)

"Will you let her go and take me in exchange?" I ask, almost in a whisper.

Miriam smiles, and it is not at all a nice smile. Her eyes are very hard. (Oh Lamb of God...) "We don't need to. She is more valuable to us. She has magic of her own, and we can teach her." I am shaken, and she is smiling. I have tried to instill in her that magic is wrong, that Jesus can help her be good. (... who taketh away the sins...) But she is innocent, innocent, though Father Michael calls that the Pelagian heresy. He does not know what far worse heresies I am guilty of. Magic in itself is not evil, though I have forsworn it. "We would let her go in exchange for you and her father."

"I don't know where he is! I haven't seen him for years!" (... of the world...)

"He has been seen. He has a part in the pattern, something to do yet before the Realized World becomes Everything. We don't know what, but he is important. And he has an andain with him, we think, a child. We want him. You too, but him especially. We were afraid he was a god, or andain. If he is a man then we can control him."

"He is near as strong in magic as a god, but with a man's roots in the world." (... receive our prayer.) God forgive me, it is pride and a sin, and a thought of Colin and so doubly a sin, but I almost laugh within to know how easily he could deal with these people and their petty powers, if they need to go to these lengths to speak to me, if they must needs steal children to sacrifice for power.

"Tell me his name. No matter how strong the magic, we can take him if we know his name." Even without his name's strength he would give them a fight. (Oh Lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world, grant us thy peace.)

"I cannot. It would break an oath I swore before God." The waitress, with a jackal's head, puts the bill on the table. She can't understand French. She snarls at me, and turns.

"We've killed your god already, Jesus is dead. He died on the cross and didn't rise again. Nobody cares about him anymore. The old ways are almost dead, this year the world will be made new. What value then are promises to dead gods?"

"Gods are not killed or brought to life as easily as you seem to think." I say, quietly. She leans forward to hear. "I have seen Jesus, after Siena." (Oh Lamb of God who...)

"How do you know about Siena?" She is startled. I smile.

"What will you give me if I tell you?"

She shakes her head. "That doesn't really matter. If you tell me her father's name, I will let Elly go wherever she wants."

They do not break their words lightly, such as her. (... taketh away...) Can I trust her? Knowing what is waiting for me? What would Elly do, free in the world? (... the sins...) She is only seven, though sensible.

"Will you bring Eleanor back to England?" She looks troubled, (... of the world...), frowns again. (... have mercy...)

"I will promise you I will give her free choice. Or I can take you to her, and you can be together. I like Elly." (Christ, have mercy.) She seems to mean that. It is a terrible thing. I can't trust her. I can't trust her, and Elly couldn't manage alone and (Lord, have mercy.) I don't know what to do (Christ, have...) even though I expect Colin could (... mercy.) cope perfectly well with these people, just like he did that little assassin at Siena (Lord, have...) just as we did all the other times it was necessary. If only I had trusted him then. Oh Colin, Colin. I would do it if I could trust her. (... mercy.) I would damn myself in the eyes of God and in my own eyes and suffer eternally by betraying my oath, and I would betray him to danger at their hands if I really believed it would save Eleanor. But I can't. Not even in my worst despair. Not even knowing I can never use the power again, and it is like walking around blind and deaf and disarmed. Not even hating myself all through and knowing I would kill myself if not for Elly and suicide being a sin against the Comforter. I can't trust this woman to set Elly free. And that being so I shan't break my oath or betray into her hands the name which Colin O'Niall has always kept so very dear.

She laughs then, loud and whooping, and my hands raise to my face and I know she has read the name in my mind, that my shield of prayer fell away, broken, as all my other shields have broken in my hands. Power, and pride, love, and hope, faith, and prayer, all my shields gone. I cannot even trust myself. I have betrayed him and broken my word and all for nothing. I have lived alone in misery and have not even saved my soul by it. I loathe myself.

Miriam's laughter rises in whoops like a hyena, and the animal faces of the people all turn to us, and then they rise up and come towards us, towards me, and their hands are claws and their mouths are open and they are reaching for me. I leap to my feet, stand a moment with my back against the wall, then spring forward, running, running. I am pushing through them, knocking over a table and going through the glass of the window. There is blood and pain and one of my shoes has come off so I kick off the other as I run. Writhing snakes twist in people's hair. The

horrible parody of music rises up and up louder and louder, it is Ave Maria mocking and echoing and ringing in my ears as I run faster and faster. They claw at me and catch at me and try to stop me, and the snakes hiss towards me. One pulls at my arm and I slip, starting to fall. There are faces all round me, and then suddenly there is a great roar, and they are moving back, afraid. The red lion on the pillar leaps, pounces, going over my head and into the crowd. The man who is clutching me goes down under his weight, and I am free. For an instant the crowd falls back away from the lion. I start to run forward again. Before I have taken many steps there is a sharp iron smell of blood mixed with the stench of shit, much stronger than any of the other smells. I glance back, and see the lion, dying, loops of entrail spilling out onto the tiled floor, stained now with a pink wash of blood. They are ripping and pulling at him even as I look, they are tearing him to shreds with their hands and teeth and pieces of broken glass. They almost all have human faces, and most of them are women. The red of the blood that drips from their mouths is so much brighter and darker than the various pinks of their lipsticked mouths.

My feet are running before my mind has caught up with my eyes, and each step falls hard on the tiles and carries me away. My breath comes fast. I have no time to thank that lion. I am running, running past displays of brightly coloured well lit torture equipment, past piles of corpses of emaciated children, past burning trees and burning boats and burning bridges. I am running towards glass doors that lead to the air and the outside world, and behind me I can hear screams and howls of pursuit and hatred as the ravening beasts come close at my heels.

Someone clutches at my bag, my precious bag, and I swing it out, lashing at her, knocking her into a flower-bed. A dripping tuft of red fur flies from her hand as she falls. I am running and the crowds all see me and move towards me, teeth bared, the human faces so much worse than the animal ones. They call my name. They press towards me and they will tear me to pieces. There is no mercy for me now, no lion, no God, for I am an oathbreaker before both the old gods and the White Christ and nobody will reach out to help such as me. I am bloodcursed and hateful in all I am. Almost I deserve to be torn apart by these maddened beasts and demons who were human once and whose claws reach for me. But I run on, though there is a stitch in my side. The lion bought me time and I think I am faster than she expected. If I can escape this place at least I will not be her sacrifice and give her power. I run past display dummies weeping blood, past windows of neon whips and pitchforks, past a

hooded cowed figure with three-headed dog who nods to me gravely as I pass. A man with an axe and a broad grin is carefully removing the clothes from a headless body. I try to avoid the blood but I feel it sticky beneath my feet as I run through. There are other bodies, mutilated. The crowd behind me is baying and howling and screaming my name, over and over. But the doors are near, and outside them is daylight and fresh air.

I run out, gasping, gulping, bending at the waist to get enough air into my lungs. I am dazzled for a moment by the brilliance of the sunlight. Then from the corner of my eye I catch sight of an old lady being set on fire by a group of teenaged girls. For a moment they seem human, but as they see me they all change. They spring forward and run towards me. Their short dresses are black, their skin is very pale, their fingernails are long and red, there are snakes in their hair and fire and smoke in their shadows. I do not see if their eyes weep blood, but I don't need to. There is nowhere to run, now, but I run anyway, blindly, away.

The music is gone, which is a blessing. There are no crowds pressing, only the nine shapes behind me. The ground is cold to my feet but the air is warm. The sun is very bright. I glance back. They have come for me, I know it, and I deserve it, but still I run, breath itself coming painfully now, and the stitch in my side agony at every step. I run on, still blindly, pounding along a pavement not thinking where I am going only that I am going away from Them. From Them who in my mind even now that it doesn't matter I still call the Kindly Ones. The ones who come for the perjured, those who betray suppliants, those who commit nameless crimes against the sanctity of family. I find silvery metal steps ahead of me and stumble up them. A bridge. If I can cross running water I may be able to escape them.

Oh Jesus, forgive me, I love you but love isn't enough on its own. I am too weak. I trusted myself too much, and you too much, and Colin not enough. I should have trusted him. It could have gone no worse, and there might have been some joy. They are closer behind. They are at the foot of the steps, but they are not coming up. But there is no water. This metal bridge goes across the roads, the six lane motorway, yes, this is the start of the M1, the Great North Road they call it. It is straight, an old Roman road. Very brightly coloured cars and trucks are speeding past underneath me in both directions. I can see them through the metal struts of the bridge. It is a long way down, and they move very fast. I fear that the bridge will give way and grasp at the rail. It seems solid and I keep my hand on it as I run. I am running in slow gasping steps now, and

then I look up and they are there before me. Three of them. These three are very tall and very dark and the snakes are reaching for me. There is no hair at all, just a mass of snakes. Their eyes are very terrible. They are my guilt, my shame, my bloodcurse. The snakes twist and writhe. They are almost beautiful.

If I go back the nine below will take me, and these three are blocking the way forward. They don't come nearer. They are waiting for me. I know their names, I think, with sudden glee and the pride that I have never been able to subdue. Their names are part of what Colin taught me long ago. I could call them by name and they would come. But what would they do when they reached me? I stand still breathing the warm gritty air in gasps. The traffic is a roar below me. At least I didn't die in the mall under that appalling music. At least here, even if all the earth is houses and roads and people and the shadow of the mall still behind me, there is brilliant blue sky glowing above and great billowing clouds moving through it. They will claim me anyway. I am their lawful prey. They don't move, and I can. But there is no choice, nowhere to move, I am at an end of choices, enclosed in the corner all my choices pointed me to until there is only one way to go. I clutch the rail, my breath loud in my ears. They take a step towards me.

The railing is cold and cuts into my white knuckled hand. I step forward towards them, the last choice that is no choice. The only choice, the chance, to give up, to die and be myself no more. And my breath comes in a scream as my feet find air, the solid bridge melts, one foot goes through, and I try to hold on but the rail bends and I slide forward towards them. I am clutching my bag as I fall, how absurd. A swirl of sky and speeding cars, their cold faces and terrible eyes, all I will see forever. Elly, forgive me. Colin, forgive me. No point in asking for mercy or forgiveness from God or any gods. I have done that more than enough already, and I know it shan't be granted. I knew what I was doing. Although I do not hope to turn again. The dark face of a driver speeding towards me, eyes wide and white in terror, the tarmac, close now, and those kind ladies reaching for me. The light is so bright, so terrible, everything is so clear and sharp edged now at the end, the blood in their eyes and on my hands as they reach for me and touch me at last as the ground comes closer and closer.

Now will be an end, a comfortable darkness, an escape, pain, the hell I deserve for being who I am. There is hell in their eyes as they reach for me, and deep down in that whirling hell I see calm brown loving eyes, Jesus, who came for me with comfort on the train, the lion who leapt for

me. And he is hung upon the cross dying, dying for me in hell. He dies for me even now in the hell I have made from love and compassion, from hating myself and seeking to sell my sins. I can see clearly now in this searing hellish light that it was never too late.

The hell of their eyes is a three-fold mirror. I see myself reflected clearly, too clearly. My heart is torn to see so clearly that I have been a fool. How could I so misunderstand what sacrifice is? What have I done to those I love? There is nowhere to turn and nothing to see but myself. I am whole in the hell of knowing myself. In this instant I know that they are kind indeed as they bear me down to the hell that is forever.

Time still exists. I am falling still. I am like a moth that flies into the candle. There is a moment left to me. In this moment I can choose to act. I reach out. I reach out and grasp my power. It comes to me whole and accustomed. I know now that it was cast aside but never lost. It is strange and familiar and I reach out with all my heart to act before it is too late. I call on those I love with all my will and all my heart and all my power, united for this last instant. As I hit the ground in a sudden rush of pain and incandescent flame I know my cry reaches them:

"Oh Elly. Oh Lamb of God. Oh Colin!"

Chapter 16

LORD OF THE WAVES

You never thought to see your dream take flesh
your king awake, walk whole from out the hill
to touch your waking life with sword and flame
his own strong dream of what that glory is.

Pappa Thomas's hand moved nervously to press the pocket where the letter lay. The slight crackle of the paper inside the folds of cloth was wonderfully reassuring. The bishop had heard him, he was coming. The miracle he has seen with his own eyes would be substantiated, and the nonsense the people were talking would be sorted out. Although he had never had much success in rooting out this sort of nonsense himself he felt sure the bishop would be able to.

He had spent so much time thinking about Ag. Varvara's visit that he had almost forgotten the real details under the depth of consideration of significance. He could not stop asking himself why the saint would choose to visit him in the guise of a female professor of archaeology. He dwelt on every detail that he could remember about what had been said, but the more he focused on anything the more it seemed to blind him, as the saint's radiance had briefly blinded him. Katerina and Stellio were no help at all, though he had told them they would be questioned by the bishop and they had agreed. Pappa Andros had baptised Katerina's baby, little Leo. Ag. Varvara had approved the name. He remembered that. He tried to tell himself that she had been kind, that she had said bravery was not everything, and that she had made the sign of the cross. But he could not help thinking of how old toothless Mikalis had said that he would pray to Ag. Varvara that Pappa Thomas' eyes might be opened. He shook his head and sighed heavily.

As he walked along the deserted quayside a gust of wind brought the scent of decaying fish and as quickly whisked it away again. The wind was strong, where light fell from moored boats white foam could be seen on the dark water. He spared a single glance of fear and hatred as he

passed the taverna where the yellow rose twined over the canopy. The chairs and tables had been taken inside for the night, someone must have been expecting the wind. Pappa Thomas was comforted again by the crackle of the letter in his pocket. By the time the bishop came he would have something to show him. He would have found out what it was they were doing in that warehouse down on the beach. The bishop would realise he was decisive and knowledgeable. Maybe he would recommend him for transfer or promotion. If not back to Athens at least to the mainland, to somewhere larger. Pappa Thomas longed to be somewhere less primitive and old fashioned and full of superstitions.

He had spent five years now trying to combat falsehood on this little island. He would start to get desperate soon if there was no possibility of moving. He still wrote regularly to his friends in Athens. But there was never any hope held out. Five years was not long enough for people to forget his part in the ecumenical council. He shuddered to think of it. The council was supposed to be to bring the Greek Church and the Roman Church closer together. He had only been trying to further that aim. The differences were mostly practice, not doctrine. They had agreed not to discuss the issue of whether the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father or from the Father and the Son together. "Filioque", the single Latin word for which, or rather, without which, Constantinople had fallen to the Turk. Pappa Thomas wished they *had* discussed it. He knew all about it, he could have made a good showing, and on his own side. He'd been very young then, not long out of seminary. He had been taken along because of his acute understanding of theological issues, or so he prided himself. It may have been because he knew how to take shorthand and spoke some Italian. He sighed, walking down the road that ran from the harbour around behind the beach. It was just that as far as differences in practice went the Roman did seem to him in many ways admirable. But he still didn't understand why his bishop had called him a traitor. He still didn't think he'd done anything deserving of this exile.

The road was very dark. There was a row of tall pines on each side of the road here, planted to give shade to the farmers going to and from the olive groves beyond. Pappa Thomas stumbled his way along. The starlight did not reach the road. He looked into the trees, waiting for his eyes to adapt to the darkness. They were swaying and whooshing in the rising wind. Once, he had read, everywhere in Greece had been thickly forested. Cedars, hazels, beech and oak were plentiful. Now there were only pines and tended groves of fruiting trees, mostly olives.

It was the fault of the goats who overgrazed the slopes and devoured all saplings. He had tried to tell people this, but they took no notice. He walked on moodily down the road. He hated the way the people would listen to him, respectful, but take no notice of what he said. At last slow old Pappa Andros had had to explain that they knew very well that the goats destroyed the trees, this was why they protected the olives and other fruit trees. They just could not manage without the goats, or with fewer goats. There were other islands which were worse than these Adriatic islands. Some of the Kyklades were so bare of trees they had become completely dry. On Mykonos all water had to come by tanker from Athens now. The goats were a good symbol for the way the modern world was destroying the environment uncaringly. He would have to remember that and use it in a sermon. Though it would be wasted on his congregation, who would smile and nod and take nothing in. He had to get back to Athens, to somewhere of significance where he could be appreciated. This was not ambition, he told himself. He could serve God better if his talents were not thrown away.

At last he spotted the roof of the warehouse, dark against the sky. There was a quicker way along the shore, but he had not wanted to risk walking all that way in darkness on uneven stones. He left the road between two pines and walked around the side of the building. It was just a dark bulk. Over in front of it was the boatbuilders' workshop, and two wooden sailing ships, showing as clear outlines against the starlit water. The water was the brightest thing out here where there were no man-made lights. One ship looked almost finished, the other a skeleton. Pappa Thomas smiled at them. He was looking forward to the re-enactment of the battle of Lepanto. He hoped the bishop would still be here for it. He patted his pocket confidently. Now he was here he wasn't worried at all. It would be some misguided foolishness, not wickedness. None of them were clever enough to be evil.

He pressed the latch of the big warehouse door. It rattled and lifted but would not open. The wind had dropped. The sound seemed incredibly loud in the quiet and sudden stillness of the night. Somewhere, far away, a dog howled, a cold and lonely sound. Pappa Thomas tried the latch again. It was definitely locked. Very well. Few locks were good, and this was an old lock and likely to be a simple pattern. The priest drew out his bunch of keys and began trying them one by one in the lock. The big old key to his grandmother's house in the Plaka worked, and the door creaked open. The dog howled again as he slipped inside and closed the door.

Pappa Thomas blinked in the saw-dust scented darkness, and drew out his little flashlight. His heart was beating fast and he took a deep breath before he switched it on. He did not know what he might find. It could, after all, be a pentagram and the apparatus of demonic rituals. He did not really think so but he was ready if it was. His hands were sweating. It took him two attempts to press the little rubber-covered sliding button before the light shone out.

After all his anticipation what showed up in the yellow beam of the flashlight was rather anti-climactic. The warehouse looked like every other warehouse on the island, though rather less fishy than most. There were planks and poles of wood, lots of piled tins of paint, and large rolls of some material on drums for unrolling. In the farther corner there were some barrels and many cardboard boxes, piled up neatly. Maybe he was wrong after all. It had seemed so suspicious that so many people were coming here so often and being so evasive about why. He had felt sure it was connected in some way with the ideas about Great Pan. As if these peasants knew what Great Pan was. He smiled to himself, playing the torch beam around the warehouse. Then it caught on some brightly coloured cloth in one of the cardboard boxes, and he went over to investigate.

After ten minutes the priest sat back on his heels, puzzled. The boxes contained shoes. New shoes. Most of them were children's shoes. If all the boxes were the same as the ones he had examined there must be at least fifty pairs of children's sandals, and probably quite a few adult shoes as well. A few of the boxes contained children's clothes. Why would anyone store that sort of thing down here? He would have thought it some charity relief project if it has not been done in such complete secrecy. As it was he had no idea whatsoever what all this could be for. All the clothes were new and beautifully hand made. The shoes too—he picked up a tiny pair of sandals and turned them over in his hand. They had clearly never been worn. He put them into his pocket. They were evidence, though he had no idea what they might be evidence of. He put everything else back and carefully straightened the boxes to leave them as he had found them. He frowned and shook his head as he made his way back through the wood and tins of paint towards the door. He was as puzzled as ever. He had no idea what he could say to the bishop.

As he opened the door a strong gust of wind whipped it out of his hands to crash against the side of the warehouse. Pappa Thomas involuntarily took a step backwards against the strength of it. Not even the

meltemi, the hot wind that blew straight up North across the Mediterranean from Africa at the end of summer was as strong as that. In any case this was not meltemi season. The priest stepped out again, bracing himself against the wind. He caught at the door and tried to swing it shut. As soon as he moved it another gust came, chill and strong, straight off the water, dragging the door out of his grasp. This time it banged against the wall with such force Pappa Thomas was afraid it had been torn off its hinges.

He took hold of the door again. For some reason he glanced behind him down the beach past the workshop and the part-built galleases. This time the door slid out of his grasp without need of any wind. The sea was pounding on the beach with huge breakers. The white foam almost seemed to glow, and in among the sea-spray were white horses, championing and pounding on the shingle and falling away to water and spume again. He could not take his eyes off them. He could see their wildly tossing manes, their rolling eyes and their rearing hooves as the waves broke. Some of them seemed to make it a few steps up the beach. Slowly, carefully, breathing deeply, Pappa Thomas reached for the door again. He swung it gently closed, bracing himself against an expected gust from the water. It did not come. With the pounding of his heart even louder than the crash of the waves Pappa Thomas closed the door in its place. He reached for his keys to lock it. As soon as he took his hand off it the wind came, wrenching the door open once more and almost knocking him over. He took three stumbling steps on the shingle before he realised he was going towards the sea and not away from it.

He looked at the warehouse. The top hinge had broken now, and the door was clattering and banging wildly. There was no hope now of making it look as if he has never been here. He turned and looked cautiously towards the sea. The white horses were still there, larger than before, and riding on the backs of some of the foremost were foam-maidens, long haired bare-breasted women who laughed and urged on their mounts. Far out in the water a huge wave reared up, and surfing down towards him on its crest came a man, naked, deep-chested with a spray of seaweed over one shoulder. His face was lit by some light that clung about his dark tangled hair. His eyes glittered and his mouth in his broad beard grinned with fierce delight. He had a triple pronged trident held in both hands as if for balance. He swayed on the wave's crest, poised in that one moment as he was swept inevitably along. The foam-maidens were laughing and Pappa Thomas could hear the deep booming pounding of the waves very loudly as they dragged stones across other stones

in the pull of the undertow. This was no saint coming out of the water, no Ag. Nikolaos come to calm the storm for the sake of the children, this was the old wild god Poseidon glimmering in the darkness.

Pappa Thomas turned and fled back around the building, fighting the wind at every step. At last he heard the great seventh wave crash on the shore. He glanced back over his shoulder, hoping the god would melt into water as the horses and the foam-riders had melted. He was surfing on as the wave swept up the beach. Quickly Pappa Thomas began some words of banishment of demons. He was stammering out the first of them when the wave reached its limit and the god stepped ashore with a leap as it began to run back. Pappa Thomas had time to run a few more steps towards the road before the god landed and the ground shook, flinging the priest down to land on his face among the tree roots. The ground shook again and a great crash came from somewhere far off. Pappa Thomas lay still, trembling, gone in some strange direction quite beyond fear. He did not move, he waited in the falling sea-spray that should not be so far from the water's edge.

He waited as still and silent as he could for what seemed like a long time, and nothing happened. Slowly he raised himself on an elbow. Still nothing. He turned cautiously, and let out a loud squeal. Behind him, in a constantly falling spray of sea-water and a light that glowed around his head stood the naked smiling god, trident extended towards the priest. He was very near, very real, and very impossible. Pappa Thomas cringed, and the arm holding the trident extended until it nearly touched him. Pappa Thomas breath came in ragged panting gasps.

"What do you want?" he asked, his voice sounding weak and quavering in his own ears. The god's smile broadened, and with his free hand he pointed at Pappa Thomas side. The priest looked down. There was nothing there. Then he remembered. His pocket. The sandals. He reached in a cautious hand and withdrew them. With them came the letter from the bishop. As soon as they were out of his pocket a gust of wind snatched both shoes and letter, to lift them whirling high above his head and away towards the sea. The god lowered his trident, and gestured with it towards the town. Pappa Thomas needed no more permission than that. He staggered to his feet and ran, feet pounding the road, breathing hard. He kept glancing back over his shoulder, and although he did not see any sign of pursuit he did not feel safe even when he was back home in his own house with the door locked and bolted behind him. He did not feel safe even in bed with the covers pulled up over his head. He did not feel safe the next morning inside the sanctuary of the

church with the icons and statues all around him. He prayed to God for help and strength, and he realised as he stood in prayer that he might never feel safe anywhere ever again.

Evadni was most surprised the next morning when she got to work early to find the broken door of the warehouse creaking in the light breeze and a pair of children's sandals carefully placed in the doorway weighting down a letter from the bishop to Pappa Thomas. She was so surprised that it was not until Manoli got there a little while later that they noticed that both galleases were draped all over with long dangling pieces of festive red, black and green seaweed.

Chapter 17

MAGIC IN THE REALISED WORLD

(Eleanor)

The king without a court, the deed unwilled,
the axle's turn while ungeared wheels run loose,
the turbine's roar without connecting wires;
each breath is power, but what is power alone?

I do not think my father was a god. Maman would have told me. I'm sure Cloud's wrong about that, even though he's right about so much else. He's always asking me about him. I wish he wouldn't. It makes me feel funny and I don't know anything about him anyway. I can't imagine Maman with a god, not any god. She would call on Jesus and say prayers and the whole thing would vanish away as if it had never been. I wish she'd come here. She'd clutch onto my arm and look fierce at Them so They'd leave me alone. But it's not too bad now. They let me write her a note. So she knows I'm OK. And Raymond's gone away again. Across the sea, Cloud said. Making ready the boats for when we all go. Miriam's gone too, I don't know where. To get more purples I expect. She'll be back soon in that case. They let me outside the wire every day now, to learn magic with Cloud. I like it.

I'm not supposed to think. It's hard not to think, just to let my feet walk and be aware, to be without becoming. I walk very slowly round the circle, pine needles sliding under my grubby pink feet. They're hard enough now not to blister. I had terrible blisters at first, we all did. Don't think, don't think. I practise the disciplines, seeing without looking. All around me are the trees, reaching up green, thin brown cones on their branches. It is hot and I am glad of their shade. All the same my shirt is sweat-stuck to my back and under my arms, and I would pull it free if I could. I walk on round, the needles beneath my feet are piled deep here, last year's under this year's and so on down. Their scent comes to me strongly, the dust and pine scent of this part of the forest.

My legs are starting to ache a bit. I've been doing this for ages and I don't ever get any better at it. I wish Cloud wouldn't make me. I'd almost rather be in the house working. I should be glad, the other kids hardly ever get out here, not even the golds never mind the purples. I can hear birds far off, and some little animal pushing through the bushes somewhere behind me. A squirrel? It's not a weasel, too loud. I can hear the river far away. Then I can feel it too, hold it, know where it is. Cloud is in the hut. There is nobody else any nearer than the house-gates. I can feel where the mountains are, and where their roots go down. I know where the sea washes the shore. I am standing on the side of a whirling planet, turning as I am turning, round and round on its axis as I go round in this circle I have worn in the needles. I can feel everything, hold it inside me as I walk and walk and walk around the circle, each foot exactly in front of the last foot. Now I have it I could change it if I chose, reach out and make a change. I walk on, feeling the moment poised about me, not reaching, not touching, until suddenly it slips away from me and I fall forward onto my knees in the needles, trembling.

Cloud comes. I can hear him coming through the trees. I rub my hands on my eyes so he won't see tears. He hates for me to cry. "I did it!" I say, when he comes near enough to hear.

He just looks at me. I stand up and look up at him. I feel him looking at me and sensing me. "Good," he says at last. I can feel my legs trembling. How long was I doing that? I'm worn out. The sun has moved, the shadows are getting longer. It must be past tea-time. Maybe six, seven o'clock? I will be late. Monique will shout and maybe hit me. "Soon you will be able to reach out from that, and that is the place from which all great magics are done."

"I felt that," I say, taking a step towards him. "I felt that if I reached out I could do anything."

"Do not do it," Cloud warns. "It is dangerous. Tomorrow I shall come with you and guide you."

I don't know what I'd do without Cloud. Magic is so difficult and dangerous it would all go wrong without him showing me how. "It's so different to what I thought," I say. He raises an eyebrow. I walk towards him. It is hard not to start walking the circle again, to walk straight over to where he is. "I thought it would all be reaching into the magic inside me and doing things with it."

He laughs, and plucks a cone from one of the low branches. He holds it out towards me, and blows on it. It flares up, popping and spluttering, burning brightly on his hand. He doesn't drop the cone or seem to feel

pain, though I can see that the fire is real. I reach out inside and put out the fire the way I did with the flute that day in his hut. He smiles and drops the burnt cone. "Easy, yes? But if I were to burn not the cone but the tree?" He waves his arm at the nearest pine tree and it sizzles for an instant in a picture of fire, giving no heat. "Could you stop that burning before the whole forest caught? Maybe you could, but if you tried now you would pour yourself out onto the tree like water on a fire. Maybe it would still spread, all the trees going up, and you would be empty. Using the magic inside you is like that. Like both sides of that. It is difficult not to start a forest fire, or an avalanche, when you use any at all. Too easy is harder than too difficult. There may come a time when you need to do it. But I hope I have time before that, before the All Holy is born, to teach you enough that you know how much to use."

I nod. I wish I could lie down. I walk beside him back towards the fence and the gates. He takes something out of his sleeve. Another book, this one small and brown-covered.

"Read this tonight." I look at it. *Sacrifice and Power*. Yuck. I still hate sacrifices. I put the book in my pocket and nod again. Cloud gestures to one of the guards, who puts his gun down to swing the gate open. I slip inside and wave goodbye to Cloud. He just stands there. I turn away and walk up towards the house. I wish it wasn't such a long way. I can't walk fast and all the time I'm getting later. I turn round to see if he's gone, but he's still standing there. I wave again. He doesn't move. Cloud is a strange man. Sometimes he is so nice and other times so horrible. Everyone is frightened of him. Even the grown-ups. Even Raymond does what Cloud says and is scared of him. I'm not scared, not any more. I'm sort of polite but I'm not scared. He makes me do terrible things sometimes, but he knows what he's doing. He really knows magic.

Sometimes some of other people's fear of Cloud comes on me, because he's teaching me now. He isn't teaching any of the others. Us golds all learn things from different people, but I'm the only one who learns from Cloud. The others who learn magic learn from Miriam. It's funny what a difference it makes. Some people are scared of me, and a bit polite. Some are really scared, like now I have magic I'm just as bad as Them and about to do something awful like set their hair on fire. That's what I said to Adam when he wouldn't play with me any more. "Do you think I'm going to set your hair on fire?" I was cross, and I almost wanted to, but he started to cry and then he ran and hid. I don't care anyway. Cloud says I shouldn't care about people unless they're important. I'm not sure that's right. That's not what Maman said, and Father Michael, Maman

said that Jesus said we should love our neighbour as ourself. But I do try not to care too much about the purples any more.

Other people, like Monique, are more horrible to me now that I'm a gold and learning with Cloud. I think she'd like to be horrible to Cloud and she doesn't dare but she can do whatever she wants to me quite safely. I expect she'll really hit me tonight because I'm so late. Cloud won't help me against Them. He's one of Them. In some ways he's the boss of all of Them. I almost forget that sometimes, when it's just him and me outside the wire and he's teaching me things. I start to think he's on my side. I always remember again though. But sometimes when we talk together about the All Holy and making a new god and how it might be one or another of the golds here, it doesn't seem like he's an enemy at all. I'm looking forward to that, to going in the boat and being there when the All Holy chooses somebody to be born into. I know it won't be me because I just know I'm not andain, whatever Cloud says sometimes. But I'd like to see it.

I'm getting up close to the house now. I can feel waves of despair and misery sweeping over me. I always can when I come round this corner. I used to think it was just because I didn't want to come back here. Now I've worked out that these waves of emotion come to me from all the others, all of them making one wave from the oldest golds to the newest purples who only arrived last night and haven't even been cured yet.

I think that is why Cloud doesn't like to come close. He almost never comes up here. He hates to feel the children's feelings. I hate it too, but nobody gives me any choice. I did ask Cloud once if I could live in his hut with him, but he just laughed and said there were lessons I could learn better in the house. I don't know what, because while Cloud teaches me Greek and Latin and magic and mathematics, nobody in the house ever teaches me anything. I do work and play with the other kids and eat and sleep. Wish I could sleep now, but I'm sure Monique won't let me.

I walk up the gravel path towards the kitchen door. The gravel crunches under my feet. The back of my legs pull tight at every step and my feet ache. As I reach the steps up to the door I suddenly feel myself falling. I lurch forward, clutching at the door handle and missing. I hear a great shout in my head, Maman's voice crying out my name "Oh Elly!" I feel as if I am hurtling downwards through the air, and although my arms go out on their own and I catch myself against the top step the feeling of falling goes on. "Oh Lamb of God!" Maman calls, terribly loud. I feel as if I am pinned under Jesus' compassionate eye and still falling.

There is a bright light inside my head. I try to open my eyes and can't. Then there comes another shout, the loudest of all. "Oh Colin!" And I feel a man's presence. He is warm and strong and for a moment I think he will hold me up. He feels me too, I know he does, though it only lasts an instant before there is a moment of terrible pain and then the whole thing is gone as rapidly and unexpectedly as it started. It takes a moment for me to realise that I am not falling any more. I am standing alone leaning on the kitchen steps in the shadow of the house.

I sit on the step. I am shaking all over. I try to reach out in my head for Maman, for that sense of contact. Maman? Nothing there, nothing at all. But that doesn't necessarily mean anything. There is nothing when I reach for Cloud either, I think those three great shouts and the bright light have left my head deaf and blind, like after the very first time I reached Cloud. It will come back, I know that. But not quickly. And it needs to be quickly.

I really need to talk to Cloud, ask him what that was, what happened. Find out whether Maman is all right. Cloud can reach her all the way to England. I have to reach him. I know they won't let me out of the gates again tonight. Even if I could walk all that way back down it wouldn't be worth trying. The guards would just laugh at me and I still can't understand their language. Wish Cloud would teach me that spell, he keeps saying he's going to. Wish Miriam was here, she'd understand and take me to Cloud. Maybe even in one of the cars. I don't want to cry but I can feel hot tears leaking out of my eyes and running down my cheeks at that thought. I'm horrible. I sniff and rub my eyes hard. Something terrible has happened to Maman. I know it has. I shouldn't be thinking about how tired I am and longing for a car. But it is so good to be sitting down. I rub the backs of my legs, first one then the other. It's so far back to the gate.

The gate. I wonder if Cloud's still standing there under the trees, unmoving. He never did that before. If he is then I could call to him and they'd let me out. But such a long way if he isn't, and then all the way back. I should one of Them to get me to him. There's no use at all trying to talk to Monique or Jean-Luc about it. They'll just be angry. If I can find Alys she might let me go. Alys is very scared of Cloud and a bit scared of me. She doesn't have any magic and neither do her kids. Cloud says they're andain for sure but he doesn't think either of them have any chance of getting to be the All Holy. If I can find Alys first and make her see it's important I think she'd let me go back to Cloud.

I open the door, slowly. Yita is in the kitchen, washing up.

"Monique is furious with you," she says, the French words still coming slowly to her tongue with the taste beneath them of the harder vowels of her own language.

"I was working with Cloud." I say. It is all I can say. "Where is—" A flash of fear crosses Yita's swarthy face as I say these forbidden words. We never ask where anyone is in case they've disappeared. Twelve last weekend before Miriam went away. Twelve. What could they have been doing to need twelve at once? Cloud didn't ask me to go that time, thanks be. But he has made me watch before, and he has made me kill animals and now has given me this book. It suddenly feels heavy in my pocket. I still remember seeing myself with a knife in my hand. I am hesitating too long and frightening Yita. "Alys?" I finish. Yiya smiles in relief.

"She is in the television room with Jean-Luc."

That couldn't be worse. She won't listen to me there, and they are probably cuddling. I am going to have to walk all that way on my own and hope that Cloud is still standing there. Yita looks at me, worried, and opens her mouth to say something as I go back outside. I close the door, cutting off whatever she says. I don't care. She'll probably run to Monique. If Cloud isn't there I don't think I can bear it. My legs hurt at every step back down the gravel. I don't want to be here. I want my Maman. I want to cry. I want to talk to Cloud and I want to find that man, that Colin. I want to be a little girl again and burst into tears and have Maman put her arms around me and call me her *pauvre petite*. But I trudge on, even though the sun is setting and it will be dark when I get there. Every so often I reach out for Cloud or for Maman in my mind, but there's never any answer.

At last I reach the gate, and he is there, a shadow under the trees. I am so relieved I almost do start to cry. The guards don't want to let me out even when I point to Cloud standing there, but at last he raised a hand and they do. I ignore the pain in my legs and run to him. I know he isn't going to hug me, and I know I mustn't cry, so I fling myself down full length on the hard ground and tell him about it. He listens, quiet, and then he smiles.

"Your mother is safely where she belongs," he says. "That man is Colin O'Niall, your father. He is, or was, a wizard. I think you are right to want to find him. When Miriam returns the three of us will go to Greece. We shouldn't have too much difficulty, now you have spoken to him in your mind. You will be able to locate him." I can't help it, I start to cry with astonished relief. And that's when Cloud really surprises me. He picks me

up in his arms and carries me back to the hut and lets me stay there until morning.

Chapter 18

SKY FATHER

The holy child held in its mother's arms
all ringed with waiting light of undone deeds
may choose the portent's truth, become divine
or choose again and change as it may wish.

Katerina did not walk down to the harbour to see Laerti. She went because Leo liked to walk down and see the boats. Katerina liked to do something with him every day where they would be alone together, away from the rest of the family. So after she came back from the regular morning swim it had been so hard to explain to her family, she took him out with her. Every day she ran her errands and then they would linger about the town for an hour or so, doing what he wanted. Stellio told her what vegetables they needed and she selected them for him in the agora. She was proud to be trusted with this delicate task. Leo held tight to her hand in the bustling agora as she chose strong green string-beans and tiny tasty tomatoes, popping one into both of their mouths to taste if they were good enough for the restaurant.

They walked past mounds of glowing purple melitzanas, strings of red and brown onions, crates of oranges and huge lemons, trays of glowing peaches from Thasos with the bloom still on them. Much of the best produce was local, brought down to the market from the hills in the panniers of donkeys. The fish was all fresh and local, gleaming silver and black on the slabs. Katerina walked past, Stellio would not trust her to buy fish yet. In any case he bought it direct from the fishermen, baskets of slippery squid and shining-scaled fishes. Plenty of people were buying, voices were raised loud in haggling.

When all her purchases were done one of the smiling old men arranged to deliver them all on his donkey. Katerina and Leo left the agora, and instead of going straight home they turned down a little street running between the church of Ag. Nikolaos and the little cobbler's shop where Taxeia used to work. Katerina came this way to the harbour

from long habit. She still missed her best friend. Leo held his mother's hand more loosely now, taking occasional little skips in his walking.

She was pointing out a cat asleep on a wall when Laerti saw them. He leapt up to the quay from the deck of his little boat, the *Argo*, in one effortless motion. He had the slightly bruised look of one who has been up all night, but his teeth flashed in his wide grin. Katerina stiffened, but after the one grin in her direction he bent down smoothly on one knee and spoke to Leo.

"Hot today, little one?" Leo nodded seriously. "Would a granita cool you down? I was just going to have one in the taverna there." He gestured.

Leo nodded again, and smiled tentatively, looking not at Laerti but up at his mother. Katerina looked down at two pairs of imploring black eyes. Despite herself, she laughed.

"All right then," she said. Triumphant, Laerti abandoned his boat to bob unattended at the quayside, the yellow plastic nets sprawled out in a tangle he would have to begin again on his return. He picked up Leo and carried him on his arm across the little road into the nearest taverna. Katerina followed more slowly, brushing aside a few strands of rose-briar and creeping yellow roses as she made her way into the shade.

Laerti ordered drinks without waiting to ask, a frozen lump of strawberry pulp with water to thin it for Leo, hot strong coffee for himself and lemonade for Katerina. As soon as the waiter brought them he stopped trying to charm Leo and began talking to Katerina. At first Leo listened, because it was interesting in a way, about a pretend ship battle Laerti was going to fight in. He found the idea fascinating. He hoped his mother would agree to watch as Laerti wanted. Then the compliments began, and Leo yawned. He stopped paying attention, bored already. He leaned back against the slats of the wooden chair and stared out at the gulls bobbing on the little waves of the harbour, pulling his drink towards him and sipping it deliberately, thinking his own thoughts.

There was a game Leo liked to play with his cousins in the evening, before his mother called him in for bed. He would run as fast as he could down the little cobbled streets in a cluster of other children. Although he was the youngest they would follow him in this, because he was the fastest. They would all shout and yell as they ran, all except Leo, who ran fast in silence. Then, when he was running as fast as anyone could possibly run, outdistancing the others, he would leap into the air and pretend he was flying. A few of times he had come down hard, hurting himself. Once he twisted his ankle and had to limp home to a scolding.

Usually he would leap and land and carry on running without missing a step. The other children would copy him, leaping high and whooping.

Just a few times he had felt in the exhilaration of that leap that he was flying, that time was slowing as he went up to the peak of his leap. He felt colours draw in around him, glowing brighter in the brief twilight than ever they did at noon. He felt sounds and scents growing clearer and more distant at the same time. And then in the moment of balance before he began to descend he felt It. It, the Real Thing. He didn't know what else to call it. He felt that he was flinging himself on towards some moment, some choice, something important, something more real than anything else he had ever known. Then his foot would touch the ground and he would be running again, everything back to normal.

He didn't know if he loved that feeling or feared it, but he sought it when he could. He ran every night, reaching for it. He knew the feeling, and he recognised it clearly when he felt it run through him. He tensed, and looked up. A moment before he had been swinging his legs, slurping the strawberry granita through the straw, half-listening to his mother and Laerti bantering. Now he was frozen on the edge of his chair, fully focused, darting glances about him. Here in the shade of the roses he was well placed to look across the harbour. All seemed as usual in the sparkling morning sunlight. Nothing had changed from a moment before. Fishing boats were bobbing on the sparkling water. Far out a distant yacht was curving away from the island. Gulls were crying over the water. Along the waterfront people were moving, locals and tourists mingling along the curve of the harbour. A big dog walked past with its nose in the air and a great air of purpose. The shepherd Menelaos made his way past, clearly on his way to the bank. Normally Leo would have run after him, calling him uncle and begging to be swung up high. Today he ignored him, looking about, trying to locate what was different. He leaned out of his chair and craned his neck. Down at the other end of the quay where the deepest water was the passenger boat from Kerkyra was unloading—it was late today. There was a cluster of people there, including a dark robed priest. Pappa Andros, Leo realised, by his bulk.

Then he saw him. There near the boat, just stepped onto land an instant ago when he felt It, was someone. He wore the flat-topped black hat and black robes of a priest. He had dark weather-beaten skin and a bushy grey beard, with a few scant strands of black in the moustache. Around his neck he wore a silver cross set with veined turquoises, and in his right hand he held a key. His eyes were hidden by a pair of mirrored

sunglasses. Leo saw all this across the whole harbour as clearly as if the stranger were standing as close before him as his mother was behind him. And in that instant of seeing clearly Leo was up from his chair and running down the quayside towards him, dodging baskets of fish and slippery cobbles, ducking past Menelaos who made a futile grab at him. Leo ran as fast as anyone could run towards this someone, this stranger, who saw him and turned. Turned, as if he had been expecting him, and lifted Leo high up as he leapt, swinging him high, high into the air, as if he were flying. And at that moment Leo felt the Real Thing more strongly than he had ever felt it. He knew that this was the moment of choice and he chose, embraced the feeling, looked down and saw himself in the mirrors that hid the stranger's eyes. Saw himself, a little boy in a white shirt, flying.

With so many people being there, and so many other people not being there, the story of what happened was told often afterwards and never clearly understood. Pappa Andros always refused to say anything about it, and if pressed he would say that he had his eyes tight shut at that moment for fear the boy would fall in the deep water between the ship and the wall and drown. Nobody ever dared to ask the bishop about it. Few people found the courage to mention it to Katerina more than once. So the stories that spread through Ithyka, told and retold in many versions came from the tourists and fishermen and locals who happened to be on the harbour that morning to see it as plainly as their eyes would allow.

Some said that the little boy was simply swung up and then caught and set down again after a moment. Others said that he seemed to soar high up before coming down to rest at Pappa Andros' side. By the end of the day people were saying that he swooped and circled three times high above the harbour with the seagulls. Some said that the bishop caught him one handed and drew him back to earth, casting out a demon that had got into him. Others said the bishop himself rose up from the ground a little to catch the child. Some said this was an ordinary jump. Others said it if it was a jump then he did not flex his knees. People laughed and asked how anyone could tell what a priest's knees might be doing, under his robe. Then they went on to deny that any of it had happened at all, until someone who swore they were there and saw it all would tell how the boy and the bishop chased each other laughing all over the deep blue morning sky. None of the accounts agreed with each other, so some people believed one and some another and some said that nothing had happened at all.

Katerina was already apologising before she reached the little group by the wharf. Leo was safely back on the land by then, standing beaming up at the bishop and holding tight to Pappa Andros' hand. The bishop's expression was hard to read with his bushy beard covering his lips and his mirror-shades covering his eyes. He was formal and graciously polite to Katerina, and to Laerti who hung back behind her. Then he watched as she led the child away down the harbour, scolding. Leo did not look back even once, just walked off uncomplaining with his mother, skipping every now and then. When they were gone the bishop turned to Pappa Andros and raised a bushy white eyebrow high enough to be seen over his glasses.

"I can see that despite all his long letters Pappa Thomas has not even begun to tell me what has been happening on this island of Ithyka," he said.

Pappa Andros drew breath to speak, looking hesitant, confused and slightly sheepish. Then, before any words came out the bishop threw back his head and laughed, the deep laugh booming out across the harbour with a distant echo of thunder, setting perching gulls off flying and making the little boats rock at their moorings.

Chapter 19

MARE NOSTRUM

(Raymond)

Your actions, all your means and ends and deeds
may meet intention or go far astray
the City fell, and so might all the West,
and nothing says we get what we desire.

I wish I had made quite sure Yusuf understood about the oars.

The sky is full of light to my left but still shadowed to my right with a late star showing above Sounion Head as the *MV Heraklites* approaches Piraeus. I am waiting at the rail as we swing around towards the city, hidden in a dirty cloud of smog. A strong smell of currants comes from the land on a warm shore-breeze. I am tired, and not because I have not slept. I am tired of this ship, tired of feeling suspended between times. Traveling always makes me feel like this. My case swings heavy in my hand. For all the time from leaving until arriving I can get nothing done but the travel itself. I am in hiatus, unreachable, unable to act while the boat is between ports. It should be a peaceful feeling to be poised between actions but somehow it makes me uneasy.

This trip has been more annoying than most, being forced to leave Tunis before I was ready, the coastal passage, then rushing in Haifa to catch this ship. The *Heraklites* is so crowded that I have hardly slept the whole way across the Mediterranean. There is nowhere where I can sit or lie without the danger of touching someone else when I relax into sleep. Every time I try I jerk awake, full of adrenaline again, driven to pace. I watched the shoreline of North Africa retreat as now I see Europe looming larger.

Soon, soon, the gangplank will go down and I will be free on land again. I can find a telephone and speak to Yusuf. I have made a list of things that need checking. Oars. Blessings. Fruit. I can't trust him to get on with it on his own. The galleys set off on Friday morning. I wish I

could have waited. I hate Tunis, hate the dust and the flies and the uniforms everywhere. I quite understand why Cato wanted to sow the fields with salt. Given the chance I would do the same. Most times I have had to be there I would have been only to glad to be called away. Not not this time. I would have liked to see them leave, after all this trouble. I walk down towards the steps. It isn't far now.

All along the little strip of covered deck on this level people are sleeping, or just beginning to stir. It is hard to walk safely. Family groups, lone travellers, couples. My foot comes down and narrowly avoids stepping on a dropped comforter tied with a piece of faded pink ribbon. So many people, surrounded by their belongings. Many have baskets and bags, others have rucksacks with brightly sewn patches. A girl with blonde hair yawns and stretches. Her breasts are good but her face is too long. A white neon light flicks off as I pass under it. The sun must be officially above the horizon. I can't see it for the smog. The world has the colours of day, now, not the colours of night. The ship hoots twice, mournfully.

I don't know if it really will be quicker getting off the ship from here. It depends where we come in, which I don't know yet. I've only done this Haifa to Piraeus trip a handful of times, and never before on this little ship. I shuffle from foot to foot with impatience as we chug slowly towards the dock. I pick up my white case and set it down again. A little blue yacht slips past, white sail half furled. There goes an heir of the galleases and galleons of Lepanto. The galleons should be with Jean-Luc in Marseilles, leaving sometime this week, not sure when. I hope they are ready. The galleys are all gathered in Tunis now. It was good to see them come in in ones and twos from all the Arab ports. They will row out of harbour and then be towed across the sea. I should have stayed with them.

Nearly there, nearly there. The water looks dirty and scummy here, polluted. Athens is such a dirty city. Never mind, I am back in Europe, and with no children to shepherd this time. I should be glad. There will be tedious passport formalities. Though those are nothing like as bad by ship as if I fly. For some reason nobody asks you your business if you go about the sea in ships, they assume you belong. There is a strange brotherhood of the harbour. Guards slouch and are desultory, there is none of the tension of the airports. I hate that tension, that distrust, the x-ray machines, the guns. It sets off a matching tension in me and makes me a stranger. I understand why people pull out their guns and spray Arrivals.

Here nobody is tense and I am not mysterious. If anyone notices me at all I am just a man in grey with a white case who is allowed to have his own reasons to be here. This time I am on foot. If I have the van it is the same, in these Mediterranean ports. There are few checks. People are trusting. Boats are the safest way to cross the Channel in and out of Britain too. Miriam may go on the train under the sea but I would choose the ferries, caught out of time or not.

Claude says when we travel across the world on trains and buses and ships, touching is easy, knowing is hard. If we fly we are like a stone skimming the water, touching is hard. That was hard to understand when he said it, but now I know it. In these last two years while the battle has been so much my responsibility, I have been across this Middle Sea so many times in so many directions. I have visited nearly every port. I have touched it all and know it all and hold it all in my head. The slopes of the shores, lined with olives or bare, the different ports, the cities that lie behind them. I have flown across it too, and seen our sea, this same sea far beneath me, wrinkled and crawling, green in the dawn and spotted with black islands. From above it looks clear, and one whole thing, but it is only possible to touch it and affect it from down here, a piece at a time. I'm doing my piece. I sigh, picking up my case again. If only I could rely on other people to get their pieces right.

I walk down the stairs and along the rail towards where the gangplank will be if I have guessed right. I step over more people sleeping on the floor. Others are sitting up, looking about them to see where they are, exclaiming. I know, and I walk past them. I know where and when I am. The morning is a place too. How different a place it is to those of us who have travelled to it through the night.

I am nearly there when the announcement comes loud and tinny and distorted over the tannoy. "*Prosachi, parakalo, Prosachi.*" In Greek first, as always on Greek ships. Then in bad English, then execrable French, saying nothing much I have not gathered already from the words I can make out of the other announcements. We are approaching Piraeus, have your passports ready, and I have guessed right about disembarkation points. Good. Then last of all they repeat it in German. It would be the same if the ship were sinking. There are not enough lifeboats. I wonder if they do that on purpose, making sure it will be the Germans who would drown. But one Europe still. I smile. It is a victory to my purpose that they do not announce it in any of the languages of North Africa. All of them would drown, for all this Greek ship cares.

As soon as I am on shore I will go to the telephone office and speak to Yusuf back in Tunis. The blessing should take place at dawn on Friday and the galleys set off straight after. At dawn, as the muzzeins cry. Some of them have been replaced by recordings, but too many of them are live still. That faith is uncomfortably alive, and the sooner it is defeated again the better. Dawn, on Friday. Yusuf has to be clear about everything before that. The oranges, and the cannon, I must check about the cannon. I can't risk any errors there. Then I'll find Claude. He said they'd be at the Plaka Hotel. I wish I knew why this change of plans is necessary. I thought it had all been worked out in advance.

The gangplank goes down, the rope rails offering no more protection than usual from what would be a very bad fall. Somehow two fat Arab women in black have pushed their way in front of me, unspeaking, unsmiling, from the little I can see of their faces. The policeman and customs man take their places at the foot of the ramp. They look bored. One uniform is white, the other green. Behind them on the quayside is a little glass cart selling sesame-bread and doughnuts. Behind that black bollards, a road, vehicles moving, on the other side cafes with striped awnings, ticket offices, a bureau de change, a telephone office. I thought I remembered there being one right here. Good.

I start down the ramp. Then I look again. Something is wrong, something unexpected, out of place. The telephone office, cafes, the road—beside a black bollard Claude is standing, holding the hand of one of the kids. He looks strange in a pale suit and panama, like someone disguised. The kid is standing on one foot and rubbing the heel of the other as if it hurts. She's one of the ones Miriam and I got early on, I think. Ah, I expect she's the one he's been teaching magic, the one he made a gold. Someone behind shoves me impatiently, and I move on down the ramp, quickly. Why the hell has he brought her? I show my papers and have them stamped. The officials barely glance at them, at me. I walk over to Claude and put my case down beside the bollard. He nods at me. The kid flinches. None of us say anything. I wait. He still doesn't speak. Hell, he drags me away from Tunis without any explanation and then he just stands there. Claude likes people to think he knows everything, that he's inscrutable. He's clever, and he knows a lot of magic. But damn, sometimes he's annoying. I'm not going to try and outwait him.

"I'm going to make a phonecall." I say. The kid flinches again. I walk off towards the telephone office and cuff her with the back of my hand as

I go. If she acts like I'm going to hit her I may as well do it. As I half expect, Claude speaks before I've gone three steps.

"That is very foolish in a public place." I stop and turn round, confused. That isn't what I expected him to say.

"The phones aren't safe, but it isn't private. Hell, Claude, I've been phoning people about the galleys all year." Claude still looks inscrutable. The kid is biting her lip.

"Fool," Claude says, slowly. "I meant striking the child. Look around you. There are people everywhere. Do you want them to investigate what right you have to hit her?" He's right. People are still getting off the ship, the cafes are crowded, and some people are looking. I nod once, hating the smug bastard.

"Come here. No communication you want to make about the galleys is urgent." I nod again, and follow him and the kid across the road into one of the cafes. I look at his back in his slightly wrinkled cream jacket, my jaw aching with how hard I am gritting my teeth. Not urgent? It'll be urgent all right if the long oars aren't long enough for the kids, and who will Miriam be screaming at then, Claude? We're making this great sacrifice, better to get it right, no? Do we want to look as stupid as we'll look if those hordes of Moslems boil up out of North Africa before the new All Holy is ready? They've done it before, and they're still there, you know?

"Two nescafe and an orange juice," Claude says to the waiter, in English. Claude chooses a table under the striped awning, and takes off his hat. I set down my case under the table, and sit down on a white painted metal chair. The drinks arrive, each accompanied by the inevitable glass of undrinkable water. The kid sits as far from me as she can, holding her glass with both hands and looking at Claude. Ha. I'll get her later. But why did he bring her? She's a gold, she has a chance, however small, of being the new All Holy. We need as many of them as we can, for there is no way of knowing which of them it might be. Back in Roumania Alys and Jean-Luc are always talking and talking of which one and weighing chances. Fools, we have no way to fix those odds, best just to take as many of the possible children as we can. Unlikely as this kid is, he can't have brought here to sacrifice? Now, at last, he looks at me.

"I have found a Don John." he says, not smiling. I can't help gasping.

"I thought we'd decided he wasn't necessary?"

"Who knows what is necessary?" Claude looks unreadable again, which is to say, like Claude. Bastard. "We thought it would not be possible, that we should have to do without. But Don John of Austria was

the commander of the Christian forces. The last knight in Europe, Chesterton called him. If we can have him, it would be—a help. A better re-enactment, let us say. We think this should work. There is a man, a wizard, here in Greece. He is Elly's father, and I know his Name. He will do very well for the honour. Elly will help us find him."

"Where is he?" I ask. "Will he agree?" Claude smiles an enigmatic smile, and glanced minutely towards Elly.

"He will be willing," Claude says, "When it comes to it." He means that we have a hostage to use against him. Ah. That's why he brought her. Giving consent is all that is necessary in a sacrifice, it does not require being enthusiastic. I find my lips twitching in a smile. Good. "And Elly knows where he is and can find him." Claude looks at the kid. The side of her face is red and starting to swell a little.

"He's on a boat," she says, looking past me over towards the sea. "A white yacht called *Little Radiant*. He's with a woman and a child, a boy—"

"We believe the boy is andain," interrupts Claude. "Go on, Elly."

"The boat is in the islands. I've found it on the map. I can show you." She reaches a hand into her little leather shoulder bag, but Claude shakes his head at her and she stops.

"He seems to be making his way slowly towards Lepanto." Claude says. "As if he wants to help us."

"Then we have to intercept him?" I ask. Claude nods.

"There should be time. Finish your coffee. Make your telephone call." I have almost forgotten. Yusuf and the galleys. "Then we will find a boat going in the right direction. We'll find him and organise him. As he has a boat that is all to the better. I had hoped Miriam might join us, but it seems she will be too busy." I gulp down the coffee and set the white cup straight in the centre of the saucer. It must be very important, that he would even consider doing that, needing two of us. It must be important that he has come himself. When did Claude ever leave the House, the forest? I can't remember. Not since before Siena. Is Don John that important? Must be. Must be.

"I will ring Yusuf, and come straight back." Claude just sits there, with the kid beside him, still and quiet. I walk away, towards the telephone office. Miriam plays being nice to the kids, but being mean to them works better, they never give me any trouble. Oars, fruit, blessings, cannon. Better get all that out of the way, then I can set my mind to this next task. Don John of Austria is going to the war. Whether he knows it yet or not.

Chapter 20

LORD OF LIGHT

And scorching in the light of what you are
are all the words you ever cast to time
your beauty and your truth, in words of flame
emblazoned in the pattern as your life.

The sea was blue but the sky was almost white in the scorching noonday heat. The shops were closed and the streets were deserted as everyone closed themselves away indoors for their mid-day sleep. The houses gave an impression of being asleep themselves with their coloured shutters closed against the white painted walls. Mikalis walked home very slowly, up through the maze of streets towards the top of the town. At this hour even in the narrowest streets shadows were small and very black. His cap was pulled right down to shade his eyes. He was late getting home today, by the time he reached them the blue doors of the bakery were closed tight. A thin black cat was curled up asleep on the white edged step, all four paws neatly tucked under her tail. He hesitated, then walked on towards the little milk shop. However little money he had he needed something to eat. The bakery might be shut but Vrahi's was always open, even in the afternoon.

He speeded his steps slightly as he walked on down the row. He had been working all morning on the construction of a new school down near the tannery. They were building it in the old style, which Mikalis preferred, using wooden supports and closely fitted stones. It would be a beautiful building and in ten years when the stones had weathered a little nobody would be able to tell it had not been there for a century. In a century it would still be standing, likely still in use. That was craftsmanship, that was work well done. Not like the ugly new holiday hotel that had been built away out along the beach ten years ago that needed repairs already. He did not mind the new methods, but he believed in work being done right, even when it made his back ache to carry the hods of stones to show the youngsters how to do it. He was tired, and he

wanted to get to his own work but the thought of cold milk gave him new energy.

A gaily painted wooden sheep hung outside the milk shop, swaying slightly in the hot wind. The meltemi was blowing hard out to sea, the warm wind that blew up from Africa across the Mediterranean in the middle of summer. Its fierce breath blew warm dust high up in the air and gusted hard near the water, blowing across Europe, ruffling the smooth sea and making waves pound on the cliffs and the rocky beaches of the island. The little fishing boats that went out under the sunset each evening would go cautiously and not as far. Those fishermen whose boats needed repairs would take this time to haul their boats out of the water and take them to Manoli and Evadni to be set right before the great rush of fish that would come through the strait between the islands when the meltemi died.

He pushed open the door and went in. A bell jangled. It was very dark inside, and almost cool. Mikalis stood blinking for a moment. It was a very small shop. Two old men and a little girl were sitting at a table in the corner, half-empty glasses of milk in front of all three of them. One of the men was turning kombouloi in one hand, the worn blue and white beads flipping between his fingers on their leather string. The child was slowly stirring her milk with a straw, seeming completely absorbed in the activity. Vrathi sat behind the counter on a high stool, reading a book in the crack of light that fell between the shutters of the window behind her. She put down the book as Mikalis walked forward, nodding his hellos.

"I have no more milk," she said, looking worried. "I have just sold the very last. Menelaos has not come today, and there is no word of him. It is not like him not to come without warning."

"A bowl of yoghurt for me then, Vrathi," Mikalis said, settling himself with some difficulty on the other high stool which was the only empty seat in the shop. "I wonder if Taxeia is well?"

"That's what I was wondering," said Vrathi, taking a ladle and a small blue bowl and setting them on the counter. Then she reached down and brought out a heavy yellow bowl covered with a weighted muslin cloth and set that beside them.

"Her time must be near," said one of the old men. Mikalis reached for the ladle and removed the cloth.

Vrathi produced a spoon and set it beside the bowl as Mikalis ladled yoghurt from the big bowl into the little bowl. "I expect that is it," she said. "We will hear good news soon I hope. Honey?"

"Please." Vrathi brought out a plain plastic jar of local honey, took the spoon and dipped it in. "Has anybody told Dafni?"

Vrathi hesitated, the honey swirling off the spoon, making spiral patterns on the white yoghurt. "I have not sent to tell her. It is not as if I have news." She lowered her voice, though the shop was so small that everyone heard anyway. "And if you were Taxeia, and Dafni the daughter of Dimitri was your mother, would you want her rushing up the mountain to be with you when her first grandchild was born? You know how she opposed that match."

Mikalis smiled, and took the spoon out of Vrathi's hand, mixing in the honey himself. "Dafni is a very decisive person, it is true. Her father Dimitri was my good friend, and her brother Spiro is my good friend also. Her son Yanni and her daughter Taxeia are both people I am proud to know. I will not hear a word against her other daughters. Her husband Elias was a fine man, although I did not know him well, and it was a sad day so long ago when the *Ilios* was lost and he was lost with it." He paused. "And Menelaos may have some other excellent reason for not coming down the mountain today, and we would not want to disturb Dafni for a mere rumour."

"Well put!" said Vrathi, laughing. The two old men in the corner laughed with her, and the child looked up, disturbed from her contemplation of her milk.

Mikalis began to eat, and Vrathi picked up the cloth to cover up the yellow bowl again. As she did so the clock on the shelf behind her began to strike, and at the same moment the door opened and a young stranger strode unhesitatingly up to the counter. The room filled suddenly with a scent of fresh grass.

"A bowl of yoghurt, please, lady?" he asked. As he spoke Mikalis caught in his breath.

"Eighty drachma," Vrathi replied, and reached down for another blue bowl. Mikalis looked closely at the young man. He was wearing white shorts and a white shirt, and new sandals of pale golden leather that had crossing straps up to the knee. His hair was very fair, and his face was very beautiful.

"I will pay for this visitor," he announced, fumbling in his pocket for money. Vrathi straightened up and set down another blue bowl and spoon beside Mikalis's. The stranger helped himself to yoghurt and honey, then leaned back on the wall and began to eat. Mikalis ate himself, and there was silence but for the scrape of spoons in bowls, the thud of the child swinging her legs, kicking the leg of the table and the click of

kombouloi. At last the young stranger finished eating and set down his bowl.

"Shall we walk?" he asked Mikalis. Mikalis nodded, smiling broadly at the sound of his voice, neither young nor old but full of resonance and a strange subtlety. He paid Vraithi and the two left together. As the door swung shut they could hear the voices start in an unmistakeable tone of query. Mikalis laughed and looked at his companion.

"It has been a long time," he said. When the other spoke there was laughter in his voice although his face held only the faintest smile.

"A time, I would call it, since that night I spoke to you in Paris. That time is not what I would call long."

"Fifty years, close enough, it seems long and long to me." The other said nothing. "I knew your voice. I have never forgotten it. Paris was still being rebuilt after the war. I was walking back to my lodgings late from the Sorbonne, my arms full of books. I was thinking about Sartre's philosophy and my poetry and almost falling over my feet on some rubble when you came out of the darkness, just a shining presence that time, and a voice speaking to me in my own language."

"In that time and place that was how I could appear. Here and now, it is different," said the other softly. "There was a necessity for me to come to you. There was a danger you would forget yourself. It is necessary to—"

"Know oneself, yes. I was very young then, I thought I knew everything but I had forgotten that I did not know anything if I did not know myself first. Easy to know that in your head, and very hard to do it in your heart and soul. Hard to live it. You came that time and called me back to myself. I have tried."

"You have done well all this time that seems long to you."

They had walked a way through the hot streets without noticing, and now Mikalis realised they were in the Post Office square. In the centre of the square, deserted at this hour, stood three tall trees and a marble bench. They sat down together, Mikalis in what little shade the trees gave and his companion leaning back in the full glare of the sun, resting one arm lightly on the back of the bench. The old man took out his amber kombouloi and began to turn them slowly but expertly in his thick fingers.

"How goes the poetry?"

"You were right that night." Mikalis shrugged. "Since I came home to work as a labourer I have published nine books of verse in Athens. In my

own place and in my own language. Some of it I am still not displeased to think of. That is a victory."

"And the poem?" This time the smile in his voice was very clear. Mikalis looked up, to see its echo on his face. He seemed now to be glowing slightly all over.

"It still needs an end. You are teasing me." The other laughed.

"I have come to tell you that the time rushes towards us on eagle's wings, it is here, within three days of this moment you may mark as now when we sit together on a bench beneath a pine tree, Great Pan will be reborn and everything will change."

"How will this happen?" Mikalis voice trembled a little.

"It is given to me to know very little more of the how than you."

"Yet you told me I would live to see it." Mikalis shook his head in wonder, fingers moving without thought, flicking the beads. "You told me that if I wished to find an end for the poem I should stop looking for wisdom in the wrong places and come home, and I did. I never queried that, all this time."

"You will see it, and you will finish the poem." The face was almost expressionless in its golden perfection but the voice held something like amused affection. "Of those details I am quite sure, that much is mine to know. Much of the rest is still uncertain, still in human hands or hands of the children of Dis who have not yet come to know themselves. But the time will be soon when all that is uncertain will move into time and time itself will be renewed."

Mikalis raised an eyebrow. "I don't understand, of course."

"But you will be ready to do your share." There was assurance in the voice now, and the hint of a smile about the lips.

"Should I tell everyone to be ready? To have the things ready?"

"What is needed will be needed. There have been some signals given already. Not all were omens and portents. I came here today for sandals, and spoke to the shoemaker. The gods have always had their sandals from Ithyka. We will all be here to see. Very many will be gathered there to see, and some will act. These things will happen, there is no need for you to do anything but be wait and watch and be ready to finish your poem. I am longing—" there was amusement in the voice and under the irony Mikalis thought he meant what he said, "to see how it comes out."

He leaned forward and with one beautiful hand he took the amber beads from Mikalis' stiff fingers. He gave them two expert twists and a flick, the beads chattered through his fingers as Mikalis watched, then beads, fingers and the god himself were gone without as much as a

shimmer in the air to show where he had been. The old man sat still for a moment, staring at the empty bench and then down at his empty hand. Then got up and began to walk home slowly through the hot streets, the words of the poem already beginning to run through his head. He smiled to himself as he walked, and although he did not, could not, know it, it was very much the same smile that played about the lips of his shining god.

Chapter 21

WHO ARE THESE COMING TO THE SACRIFICE?

(Jenny)

Fate chains you by the foot and holds you back
where you would leap and run to time's warm arms
those certainties of life or hope or change,
are things you carved in ice that runs and melts.

It's dark in the locker, and hard to breathe. The way they've tied my hands to my feet gives me cramps that shoot up and down my calves. I'm lying on my side and I can't change position at all now because Emrys is asleep with his head on my thigh. I can feel that Emrys is breathing, which is about the only reassuring thing about the whole situation. I wish I knew where in hell Colin is. They might have killed him. He told me *Sarakina* was safe. He was evidently wrong. We're moving under a lot of canvas, I can tell by the way she's moving. I don't think they know what the hell they're doing with her, though it's mad to worry about drowning when I guess they're going to kill me anyway. I can't move my right foot at all any more, agony to move my left. If the circulation's cut off completely—well, not worth worrying about in present circumstances.

I wish I could remember more about what Colin told me about them. He said they weren't Satanists as I meant the word. I suppose that means God can't protect me from them. "Oh, it's all true," he said. How can all of it be? Years since I went to church and it seemed so meaningless, empty, for me, it wasn't what was important. Different for the Greeks. I don't quite know why. Maybe because they mean it, they're not just going through the motions like Dad. I could pray to their God, though it is the same God of course. Or one of the gods with silly names Colin and Emrys call on. Shit, I'd feel so stupid even in this situation. I've never been so terrified in my life, not even when *Jenny* went down. There were things to do then, and I kept on swimming even after. Now there's

nothing to do but wait, and I don't even know what I'm waiting for. Wait and pray, and I can't take prayer seriously. I'm ferociously thirsty. Better not to think about it.

No way to tell where we're going. From Kythera, at this speed,—if we were heading for Athens we'd be there by now. What the hell, what the hell, no use panicking, be calm, relax. Only two men and the kid that I saw. "Scary men," Emrys said. Kids know these things, I should have listened. Just walking by in the street. I looked, but they weren't anything special. An old man in a white suit and a straw hat, a younger one with a ratty face in a grey suit, strolling together. They were both looking at Emrys and I thought maybe they were the sort of men who come to Greece because they heard that two thousand years ago it wasn't against the law for men to love boys here. Emrys clutched my hand. I should have found Colin then, but he was looking for his daughter as he has done at every port we touched since we left Molivos in May, with ever increasing urgency. It's become a familiar pattern, and Colin's alternating bouts of depression and energy are becoming familiar too. I didn't want to see him just then right after another dead end. So I ignored them and went back to the boat. Emrys thought we'd be safe there.

Safe. I should never have trusted a fool who glued a penny to his mast and called it protection. I looked at it first thing the first morning there at home in Molivos harbour. Before I'd even taken my bag down, as soon as I stepped on the deck. Just a little bronze penny, Irish, with some swirling fantastical bird on it. "For good luck and protection." he said, coming up behind me, in that damn sexy Irish voice. I should have listened to Panayoti, I should never have come. Danger, he said the Old Maid told him, danger and bad luck. Emrys stirs a little and makes a sound in his throat. Don't wake up, honey, better to sleep while you can. Wish I could sleep. In everything I've read about hostages, about torture, it has said that sleeping when you can is a good thing. I have only been able to sleep in snatches.

There's a noise outside. Maybe they're going to give us water? It's true that story about hope being the last and the worst thing to come out of the box after all the plagues, hope can be a torment. The door slides open. It's the kid. It's dark out there, but she's got a light. She's carrying something that sloshes. I swallow, hurting my dry throat and try to speak.

"Hello?"

"Hello," she says, uncertainly. She has some sort of accent, on top of a British sort of English. French maybe. I thought she was a boy when I

first saw her. She's still wearing jeans and a denim shirt but that long mousy hair was tucked up under a denim cap when they all jumped on deck. No idea how old, I guess a bit younger than Emrys? Just a kid, even if she is with those men.

"I'd really like some water," I say. She comes closer.

"You smell awful," she says.

"Well honey, so would you if you'd been down here all this time with nowhere to go to the bathroom." Emrys minded that much more than I did, actually, poor kid. It can't have been that long since he learned not to do it in his pants. She comes forward with the water. I can't take my eyes off it. My green two-pint waterbottle, mine, and it's nearly full. She tips it carefully into my mouth, holding the heavy flashlight up in her other hand. If my legs would work I could jump her but I don't think they'll hold me and she could be my chance. Have to be nice to her. The water is wonderful. I gulp and gulp. Then she bends down to Emrys.

"He'll be awake soon," she says, looking at him. In the beam of the flashlight he looks even cuter than usual, his dark curling lashes lying on his cheek, his fair hair spread out.

"I expect he will. Where are we going?"

"Lepanto," she says, like someone reciting a lesson. I've never heard of it. Italy somewhere? It sounds Italian. Shit, across the Adriatic in August with maniacs and even if we make it I don't speak enough Italian to persuade anyone what's going on. No. Doesn't matter. All I have to do is get to a Greek boat, any Greek boat, there will be *someone* who will trust me enough to come and help. And there are always and everywhere Greek boats.

"We should be there soon. That's what Cloud said. They won't let me on deck because it's windy and they're worried I might fall over the side. They're a bit worried that they will, but they've roped themselves on."

"Using the jackstays?" I ask. We had jackstays on Emrys all the way, there are places for them all over the deck. She shrugs as if she doesn't know what I'm talking about.

"I'd much rather be out on deck than stuck down in the cabin. Cloud told me I could bring you water. Do the ropes hurt?" she asks.

"They sure do!"

"It might be better if you relaxed into them instead of tensing against them." She sounds clinical, detached. She's still looking at Emrys. "What's his name?"

I laugh, and she steps back slightly. "I may not know anything much about anything, but I know better than to give my friends' names away

to kidnappers and torturers." I still don't know how they got to know Colin's. Even if they broke onto the boat it wasn't anywhere here—his passport says his name is Peter Phillips travelling with his son Matthew. But the way they used it against him, the way he froze when they did, made me realize that he wasn't kidding at all when he told me how important it is.

Damn, though. I shouldn't have said that. She steps back away from us and puts her hand on the door. "Wait!" She pauses. "What's your name?" She hesitates. "You see? You don't want to tell me."

"You haven't got any magic." She comes a step nearer. "You haven't got a name either, have you? I saw what's on your passport, but that's not your name in your head, and neither is what they call you, American Jenny. It's a dangerous thing to walk about the world without a name, Cloud says, though it might be enough to save you."

"Save me from what?" I ask, softly, I don't want to wake Emrys, I don't want him to hear this.

"Being a sacrifice," she says, calmly. "We came to get Colin, and they'll want him—" she gestures at Emrys with the flashlight. "—because he's a gold, he's andain, one of his parents was a god, and so there's a chance that he'll be the new All Holy." I'm completely confused now. What's one goat footed god more or less? I remember saying that, but Emrys? "But you, well, probably They would have killed you when you fought like that if They could have used your name to make a magic to make them stronger. They do that. And you hurt Raymond, he was cross." She grins suddenly and unexpectedly, in a way that reminds of Colin's occasional grins. I am very stupid, I know I am, why did it take that for me to realize that this must be his daughter? He told me they took her. I have missed something she is saying.

"Saw you in the smoke, so I think they'll let you fight in the battle, which gives you some sort of chance."

"What battle?" When I was fifteen I wanted to fight in a battle. When I was seventeen I wanted to die for love. When I was nineteen I just wanted to die and for the last ten years I've been living each day as if I were dead already. It took being attacked and tied up and left in the locker of a boat for days to make me realize I can rely on myself and I want to live.

"The battle of Lepanto, of course." It's hard to make out her expression but I think it's condescending. "Will you do it? Colin's going to. He's agreed. He's given Cloud his word he'll go through with it."

"He's your father."

"I know *that*." She sounds scornful. "Will you or not? You have to agree. If not, I suppose they'll probably just kill you even if it's not a sacrifice." She sounds horribly matter-of-fact about it. Little kids shouldn't be like that about murder.

"All right then."

"Then if you tell me the kid's name I'll let you come into the cabin where Colin is. I have to give him water next anyway."

"Why don't you know it already?"

"What do you mean? Why should I?"

"He's your brother, isn't he?"

"Is he?" She shines the torch onto his face again, and he screws up his closed and sleeping eyes against the light. "I wonder what goddess would have gifted Colin O'Niall as much as all that?" There is a strange cold curiosity in her voice, and she does not sound like a little girl at all. I shake my head. I thought—She moves the light a little.

"Why do you want to know your brother's name?" I ask. I have to protect Emrys.

"To know you trust me."

"Are you going to tell Raymond?" That must be the younger man, the rat faced one I had the satisfaction of kicking.

"No. I might not even have to tell Cloud. Not if he's really my brother." She's hesitating, maybe lying. If I get out of here, if I see Colin, I might have a chance. Some magic battle—well, I might win. Life is precious, very precious. Somewhere on the other side of the Atlantic I've got a kid of my own, a boy called Jason who'll be nearly nine years old and who calls my sister Mom. He's gone from my life forever, but there is still life, still hope. Maybe even with Panayoti, if that's what he really wants, if he can see me clearly and still want me. I have done bad things, but I am not a bad person. I thought I was in love with Ralph. And even though I behaved very badly with poor besotted Oyvin, it was not really my fault he died. Now I have to trust myself to make the right choice. Never mind the cramps and the darkness. Can I trust this kid, Colin's daughter, with Emrys' name? If it's our only chance to get out of the locker alive? Her, maybe. Those men, never. I shake my head.

"I'm sorry, honey. It's not that I don't trust you, I just can't risk it." Emrys picks this moment to move a little and open his startlingly blue eyes. He licks his dry lips. The girl steps forward and gives him a mouthful of water. He swallows.

"My name is Emrys Louis MacAran," he says, looking directly at her. "And yours?" What is he doing? He's telling her? Does he understand? Is it safe?

She hesitates, holding the water in her hand. She lifts the bottle towards her lips, as if to drink, then lowers it again. She shakes her head and bites her lip.

"Good try," she says. "But what are you to me? Cloud is here, and Raymond. They would hurt me, maybe kill me. I can make no guest of you, little brother. But I have your name. You can come into the cabin."

She bends down and cuts the ropes that tie Emrys' legs, and then the ones that are holding mine. The agony is worse than before, I almost cry out. My feet feel as if they are on fire as sensation rushes back. She takes Emrys' bound hands and pulls him out of the locker and helps him to his feet. Then she cuts the rope that holds his hands, and he flexes his wrists. They are curiously formal with each other. I try to drag myself to my feet and fail. She puts a hand on my arm, and there is a burst of far more intense agony, then the cramps and pains are gone and I can move normally. Even my arm where Raymond twisted it so hard behind my back seems better. More magic. Damn magic. Out of the locker, past the head. I stop and look a mute plea at the girl.

"They'll never forgive me if I free your hands," she says. "Without your name how can you give your word?" Then she unzips my jeans, and I go in and use it, thank you God. The kids wait, when I come out Emrys goes in while she straightens me up. I have no pride left, I am grateful to her.

Into the aft cabin. Colin is there, lying on my bunk. He looks at me and raises an eyebrow. Before I can say anything the girl goes up to him, the water in her hand. He looks at her in a very strange way, as if he's never seen her before. My feet are free. She's not looking. I could jump her now. She's only a kid.

"I saw you when Marie died," he says.

"Marie—died?" she says, saying the last word very slowly. "Maman? Died?"

"Didn't you know?" Colin asks, very gently. She shakes her head.

"I don't believe you. You're lying!"

"I wish I were," said Colin, and there is a great weight of sadness in his voice. When she speaks again her voice is trembling.

"I felt you," she says. "I thought something bad had happened to her. I was afraid she was dead. But Cloud said—Cloud said she was safe where she belonged." She stops and draws a trembling breath. I hardly dare breath myself, although I do not know quite why. We are all

looking at her in the silence. Then she looks deliberately at Emrys, raises the bottle and takes a sip of the water.

"I am Eleanor Maria DeNuit." Different names, and neither of them O'Niall? I wonder why? Oh well. She offers the water to Colin. He smiles a little, wryly, looking at her. Then he takes the bottle and drinks. I don't understand.

"I am Colin O'Niall, and a hundred thousand welcomes to you here in my boat."

He offers the water to me then, over Eleanor's head. "Drink," he says. "This is how we pledge friendship. It is time you had a name of your own and stopped carrying about the weight of a dead boat and a sister betrayed on your shoulders. Drink, Bel, and a hundred thousand welcomes."

I don't know what to do, but Eleanor cuts the rope on my wrists so I take the bottle and drink, seeing both kids and Colin smiling at me. Ah well, this may yet come out all right. "A new name for new hope," I say, "OK, I'll be Bel, and thanks a lot." Emrys laughs. I don't know where the men are. Looking after *Sarakina* I hope. I am yawning suddenly, as all the missed sleep catches up with me.

"Is it all right if I change?" I ask Eleanor. My clothes are in here. She nods, and Emrys and I get into clean things. I'd have liked a shower, and I'm hungry too, but even this is such an improvement I can hardly believe it. Eleanor is talking about the battle, explaining to Colin. I sit on the my bunk, yawning. Then lie on it. And shut my eyes. Five minutes sleep won't hurt.

When I wake Colin is talking. "—In a children's home. Nobody ever really cared about me. I thought nobody ever would, I couldn't imagine what that would be like. I used to read a lot, do you like to read?"

"Yes," from both children. I open my eyes. He is sitting on the bunk, an arm around each of them.

"I used to hate books about children in families, children doing ordinary things and riding on ponies and winning competitions," Eleanor winces. "And I used to hate books about soldiers and fighting and kids in families solving problems and finding treasure. What I liked best was books about other worlds, completely different places, places I could pretend I was from really. The very best of those stories for me were about worlds where they had magic. One day I found a wonderful book about magic. It was about a boy learning to be a wizard, and he had a boat—a boat with eyes on the prow. That's why I put eyes on *Sarakina*, years later when I built her down in Cork. But this book, somehow it

seemed so real. It had different sorts of magic. I read it over and over, and one night I was reading it under the covers with a little pocket light. And I thought—I'd really love to be able to do some of those things. So I got out of bed and I tried, and I could. Not all of them, not hardly any of them in fact, though I learned later how to do more of them when I had proper books of magic, books written by wizards long ago. But right then I didn't have any how to, I just had the wish and the power inside."

"Cloud says that's terribly dangerous." Eleanor looks serious.

"And so it is, he's right about that. I found that out myself much later. But I didn't have anyone to teach me, and I didn't know it was. I never had anyone to teach me ever, almost everyone I met who knew about magic seemed either stupid or evil. I had to do it on my own, and from books. I looked for real books later. But that first time I really was completely on my own with the idea. There was just me, late at night in the boys dormitory of the children's home. I was wearing striped cotton pyjamas that were a bit too small for me so my hands and feet stuck out too far. And I was walking back to bed between the rows of beds where the other boys were asleep, about two feet above the floor." They all three giggle, but I want to cry for the little boy who was Colin O'Niall so full of power and so very lonely.

I sit up. I feel almost faint from lack of food—I've had nothing since breakfast with Emrys on Kythera—two, three days ago? I don't know how long it has been.

Emrys notices that I am awake. "Bel!" he says, startling me a little.

"Don't go out of the cabin without me," Eleanor says. "They know you're all in here. I told them you've given your word to fight, the same as Colin. Raymond wasn't all that happy about it, but Cloud only let him tie you up like that because you fought so hard. Cloud and I saw the two of you in the battle, so he thinks it'll be OK. Luckily it's windy and Cloud needs to use his magic to make the boat work, and Raymond is busy doing things with ropes all the time. We're nearly there."

"There is a plan for when we get there," says Colin, grinning at me. "You and I are going to fight in a re-enactment of a sea-battle. This isn't going to go quite as expected. Don't worry. It'll be strange but fun, I think. And while everyone is distracted by this *Sarakina* is going to take the kids to safety. I think the nearest place that will count as safe is with your friend Panayoti in Molivos—they'll be all right there until we can meet up with them." I nod, bemused. Panayoti is reliable. "There are a whole lot of other children in Roumania who need rescuing, after that—" he continues blithely, "And then it will be time to see what is to be done

about Great Pan being reborn. In the Spring." He sounds buoyant, confident.

I shake my head, puzzled. "Colin—what's going on? You seem so—or have you got your power back?"

He grins. "New insights with a new name? Not yet, no. It's not as easy as that. But I will have by the end of the day. This battle really isn't going to go the way that *anyone* expects it to." The kids grin up at him, and then the door opens and the rat-faced man, Raymond, is there, holding a bundle of material. "Your clothes, Don John," he says, dropping them on the floor, and going out again. He leaves a chill behind him. I pick up the costumes and shake them out. I wish I felt half as confident as Colin.

Chapter 22

THE LORD OF THE DEAD

In death's dark halls the echoes linger on
ghost voices squeaking past the cold stone throne
what you could be and I could be we all
could choose to be in time's free moving chance.

The little town of Ithyka was crowded with visitors, here for tomorrow's battle re-enactment. Nevertheless there was a little space around the table outside Stellio's where the bishop was playing cards with his friends. The shadows were starting to grow long when this space was infringed sharply and suddenly by Dafni bustling into it, frowning. She had come as soon as she heard who was there. As she made her way through the streets everyone who saw her lowered brows and determined expression made way as quickly as they might. They knew from long experience that what Dafni looked like that there was trouble ahead for someone.

The six around the table under the painted arch looked up as Dafni approached. Costa half groaned to see his aunt bearing down on them with a face like thunder. He pulled his winnings closer towards him. Pappa Andros took a deep breath, set down his cards, picked up his glass and took a large sip of neat ouzo. Yanni clutched his cards tightly in his hands and stared at his mother, horrified. The bishop smiled deep in his beard. The dog under the table whined. His master put down a hand to calm him, but kept his eyes on Dafni. The sixth had his back to the square. He was dressed as a fisherman and his long hair and beard were so black they were almost blue. He noticed the reactions, leaned back in his wooden chair and turned to look. Then he drew his chair aside to make space for the angry woman's approach.

Before she quite reached them Stellio came out to intercept her, twisting a dishcloth in his hands. He spoke quietly and they caught only the words "Bishop... cards... friends... peace..." Dafni's snort was louder than Stellio's entire speech. She waved him aside and he went meekly

back to the kitchen, shrugging helplessly in the direction of the card-players.

Dafni stopped in the space between the two strangers. Yanni closed his eyes, but she paid no attention to him. She had eyes for no one but the stranger. He wore a white short-sleeved shirt and grey trousers. He looked unremarkable, like an old man anyone would pass without a second thought on any island of Greece. She almost turned away until she looked into his face. His hair was silver and although it was neither thick nor long it seems always to cast shadows on his face so that it could not be seen clearly. Only his eyes stood out from this obscurity. They were dark and very deep. Dafni knew as soon as she saw them that this was indeed the man she needed to speak to. She drew together all her strength, all her determination and held hard to her right to say this to him, her right as a mother to speak for wrongs done to all children.

"It's not good enough." she began, setting her hands on her hips.

"Mama!" Yanni tried. "We are playing cards—"

"Playing cards, yes, very traditional. These three played cards once before and divided up the world for their winnings, I know." Her scathing glance swept across the six of them and the blue-painted table-top, cluttered with red-backed playing cards, glasses of ouzo and water, a half-eaten meze-dish of crumbled goat's cheese and cold sausage, a little pile of coins in the centre and a larger pile near Costa. The players moved a little uneasily under her gaze.

"Playing cards is all very well, Yanni my son, I say nothing against it, and I know these are your friends. I'm sorry to interrupt your pleasures, Pappa Andros, Costa." She nodded at them in a cursory way. "But here you all sit playing cards while everything hangs in the balance, and it really won't do."

"We have done our share as best we can, even as you have, Dafni," said the bishop. "Nobody can do more. We can not interfere now for good or ill. Playing cards is as good a way to wait as any."

"You can't play dice, after all," interrupted Costa slyly. The card-players all laughed, the bishop's laugh booming very deep. Dafni stood still and did not laugh. She ran a hand through the back of her iron-grey hair and waited for them to finish.

"I am saying nothing to you for or against, holy ones," she said, biting her lip, looking at her reflection in the bishop's sunglasses, then nodding the the blue-haired man beside her, who smiled. "Excuse my rudeness in interrupting you like this, going against all custom. But it is your brother here I want to have words with."

Both the strangers twitched a little. The dog beneath the table growled a little. Dafni stood still, red in the face, hands back firmly on her hips.

"I am here," the silver-haired man said, mildly. "Do you have some complaint to make of me?" His voice did not sound like that of an old man, it was deep and strong in his chest.

"Many might complain of you, I suppose," she replied, smiling slightly. "But I have not come to ask for my father Dimitri or my dear husband Elias back, I know better than that, holy lord. Once anyone has passed to your halls the only way back is across the river of forgetfulness and a new beginning." He nodded, waiting, his dark gaze firm on the old woman. She drew breath again, pushing away her hesitancy and temerity at daring to speak so to such a one. This time all she had been thinking since she heard poured out of her.

"But really! How could you abandon your children like that? Don't think I don't know. Your son has been wandering about Greece for months, looking for his daughter. The land knows and the sea knows, how could we not know who he was as he stepped ashore here and there? Though he doesn't know himself for pity's sake, and the little mite even less. Oh, I know your holy way of scattering your seed here and there. You—" she turned to the blue-bearded man, "—you've done that even in this little town, and recently. That's one thing, done willingly, you've mostly had your loves here and there. These children are cared for and not anything to make the slightest fuss about. Nobody minds. I don't mean that. But you—" She turned back to the Lord of Souls, "You left your son to grow up without knowing anything, and have a child himself without knowing. And all the time you meant it all to rest on him. It isn't right."

"It might not be right, but it was the only chance there was." He stared at her, made expressionless by the shadows, but deep in his eyes she saw pain. "My wife bore me two children, and the only way to raise them to their task was to cast them into the world to grow up as they could, to belong to the world and find the way to change it. We may not act, we may not even come whole into the world until it is changed again. The actions to change it must come from within it. You know all this."

"Two children?" Dafni asked, surprised.

"The girl is back in my halls. She never found a way to do her share, never accepted the responsibility of being herself. What she did not learn in life, she must do in death." The pain was apparent now in his voice. "My son yet walks the world, and he may find a way on his own to bring

all things to fruition as we would wish." He paused. "This is his work, fated maybe, yet freely chosen."

"How could you just abandon them?" Dafni was still frowning.

"They had to grow in the world and of the world, knowing nothing but this world. They did not grow at a greater speed than other mortals as the children of the gods often do. They thought they were as other people. They had power but it was all at their own will and would not work despite that."

"Surely they came to guess what they were? If they had all the power of holy gods?"

"I forbade all such divine powers and spirits who move in the world to tell them anything of their heritage. Few would cross my will in such a thing." He paused, looked at the grave-faced bishop, at Pappa Andros, back at Dafni. "I know this was cruel, but if they were to be of the world they could not know before it was time. It was necessity."

Dafni sighed. "All very well, I suppose, if that's what you intended. But why did you have to abandon them in the North where nobody understands anything? That was bound to lead to trouble. There are people enough on Ithyka who would have fostered them and not told them who they were if that was necessary. I would have had them myself." Yanni winced visibly. "Or there are any number of good Greek families who would have done it."

The bishop spoke, his deep voice rumbling from his beard. "This island is not quite in the world, and here everything is understood too well without need of words. I think my brother meant the children to learn the ways of a harsher church than the one my friend here has felt it so hard to tell me about." He smiled at Pappa Andros, who was pouring water into his ouzo, clouding it. "My brother made no peace with Agios Pavlos and has been very little able to act within the world in all this age."

"They were left on church steps," confirmed the other, nodding. "In the heart of where that faith was strongest. That was how it had to be. They had to grow knowing that, and be free to choose, free to act." There was a rumbling sound cutting across the ordinary sounds of the square at the beginning of evening. For a moment Dafni started, thinking it was the dog growling again, more loudly. Then she realised it was a motor-engine coming closer.

"As a mother, I don't know how you could." Dafni sniffed.

"My wife said the same to me," said the bishop, half-smiling. From beneath the table came a small sound of a tail thumping the ground hard.

"You need to learn, I think, that there is always a time to let children go," said a woman's low clear voice. Dafni looked up, surprised, to see a tall serious girl standing in the pillar's shade. She wore a plain grey dress such as any girl might wear on an ordinary day. Her eyes were grey too, but her hair was a pure pale gold and it fell straight and even below her shoulders. She did not look as if she could be twenty yet, but her eyes were very wise. "In our case it came sooner than usual. Understand that it broke our hearts to do this thing, for we have made no other children than these two in all the long time we have been married and spending what time we were allowed together." She put her hand on the free hand of the Lord of the Dead. He turned his face up towards her. Their fingers laced. She smiled down at him, but there was old pain in the smile.

"It is good to see you here, daughter," said the bishop.

"There is nowhere I would rather be than here," she replied gravely. "Soon we will all be gathered here. The time is drawing very near."

The table rocked suddenly, slopping water from the chunky glasses. From underneath in a tangle of paws and heads came a big brown dog, who jumped at the girl, tongues lolling in a frenzy of delight. She was almost knocked backwards, then she gave in to the rush and crouched down, embracing the delighted animal as he gave little enthusiastic barks. His tail wagged frantically. Her husband put one hand on her shoulder and the other on the dog's left head. She looked up at him over the dog's back and their eyes met. Dafni looked up and away, towards the mirrored surfaces of the bishop's gaze.

"All the same, whatever the necessity," she said, "As a mother—"

The hum of the engine was louder, and suddenly Costa pointed, interrupting Dafni's flow. She turned. Behind them in the square was Menelaos' little motor-cart, with Taxeia sitting behind her husband. In the crook of her arm she held a tiny baby.

"As a grandmother..." Dafni continued smoothly, beaming, amid the rising gales of laughter.

Chapter 23

THE SICKNESS OF THE PEARL

(Sarakina)

The coin is in the air, the die is cast
the river crossed, and wagered on that throw
is all the world you know and fear to lose
and worlds unknown you fear and long to gain.

You made me, long ago, of oak and elm, down on the wooded western shores of the the gentle green island. Oaken keel, strong oak timbers for my frame, with planks of light elm, hale and tight, hand varnished. You learned the old craft working summers in the boatyard, and when you were ready you built me yourself, the others giving help and advice and friendly laughter. There alone one dawn you named me and floated me, while the breakers crashed on the beach with a thunderous roar. You gave me eyes and with them life, after the way of my kind. Then with your touch you woke me to know myself, to be myself as I saw where I was going.

For a little while we sailed together, then off we went to find her and bring her back home. Many voyages we took together, all three, far to the cold South, West across the broad Atlantic, North through the fjords and East. Eastward, slipping in through the narrow gate to the Middle Sea, this warm blue sea where the gods are kind and the tides run deep. There we lost her, long ago, and you put away your power with your broken heart and would do no more but wander only. No power had I to help heal you, and on and on you went, over the seas and the lands. Long you left me but ever I sought you and found you at need.

We went nowhere in those years, only away, the two of us together. But even going nowhere we moved. We went on through this sea, through the islands dark and humped like dolphins rising up in the sunrise. Through the wheel of islands we went, circling ever round the tiny hub where long ago light was born. Then we would turn and run

westward out between the pillars and home for a while to our own green island where both of us had our birth and our beginning. Then we might voyage again with no end in mind but forgetting. You learned at last that you could not leave her behind for trying.

Even in deep despair you would speak to me, lean your head against me, pat me as you passed me. If you did not tell me where to go I would decide on a way myself. What you told me to do, I did, trying my best to care for you. Without me you would forget human things, forget to eat and change your clothes. Long we have been together, and it is hard now to leave you for the last time in starlight before dawn, to see you step onto another boat. I cannot remember a time before I knew you, for there was no time when I was and you were not, you made me. Hard to say goodbye. Especially hard to say it as I must, without words I can use to reach you. You broke your heart when you lost her, and if I had a heart it would break now as your foot leaves my deck for the last time. You do not turn round, do not look, speak no word. I will not hear you say the sounds of my name again. I have no heart, no flesh and blood, I am a spirit of fire made of wood, moving by air and water's grace. If I have a heart it is you, mo chridh, my dear heart, my heart's darling.

I know what I have to do. The painted eyes on my prow would weep wooden tears if they could to see you going from me so cheerfully to your death. You and the fool and the sad-eyed woman who knows ropes, all three step from my deck onto the other boat. Goodbye, my heart. All this time so much pain. I could have had the fool fall overboard ten times on the trip here except that you forbade me. They didn't use the jacklines properly. They would not even let the girl on deck for fear she would be swept over. Even now when the sea is calm to the horizon they were reluctant to let her up except that you insisted. I kept them busy all the way. I kept the ropes tangled about the gaff and the sails in constant need of attention. But even though I could have lost him so easily the other would have been more dangerous without him, and he is more careful. He will not go near the water, and you had given your word in exchange for the child's safety. I do not like that man in the hat. He sought to master me with magic. Your magic breathes in me, he is a crude bumbler. He is a landsman who knows a dangerous little, and well I might wish him at the bottom of the sea.

The girl stands at the rail watching the ship that took you. The sky is growing lighter. The boy is sleeping below. The man with the hat commands me crudely to make for shore. He knows I am aware, does not know what it means. I obey him. I wait for the girl's command, as you

told me. She stands still and silent by the rail. Her hair is brushed and neatly tied back. No need to leave the door of the shower hanging open and shake towels out on the floor to remind this one. She is as clean and tidy as her mother. What of you is there in her? I sense she is full of the power that was ever in the two of you, but beyond that there is not much to mark her your child. What is there in her that I should cherish her?

The shore is wooded here, we are a way from the harbour. There is a fishing village somewhere, but not near, there are no boats and no people, just the shoulder of the island to the East and clear water to the West. The sun has risen when I come close under the lea of the island. There she commands me at last. "Sarakina!" The man in the hat looks up, puzzled, but it is too late, already I have swung the heavy boom, it strikes the back of his head hard and he falls to the deck. She moves quickly to secure him with ropes. I hope she knows what she is doing, there is a skill to that. Oh well, she has seen the fool tie up two adults and a child recently and perhaps she has been taught knots. I cannot imagine her mother teaching her knots.

She does not speak to me again or tell me what to do. I put down an anchor. It is safe enough here for the time being. Then she consults a little book from her pocket and chucks some signs on the deck. I trust her magic better than her knots. What is she doing? I thought she'd pitch him overboard. Did you agree to this? She goes below to the aft cabin and fumbles in the cutlery drawer, comes back looking dissatisfied. What is she doing? Does she want it? She cannot know about it, and the time is not yet. The boy is still asleep in the forward cabin, she does not look at him but comes back out on deck. Her little knife is in her hand. The man is groaning and trying to move. The ropes hold, praise the Lord Maker. His eyes open to see her standing above him.

"Elly," he says, calmly. "What is this?"

"The necessity for Sacrifice, Cloud," she says. "I'd have liked it ever such a lot better if you'd gone with them and left Raymond with us. But nothing personal, no more than if you'd had to kill me. You've been good to me mostly. You healed me and taught me magic. But you had me stolen, and you lied to me about my mother. She's dead. And soon you will be too."

"I have never lied to you." he says.

"You said she was where she belongs." the girl's face is twisted with emotion now. "She is dead and you told me that."

"You believe Colin O'Niall above me? Ah, the ties of blood are amazing." He is smiling, incredibly "And I did not lie. You did not ask where

she belonged." He is still trying to free himself, struggling hard against the ropes. "You won't kill me Elly. You can't. Do you think Colin O'Niall will teach you magic? He is a broken man, good for nothing any more, he has lost his power. Miriam is out there with him in the battle. You love Miriam, will you kill her too? And all the other children, the golds and the purples, they're all out there, all your friends. I am your friend. And what will happen when the All Holy comes? A new god, remember, and we can control it. Us together. You need me, Elly. You love me, you know you do. And magic is so dangerous. You have power but no control. You're good, but there's a lot you don't know yet. You don't even know what to do with the power you'll get from killing me."

"Oh I know that," she says, and smiles. It is very quiet then for a moment. The water is lapping on the shore and against my sides, and somewhere in the trees there is a bird calling. "Where did she belong then, Cloud?"

"In hell. Wait!" She has raised the knife. "She was Hell's daughter, although she did not know it. Your mother was the daughter of the Lord of Death and his Bride, and to them she has returned. It is true to say that she is no longer alive, but can such a one die?"

"It seems there is a mighty weight of destiny about me and my family," she says, simply.

"That is one of the things that drew me to you."

"How long have you known all this?" Her voice is curiously calm and steady. He has relaxed a little. Can this be true? If it is true then you are a full god by birth and so was she and so is this child. The spirit told you when you asked that you had been placed as you were for a purpose and your parentage was not important at that time. Of course you believed it, what spirit could you not daunt in those days? One that had been daunted by the Lord of Souls maybe.

"I knew it since first I cured your sickness. I could feel their touch in you, though I did not at first know which of your parents it was the family was clear. It was no mortal sickness you had, though it was attacking the cells of your body. There are things you need Elly, things you were not getting."

"What things?"

"Do you think I am a fool to tell you when you're going to kill me?" She leans over him and speaks clearly and precisely. French is not a good language for making threats, but she is good at it.

"I think you are going to tell me, yes. And I am going to kill you afterwards, I'm not pretending anything else. If you don't tell me I know how

to ask the gods, and if what you say is true they will tell me. I don't think you're lying now. If the Devil is my grandfather then I can call on him and he will come at my word. Isn't that right? Shall I call him now?"

Her voice is light and firm and she sounds as if she might do it. What can I do to stop her? I rock once, hard, tipping the deck, rolling him slightly, making Elly take half a step to steady herself. They barely notice, intent on each other, but I achieve my objective of waking the boy in the cabin. He yawns and stretches. Get up quickly child, you may be needed. Sometimes I almost think he hears me.

Up on the deck he has begun to tell her. "Sunlight. Magic." he speaks reluctantly, each word dragging out. "Elly—" He is struggling to free his hands, he has almost done it, I think. Can she see that?

"What else?" she sounds impatient. Down in the cabin the boy starts getting dressed. I can hear a crashing and a booming from somewhere far away where there is a battle raging that finished four hundred years ago. I can hardly spare a thought for it, not even for you in the midst of it. She raises her little knife and sunlight reflected off the water glints on the blade and sends light dancing about the deck.

"Sacrifices." She laughs, and the sound is shocking as I rock there in the water and the bound man struggles beneath her on the deck. The echoes come back from the island.

"Are you telling me Maman was conducting sacrifices?"

"I'm trying to tell you that your mother kept you cut off from everything you need spiritually and that was killing you. She didn't know, she loved you, but she was killing you."

She would have done that, yes. I remember that night, the spirit you called, the way it rocked the water and almost sunk me, the things she said afterwards when she was going. You didn't know. If you had known you would have rescued the child. Why did we never think of doing that? Why did we leave this girl to grow like this? I know we've been looking for her this last half year, but there were seven years and a half before that when we should have been there for her. The boy is coming out of the cabin now towards the ladder to the deck.

"I don't believe you," she says. "I'm sorry Cloud, really I am. I do like you and I don't want to drag this out. Consent."

"You don't hate me, Elly. You know you don't. You love me."

"Yes," she says. "Consent, Cloud." Their eyes lock. Then she takes a deep breath and plunges down her arm. "Cloud Kir Harghia, with love, in the name of death and life and the hope of a new beginning—" He screams before the blade finds his throat and the bright arterial blood

fountains up, covering her and the deck. It feels warm and sticky and unpleasant on the planks. I do not know what it must be like on her face, in her hair.

The boy stands at the top of the ladder, quite still, holding the rail. She drops the knife onto the body and raises both her arms as high as she can, fists clenched. The blood runs slowly away, leaving her clean. He is still moving slightly but dead beyond a doubt. She takes a step backwards and releases her fists, spreading her fingers wide. I do not know where that power is going but that is a summoning of some sort, an opening. I can feel the gods and spirits drawing close around this island.

The boy does not move, and neither do I. After a moment when nothing has come she takes another step backwards and bumps the wheel. She sits down abruptly on the deck and starts to sob. The boy comes forward then, towards her, past the body. He neither stares at it nor avoids looking at it. He puts a hand on her shoulder. "Elly?" he says. Tears are streaming down her face.

"Cloud." she says.

"He was a bad man."

"He was good to me. He was my friend. Nobody made me kill him," she says, "I did it myself. Oh Emrys, I saw myself in the smoke with a knife in my hand. And now I have done it, but do you know what? It was the wrong knife." She is almost choking on her tears. "I don't want to be like that. I don't want the devil in my family."

"You can choose who you want to be, but who is in your family just isn't a matter of choice." The boy hugs her fiercely for a moment and then lets go. "Sarakina?"

How does he know I have it? He was in the restaurant with the others when it was brought to me. Nobody knows. The fisherman brought it from the Lady, the ever-renewing Priestess of the Moon who has had it in her keeping the last two thousand years. It would have been too good a knife to use on that man. It is for her, though, and the time of her need will be soon. A knife is a tool, and it will be needed to remake the world. Which is what you longed for above all things and what you have cared about more than anything else. It would be wrong of me to withhold this now. With some reluctance I slide open one of the lockers. It is inside, incongruous amid the jumble of tools and rope and charts you keep in these little deck-lockers. He was so nervous, that fisherman, fulfilling a bargain he had made with one he feared so much. He stood on my deck, cap jammed right down on his ears and muttered the message, that it was an old knife from the Lady, that the last time I would see you would

be at Lepanto, and that this was needed for the girl and I would know when. The knife is wrapped in sacking, as it was when I opened the little locker for him to put it in. I saw no need to unwrap it. The boy steps forward, but does not touch it.

"Elly?" he says. She looks up. "Here it is."

"What?" She is still sobbing a little and her face is tear-stained. "What is it?" She comes forward, frowning a little, takes up the bundle, opens it. The blade is stone, crescent shaped, very sharp, the handle is bone. In her hand in the bright sunshine it looks every year of its immeasurable age. She has turned it over in her hand, and is beginning to look up again before he answers.

"The knife you need to kill me."

Chapter 24

LORD OF BATTLES

The poppy's red that stains the decks with death
the wine-dark waves, the brightly-bannered ships
the golden sun that glints on helms and arms
no colour bright enough for death is death.

Laerti was the only person from Ithyka on *El Real*, the galley that was Don John's flagship. He was proud of his position. He knew it was due in large part to luck. Since he and Dimitri had found the monster fish he was someone. He knew that without that he would not have come to anyone's attention or been chosen for this honour. Yet however known he might be, if his skill and seamanship were not up to it he would not have been here. His skill counted, and luck, after all, was the favour of the holy ones. So he stood proud in his cardboard armour and fluttering red neckscarf and waved at Katerina and little Leo where they stood by the boathouse beside Pappa Andros and the bishop. There were crowds all along the shore, tourists and locals mingling to watch the battle. He waved again as he spotted his parents standing with old Vraithi from the milk shop. There were even more people on the farther shore, and more again would be watching from the distant heights of Nafpaktos. Laerti waved a last time then turned his mind to his work.

The strait between the mainland and the island was crowded with wooden ships. There must have been a hundred on each side. Most were oared vessels, galleys, those few galleases with sails were placed strategically along the line. Laerti was kept busy with the oars. He found it strange to work with strangers, Italians, Spaniards, Germans, Greeks from other islands, people from all corners of Europe. They spoke English as their common language. Laerti had learned it in school, as everyone did. They had been practicing together for days, but the feel of the crew was still very different from working with friends. He was glad he was up on deck and not down below. On a real galley they'd have chained slaves working those oars. They'd have had to have chained him

to make him stay down there in the heat. Whenever he had a chance Laerti gazed across at the enemy fleet. Most flew long red pennants which fluttered in the breeze, showing arabic curlicued writing in gold. On the mast of the Turkish flagship hung a great standard.

"That is supposed to be standard of Ottoman Empire," the sailor at the next oar told Laerti when he asked. "It has embroidered on it name of Allah twenty-six thousand times. Never has it been captured, but today it will be." She grinned. She was a student from Lisbon and she was proving susceptible to Laerti's charm. "They had also on that flagship tooth of prophet Mohammed, set in crystal. I do not expect they have gone to trouble to reproducing that. Hush now, it is time for praying."

The Christian vessels were all in position. Crucifixes were raised all along the line. Laerti shrugged and whispered. "I will pretend to fight, but I am not going to pretend to pray." The woman frowned. A hush spread out over the water as the Mass began. Don John came forward and knelt before the priest. Laerti was more interested in the curves of the slim blonde woman who knelt beside him. Then there came a flashing of helms on all the ships as all the crews knelt, and Laerti knelt among them.

The Mass was in the Roman form, and moreover in Latin. Laerti's mind and eyes wandered over the ship, noting the pretty girls and the way the vessel moved in the water. It took a great gasp from all the others to drag his eyes back to the priest. Then Laerti gasped with them. The priest had his back to the kneeling crew and his arms upraised, with the silver plate that held the host across both palms. Where there would normally be a small pile of white wafers, there lay what looked like the bleeding hand, arm and half-torso of a man. Laerti frowned. This was going too far. He looked at the sailor beside him to check her reaction, she had tears on her cheeks. He looked back at the priest, who was lowering the plate. It had been replaced by one containing the usual consecrated wafers. He gave one to Don John, and moved through the crowd, giving one to everyone, murmuring "The body of Christ". Laerti took his with the rest. Miracle? Trick? How could anyone tell. It tasted of ashes and stuck in his throat. He hawked and spat the remains over the side.

Don John went to the mast and began to raise a great garishly coloured banner. It bore a picture of Christ crucified. Laerti glanced back across at the Turkish ships. There was so much of this battle that had not been, could not be, rehearsed. There was someone on every ship who knew what should happen and from whom they were all meant to take

their cue. There was a dark haired French woman called Miriam. Laerti found her too chillingly efficient to be attractive. He glanced at her. She had a little radio hung on her sword-belt and was peering intently at the screen of a hand-held computer. Then she straightened up and started gesturing them into position. For a long time Laerti concentrated on his work.

He did not really notice when the two fleets clashed head-on. He had no idea what was going on on the wings. Mikalis had told him that he would understand very little of the battle. "Those who watch from up at Nafpaktos will see more of the field than you will who toil in it." the old man had said. He has fought in real battles in the War, Laerti knew. Still, despite everything he had thought a sea battle would be different somehow. There was smoke from the cannons, and great noise and booming. The galley went here and there, as Miriam directed. Then they rammed a Turkish ship, and the soldiers were leaping over onto the deck. Then after a while they came leaping back as the ships disengaged. Laerti was dimly aware of them as he obeyed the order to back the oars. He was getting tired.

The first he realised anything was wrong was when one of the arrows that had been flying over their heads for some time hit the woman on the next oar. It hit her in the throat between helmet and armour as she was leaning back to pull. Even as her red scarf became soaked with red blood Laerti did not quite take it in. He leapt from his place and stood between the benches, trying to help her, calling aloud. His words were drowned in the hubbub of battle. He grabbed the man on the next oar and started to say something. "Shut up and row!" the man said. "The Turks are getting nearer. Yes, she has fallen, she will be in Paradise, row for your life if you don't want to join her!"

Laerti stepped back, stunned. She was dead, and nobody was taking any notice. It was not a terrible accident after all. All the blood on the decks was real blood. The anger in everyone's faces was a real battle frenzy. This was no longer a game. His friend lay dead in a wash of very red blood. The metallic smell of it was strong in his nostrils. He did not even know her name, just that she had been studying history and was a Catholic and liked reading better than dancing. He looked around. The ships were very close together, and some of them were sinking. The Turks looked very fierce and very near. Of course he hated Turks as much as anyone, but he had no wish to be involved in a new crusade. He looked at the shore of Ithyka, he could swim that far, but not through such hostile waters.

He pushed his way through the crowd on the deck. Miriam was shouting to him to go back to his place, but he made his way towards the silent Don John and the woman at his side. They were the only people who looked calm.

"People are really dying!" he said. He forgot to use English and said it in Greek, but even as he realised the man replied, in Greek.

"I know. I am very sorry about it. I had hoped it might not come to this. It is not my doing. But fear not, I shall act as soon as I can." There was a crash of cannon from one of the nearby galleases. A Turkish galley was hit and sinking. People were drowning in the water. There was a strange gleam in everyone's eyes.

Then Don John murmured to the woman beside him, "At last. She has done it. It is opened. It is time." The woman put a hand on his arm. Laerti, close enough to hear, turned to ask a question. Even as he did so Don John leapt up onto the rail and stood there, keeping a good balance. He raised his hands high. There was a rain of arrows towards him from the nearby Turks. Laerti suddenly remembered that his own armour was only cardboard even if this had suddenly become more real than he had bargained for. He crouched down and peered over the rail.

"Come then," called Don John loudly, standing unscathed among the arrows. "Come Lord of Battle, let Battle live again." He raised his voice and let out a huge bellow. "Ares! Ares Enyalios. Ares Enyaliosssss!" Laerti caught sight of the utterly horrified expression on Miriam's face. Then he looked around. Surely there were more ships than there had been. More ships, yes, rushing to engage. Galleons and galleases, and galleys, hundreds of galleys. The waters were full of them. And that—that was a trireme, and those aboard her were wearing old armour like that you saw painted on old vases. They were fighting fiercely with men on the deck of a grey submarine. Don John was still bellowing out his war-cry. Miriam opened her mouth and called something. Don John hesitated as Miriam spoke, but then cried out again. The sky was swirling with clouds suddenly, and there were shapes moving in the clouds. Laerti stared up at them, giants and genies, harpies and gorgons, angels and demons, flying horses, snakes and other stranger nameless writhing things. They swirled and spread out across the sky in red and purple, in green and swirling grey, in hundreds of shades of blue, some as thin and insubstantial as mackerel sky at sunset, some as seemingly solid as the great anvil clouds that presage thunder.

Miriam was closer now and he could hear what she called. "Colin O'Niall!" Don John froze for an instant as if shot. Then there was a

tremendous explosion and a nearby ship started to sink. In the distance Laerti could see two galleys that had been near him in the harbour that morning, one Turkish and one Venetian. They were pelting each other with oranges as the Turk pursued hotly, and all aboard both vessels laughing loudly. But nowhere else could he see anyone playing any more. There were drowning men in the water. Don John called again in a loud strong voice.

"Ares Enyalios!" Laerti saw someone being beheaded on the next ship, terribly close. A turbaned head rolled down the deck and splashed into the water. The cry was spreading across the fleet, everyone aboard the trireme was echoing it as they engaged with a galleon and swords flashed. Laerti found himself shouting it, and the blonde woman who had been beside Don John at the mass was shouting it at his side. There was a satisfaction to the syllables "En-yal-i-osses".

At that great shout a young warrior came striding down from the clouds. He was dressed in beaten bronze armour, with a swirling gorgon's head in beaten bronze with jewelled eyes upon his chest. His helm was tall and crested high with dyed gold horsehair. His arms and legs were bare, but for leather sandals. He had a huge sword in one hand, fire dancing around the blade. In the other arm he held a spear which flickered from shape to shape, a javelin, an assegai, a rifle with a bayonet, a thick thrusting spear. Where the spear waved bullets chewed them and people fell back into the water. He was laughing delightedly and aiming the spear, and Laerti flung himself flat on the deck in fear.

Then right above his head Miriam called again. "Colin O'Niall!" Don John stopped and turned to her, jumping down from the rail to land almost on top of Laerti. He lay between them, trembling, unable to see anything apart from the two of them. They ignored him as if he were the planks of the deck he wished he could sink into.

"I see you know my name." Don John said, bowing. "And you have called it three times in the midst of a raging battle with death on all sides. This is your battlefield not mine, and you spilled first blood upon it. I have called to it none who live. These who I have summoned here today are those who first fought and died before the lofty walls of Troy, in the walls of wood at Salamis, before besieged Syracuse, at Mylae, at Actium, and oh yes, here at Lepanto. With some from every other sea battle this Middle Sea has ever known. They have come back from death's realm to fight and die again for what they believe in. I have invoked them, and they have come. So, you have invoked me Lady, here I am, what would you have of me?"

She stood for a moment, clearly taken aback. "This should not be possible. We haven't done it yet. You are living, not dead. Are you a man or a god?" she asked.

He laughed. "I have gone about the world these long years as if I were a man," he answered, "Hiding my name as if it were my word. Living without anything to live for, believing hope all lost. But when you fools tried to bind me by it and make me trade my life for my daughter's life I found that it was not so. My name is only part of what I Am. Or maybe you only stole the name and clan I chose, and not that unknown name my mother whispered in my ear when I was born. My child is safely away from you now. You hounded my poor Marie to death, I know that. I do not in honesty know for sure which I am, but it seems my name will not bind me. Do you want to find out? What will you have of me? Whether I am man or god there is blood enough here that is your sacrifice for you to give me a fair fight. I have reasons enough to wish you dead."

"And gods too can die," she said, her eyes challenging. "That is one thing that Jesus shows us."

He laughed, his chest heaving. "Are you all completely mad?" he asked, as if interested in the answer. "You went to all this trouble to stage this battle, and it must have been some considerable trouble, and you didn't realise it was pointless? And now you tell me you think the lesson of Christianity is that gods can die? I would say rather that it is that men can live again. That gods may die was no news, then or ever. Come then, do it. Kill me if you can."

Miriam stood still a moment. Their eyes met and it appeared that they were somehow battling. Sweat stood out on her face and she appeared to be making great efforts. Arrows and bolts fell all around them. Great cries rose up from ships around. After what seemed to Laerti no more than a moment she spun round to flee. Without thinking, Laerti grabbed at her ankle. She came crashing down on top of him. Don John, or whatever else he might be, reached down and lifted her up. He leapt to the rail again, holding her. Then he laughed again, loudly and flung her upwards, crying aloud again: "Lord of Battles!"

Laerti watched from the deck as, immediately above his head, the god reached out a hand and snagged the woman as she flew past. Then she was gone. Don John wiped his face with his scarf, reknotted it about his neck, and jumped back down. He leaned down to Laerti, offering a hand. Laerti pulled himself to his feet.

"That was bravely done," Don John said. Laerti grinned, despite his fear, but could not speak.

"What now?" the blonde woman asked, coming forward.

"This is still a battle. And it must be won. I think we should do what we can for the survivors." The woman nodded, and began giving orders to the rowers in American English. Laerti went back to his place. Don John leaned against the mast and fended off occasional flying demons and harpies that approached them. The woman's orders were crisp and clear. They made for sinking ships and picked up any swimmers. On some ships there were real bound galley slaves. After a while Don John made up groups of people willing to leap across and liberate ships, and the *Real* was much less crowded. Laerti thought about going, but decided he was more use at his oar. He was worried about what might happen if one of those ships vanished again when he was on it. Some of them were more substantial than others. Confusion reigned all around, there was battle in the sky, and battle on the water. Yet the day seemed almost won.

It still seemed so a few hours later when they picked up another group of survivors from the sea. Laerti was exhausted, and the others looked no better as they worked alongside him. The woman came up along the rows of oars, and touched Laerti's shoulder. "Help me with the water," she said. He rose and walked back to the water barrel, dipped in a bucket and went around giving a drink to the rowers. He had been given two or three such drinks as he rowed, the water very welcome on a parched throat. He went swiftly between the rows with the dipper. It was the first time he had looked up for some time. On the water around him Romans were fighting Carthaginians, and other Romans. Christians were fighting Moslems. Greeks were fighting Persians. In the sky monsters were battling, angels and harpies mauling at each other, men on flying horses hunted down djinni. The Lord of Battle wrestled with two writhing snakes in all the colours of cloud.

Then he was pulled abruptly back to the battle on the water. There was a crash as another galley rammed them, and from the tilt of the deck what he had most feared was happening, the *Real* was sinking. As the other rowers struggled up from their benches Laerti looked for open water to dive into. He saw before him the sight he would dream about for the rest of his life. He saw with a horrible clarity, but almost without taking it in, the crushed and broken body of the blonde woman who had been with Don John. Blood was oozing from beneath her armour. Splinters of bone were visible where her ribs had been crushed by the ram.

Enemy soldiers were leaping onto the deck, and when the booted foot of one of them came down hard on her face, she did not move. Laerti never knew how long he stared at her, whether it was seconds or hours, but as the enemy hit the deck with their swords in their hands he turned and dived into the water. So it was from below, as he frantically trod water, that he saw the figure of Christ crucified step off both cross and banner. He set one foot on the deck of the sinking ship then he walked up empty air and away into the clouds, shining with the light of divinity.

As Laerti watched, most of the ships melted away. Those that were left seemed aimless, suddenly bereft of purpose. Then he turned on his back and swam for shore, tearing off his sodden cardboard armour and letting it sink, avoiding corpses and other swimmers in the sea, letting the water do the work and carry him home.

The clouds and their occupants faded to reveal a clear blue sky. Laerti swam on. The sun, setting behind the island of Ithyka, shone red upon the bloodied waters of the gulf of Lepanto.

Chapter 25

LITTLE DOUBT GOD WAS A MAN

1. (Raymond)

Alone, confused, cut off by veils of lies
with eyes tight shut in fear to face the world
so lost, alone and helpless in your rage
your hate for all that breathes that is not you.

Claude wouldn't listen and now it's all gone terribly wrong.

It's only luck that I didn't drown, that I made it to the island. It's a stupid little place. It is easy to tell locals from tourists here. Locals are dressed up in embroidered black, jingling with gold coins around their necks. Tourists are tanned and wearing pastel colours, cameras dangling. I wish I had mine. That would show them all. Wish I had my radio even—the water ruined it of course. White houses, flowers everywhere. I told Claude that Colin O'Niall was the Irish wizard who stopped me at Siena. "Good," he said, and smiled. I still have nightmares about being frozen like that and unable to move, and "Good."

Where will he be? Where is that confounded boat with the children? Where that is Colin will go, and if I can get there first I can help Claude keep the children hostage. I have to warn Claude. I stamp through the harbour looking for it. Nothing. And no boat that will take me to find it. None of the boats are moving. There is a battle out there still, gods and demons raging across the sky, boats sinking. It's getting to be late afternoon, it has been raging all day. Shops, a square, post office, telephone office with a microwave dish on the roof, but it's shut. Always shut in the afternoons, it says. Open at 19.30. Idiotic but completely typical of the islands. Nobody to call anyway, even if I could get a line out of the country. Everyone's here, mostly out there on the water fighting for their lives. Nothing I can do to help them now. Claude, got to find Claude, tell him.

Claude won't go too far away. He's probably somewhere on the other side of this island. I wonder if there is transport? Nothing, nothing anywhere, until I am lucky. I see a blue motor-scooter leaning against a pomegranate tree at the side of a church. I expect it belongs to that fat priest I saw down on the beach earlier handing out shoes. I haven't ridden one of these for years, but I remember how. Leaving the keys in is very careless. No helmet either, I don't expect he can fit one over that ridiculous hat that the priests here wear. Roaring off out of town and up the hill. The sign says "Stavros". Up and up past little shrines on every bend standing out very white against the blue sea. Far above the battle, wonder why there's nobody watching from here, good view. And over the ridge and down the other side, and there she lies, rocking in that bay, that's the stupid ketch. I'd know her anywhere. Not many of those wooden boats in the Med, fishing boats yes, but hand-built wooden yachts are thin on the ground. Right, let's get down there. No sign of anyone on deck, thought that was someone lying down but it's just an old tarpaulin. Claude will be able to tell me what to do and get everything back under control.

The sun is setting, out to sea. This is a terrible road. More of a track really, made for donkeys I suppose. Got to be careful—what the hell? Lying in the ditch back there—that was them. The kids on their own? Turning isn't easy, but back I go, throttle out going uphill, and they're running. Well, let them run, just try and outrun a motor-scooter, kids. This could even be fun if they weren't gods and I didn't have to be careful of them. Hostages too. Mustn't kill them. They're cutting across away from the road. Making for the trees, damn, got to catch them before they reach them. This field is terraced for whatever these green things are, makes it very bumpy. My shadow stretches out before me, very long. The boy's lagging behind, nearly there, ha! Caught him. Switch off the engine. She'll come back and tell me where Claude is and how they got away.

Yes, back she comes. The kid I've got hold of stands limp, not struggling at all in my arm. I've got a good tight grip. She's walking right up to me, slow steps, head slumped over, despairing looking. That's right. She might be a god but Claude's not here to tell me not to hit her this time, and there's nobody watching up here. I won't kill her but I'll teach her to think she's special. She's nobody, she's just some kid I saved the life of taking her from a hospital. Not even a god really.

She stops about a metre away, just out of reach. She's got that bag slung on her shoulder, the one she had the map in. One hand's on the strap. She doesn't make any threatening moves, as if a kid like that could

threaten me. The boy stays limp. Then she looks up and her eyes are full of hate. She's afraid of me.

"Let him go." Her eyes are burning. I'd like to laugh but somehow my hand relaxes and releases the boy. He runs quickly and gets behind her. I try to move and what the hell? It's just like last time. I can't move at all. How the hell does she have to power to do that? It would take Claude two or three sacrifices to get enough for that sort of thing. Has she—can she have—killed him?

"Get off the bike." I sit in the back of my mind helpless while my body obeys her. She is smiling now and her eyes are still full of hate. "Bend down." I do. She slaps my face as hard as she can. It isn't very hard. The bike falls over, hitting the ground with a hard crash.

"Elly..." the boy touches her arm. "He is a bad man, but you can make yourself as bad as he is." Little bastard, needs teaching a lesson. They both do.

"It's easy for you," she says. But she does not strike me again. "Follow me." she says. I follow her under the trees and into the wood. It is dusk in here already. "Now what do I do with him?" She asks the boy. He shrugs. Trees brush against my face and into my eyes. I walk on regardless of the pain, following her. No matter how much I struggle I cannot get free of this compulsion. If she lets me go even for an instant I will be on her. I will kill her no matter what she is, even if she is the new All Holy. I am not afraid of killing gods.

They come out ahead of me into a clearing in the trees. There is a big stone in the middle. There are white flowers growing all around. For no very good reason it reminds me of the hill in Siena, the crucifix, the heat and the dust. Then I know it, it is the place of sacrifice Claude told me about. This must be where Jean-Luc and Alys were supposed to bring the golds after the battle. This is where they're going to use all the power to do it. Good. Good. They'll come here and rescue me.

"Look!" The boy has found a jug and some cups and bowls. This doesn't make them at all suspicious. They sit on the stone together and drink milk and eat yoghurt, pouring in honey. They'll be sorry later when they find out what that stone's for. They pile the plates up again on the side of the stone. Then the boy brings me a cup of milk and she tells me to drink. I do it as automatically as I have done everything else she has told me. I hate this paralysis. Come on Monique, Miriam, everyone. Come on before she kills me here in this place of sacrifice. Or orders me to kill myself? I wouldn't be able to disobey even if she asked me to tear out my eyes and claw open my brain. In some ways it would be a relief.

"Lie down and sleep," she says, and I lie down in the grass and close my eyes but even though I can't move I don't sleep. I wait, hour after hour, eyes closed, lying on the hard ground, growing angrier and angrier, waiting, waiting, hoping, growing fuller and fuller of hate.

2. (Sarakina)

What holy breath, what men or gods are these
who're dealt divinity to be their share,
but still eat bread and wine and walk the woods
and choose to live and die and breathe as flesh?

Little night noises, calm cool water laps around me in the starlit darkness. I am still in the bay where I have been all day. I do not know where else to be. Maybe she will come back, but what is that to me? I am waiting. It seems everything is waiting. If the world is made new that will be a good thing. It is what you wanted—but I will not think of you. Thinking of you is joy and pain mixed beyond bearing. I have learned in this long day that thoughts of you are no comfort when each thought is shadowed with your loss. If the world is made new then everything will change. Maybe I will be less lonely.

But that is a foolish thought. I must find a way to be myself, to be what I am, to find myself whole without you. I grieve, but I must not surrender myself to grief. That would not be what you wanted, nor what I want. So I rock here, lapped by the little tide that stirs this calm Middle Sea. When the waiting is over I think I shall go to the isle at the heart of the dancing islands. If the Lord of Light is there he can learn from me about his son. He might be glad to know a little more about his blue-eyed boy who could almost hear me speak and who went so gladly to the sacrifice. Maybe then I will go back to our green island and see what is waking there.

The moon is rising, huge and silver and silent. The water ripples silver and black, the island is a shadow against the night. A bird calls once from the trees. As if in answer my deck tips as to a footstep, and you are there. You. You are there, there, one hand on the forward mast. A moment ago I was alone. You are here. The fisherman who came from the Lady said you would not come back. You are very still, pale in the moonlight. You are not wearing any clothes at all. Are you real? Is it you, or has my longing called a seeming? A ghost? A god? You are very still and I do not have words for the look on your face. Where have you been and what have you done this day when they all thought you would die? Is that really you?

You stand still a moment, then you touch a finger to the bird on the mast. You smile. I never thought to see that smile again and all the world seems to glow in the moonlight. You turn and head down to the cabin and set a pot of water on the stove. You fumble a moment for the matches, then you smile and make fire from your fingers. It is long and long since I have seen you do that. You did find a way to use your power then? I open the cupboard and drop a mug into your hand. You take the teabag, holding it by the string and pour the boiling water over it until the mug is full. I open the door to the cupboard where your clothes are, and shake some out. You pick them up, grinning and pull them on, jeans and an old worn jersey, one with leather pads on the elbows. What happened to your clothes? Why did the Lady send to tell me you would not come back when here you are? Did you break fate?

Still barefoot, you pad back up onto the deck again, mug in your hand. You crouch on your heels where the children sat this morning. The locker is still open where she took the knife. I close it quickly. You glance up at the noise, taking the teabag from the mug. You toss it overboard. As well the sad-eyed woman is not here, she always reproached you for that bad habit.

I want to set sail and go somewhere far away and very fast, running before a gale with you laughing and clutching the tiller. I want to skip over the waves while the coloured skies of the far north shine above us. I want to sail with you through the islands very fast and see them dancing like dolphins black against the rosy-fingered dawn. I want to go on forever on the wine-dark sea with you on my deck. I never want to lose you again. You sit, staring out towards the shore, sipping your tea. You are no ghost. I do not know what you are.

"Do you know what I did, Sarakina?" You pat the deck. I don't know. I listen. How often you have talked to me like this. You sound incredulous, as if you can't believe yourself. "I called a god. I took the power Elly freed for summoning and I called a god, and he came. I called all the men who died on these waters through all of time to come and fight again, and they came at my call. At first I thought—" You laugh, shortly. "I thought it would be easy. Then at the Mass I knew they had such power to use the old things and make them real. Even if they were fools they were doing such dangerous things. I thought I would be able to bring ghost ships and scare them away, but then I knew it would not be enough. I took the opening Elly made and I called with all my heart. I thought it would break me, that my power would come back and I

would crack with the force of it. What I did today, nobody can do that and live. No man."

I wish I could tell you that you are a god born, full a god on both sides, if I can believe him. She believed him and she is no fool, though she knows less than she thinks.

"Beyond that I picked her up, the witch. Miriam her name was. She was the one who killed my Marie, or drove her to her death. I beat her in magic and I cast her out of the world, right out, she is gone, they took her. But it was not a sacrifice. I don't know what it was. I just knew what to do. I thought I would die, at the end of the day. I was sure of it. I thought it was my fate. Yet I lived. Many did die. Many living people who would have preferred to live. Bel among them, you know, you liked Bel." Your voice is sad, but wondering more than sad.

"I am a useless seer," you say. "No seer at all. My foresight is severely lacking. Emrys knows, he can see the threads of the pattern he says, like his mother, like his father too. But not even the gods know all ends. Ares came at my word, he came laughing to the battle. What am I, Sarakina? Am I a man or a god?"

There is a fluttering on the furled sail. A large white moth, the size of your palm trembles there a moment then flies down around your face. Then there is another by the mast, and another and another until they are all around you in a cloud. They circle you as if you were a light. You do not move. The last time one came you gave it blood and it spoke. That was long ago and far away. It told you where to go to stop that bad man killing someone. You said it was a spirit, but you did not call it. You went where it said, and you stopped him. Then she had such trouble believing what you had done and you did summon a spirit. Oh my heart, you sit slumped so sadly. You have not called these. They bat against you, and you are still.

"I do not wish to speak to the dead." you say, your voice flat. They are growing frantic, battering themselves against you and at last one falls to the deck, dead. The others crowd round it, desperately, swarming over the body for the little blood it contains. Then they all begin to speak in squeaking tiny human voices, calling on you. You shake your head. "So many of you died today. I know. I take responsibility."

They settle to the deck, silent. I am covered from bow to stern with large pale death moths, still in the moonlight like strange flowers. Then one of them rises and speaks with the voice of the sad-eyed woman who knows ropes.

"Colin, the children, you have to save the children!"

"The children?" you start. "Jenny—Bel—aren't they safe asleep below?" The door was shut. I couldn't tell him.

"They have gone onto the island," says that moth, and another, a man's voice, "You may still be in time."

"Where have they gone?" you ask.

"Pan's Grave." one says, from behind you, and that is her voice. You jump and spin round, sending the little cloud of moths fluttering off around you.

"Marie?" There is such pain in your voice even now.

"I know now what I fool I was. Don't make the same mistake. You have your power. Act."

"I don't know what I am—"

"Find out, or do it without." She flies up and whirrs about your head, sounding irritated. She sounded like that often. There is a movement in the air, and They are standing on the rail, looking down onto the moth-covered deck. They are crowding round, more gods than I ever imagined, all waiting.

"Marie? Am I man or god?"

"God born, but that is your free choice." Her voice is fading. You take your knife to draw blood from your arm, so the moth that is your wife and your sister can drink and speak longer. But you hesitate, blade flat against your skin. You look up, and it seems you do not see the crowd of anxious watching gods.

"If I am a god," you say very quietly, "Then I can make a way to bring you back, for you are a god too and what is death to that kind?" There is a strange longing in your voice. "But no. No." Your voice is firmer. "Even if I were Pan and the pattern that would be wrong. Marie, Marie. Have I the right—no." You are near shouting now. "No. Everyone has the right to act, to do what they think best, man or god. And there has been too much blood and sin and—and there is no time for this!" You drop the knife, blade still open. Moths hastily rise from the deck and swirl around you. The blade sticks down half an inch into the wooden plank, quivering.

"I am a man. I have always held myself a man. I do not want more power than any man should have, I do not want to go farther and farther from all human things. I walked among the gods, for a little time, there at the end of the battle, and when I saw my boat I came home. That was my free choice, if you like. Now I will be what I can as best I can, and you are dead, dead, and lost to me. Go on and be reborn and learn again,

Marie, learn how to be human, because that is enough." You draw a ragged breath and look over towards the dark shoulder of the island.

"Sarakina, take me in. I should hurry. The children. They are children, and I have mostly failed them in my teaching. I must hurry now before it is too late."

I move towards the shore. The white moths swirl up in a great plume, taking the gods with them, and they are all gone. As near in as I can go you jump down, patting the rail as you go, and splash through the water. I can bear to see you go, even though I do not know if you will come back. On the shore, just beyond the edge of the waves, there is a great golden sad-eyed lion. You put out a hand towards him.

"I haven't forgotten about you, Lord," you say. "Let me pass. I am a man even as you are. I have chosen what you chose at Gethsemane, as near as anyone can make another's choice, which isn't very near. Make way graciously for a new age that will have room for you as well as what else may come. We don't need saving any more, we can take that burden from you and each save ourselves."

The lion stands still a moment as you walk towards it, then vanishes with a toss of mane and a flick of tail. You laugh a little, sounding strange, and turn at the water's edge to look back at me.

"Don't be afraid, Sarakina, radiant one." you call "It is the right of any living thing. We just don't mostly dare to do it." Then you turn and stride off uphill towards the trees. I go a little farther out into the bay and settle to wait again.

Chapter 26

LORD MESSENGER

Each breath you take and every choice will count
the share you strive to do to make the world.
Each word and deed from everyone has weight
the living world composed of what you are.

The galley came slowly towards the boathouse on the beach in the sunset. Pappa Andros smiled down at little Leo. Leo looked back gravely. He had been running to and fro all day on the beach helping take clothes and shoes to people swimming ashore. Pappa Andros had given thanks so many times for the warning they had been given that he had lost count. Now as the sun slipped down behind the island this galley headed ponderously towards them. The rowers on the deck were children, all of them seemed to be about seven or eight years old. Each had a gold patch sewn onto their clothes. Pappa Andros could not see below their waists but he would have wagered his living that they were barefoot.

Pappa Andros turned to Katerina. "Go to Evadni and have her organise bringing the children's shoes down here." Katerina nodded and dashed off, her hair flying back, the last rays of the sun reflecting off the pale gold ring around her neck. Leo took a step towards the edge of the water, and waved. The galley drew up on the shingle, still in several feet of water. The children released the oars and jumped down. Even when they ran ashore on the surface of the water as if it were mud Pappa Andros just smiled and nodded, sure that everything was somehow under control, sure that someone somewhere was planning this and expecting what was going to happen.

The first child on shore was a girl with tangled dark hair. She spoke to him urgently in a language he did not understand, pushing her hair out of her eyes. He shook his head. She tried another language, then stepped back among the others. She put her arm around another girl who was

weeping and whispered something to her. A boy came forward. He was fair-haired and splashed with blood. He spoke in English, panting.

"My name is Joel." He indicated the first girl. "This is Yita. There are more of us. On board the ship. The purples. We—"

"Go slowly," pleaded Pappa Andros. Purple was a colour, but what were purples?

"Chained." he gasped. "Below decks. More children. Please help us. They were going to take us off and sink the ship and let them drown. We had to do it." Pappa Andros looked at the boy, and understood the important part. He turned to Leo.

"Run as fast as you can to Manoli, and get him to come back with some tools for cutting chains." Leo nodded, and took off running. After three steps he was flying down the beach. The children barely seemed to notice the wonder. One of them was pushing forward, a girl.

"Are you a priest?" she asked, in heavily accented English. Pappa Andros smiled, and nodded. She dropped to her knees. "Father, forgive me. I have helped to kill my mother."

"We had to do it," said Joel again. "They would have killed them all. Don't cry Brunhilde, don't feel bad, you had to do it, it's all right. It isn't any different for you because Alys was your mother, we all did it. Tell her it's all right."

Pappa Andros wanted to sit down and think about it, but there was no time at all. There were thirty children in front of him, all of whom could run on the surface of the sea. All these children were like Leo. All of them were looking at him imploringly.

"You killed a woman?" he asked, in his slow English. "This child's mother?"

"Two women and three men," Joel replied. He was one of the very few who were not crying. "It was necessity. It doesn't matter."

"You killed them because they were going to take you off the ship and sink it, leaving the other children on board?"

"That's right." Thirty pairs of wide eyes looked into Pappa Andros'. He could not pretend for a moment that they had not known what they were doing. There was a depth of understanding of the horror of their actions in those faces which was nothing like childlike. Again he hesitated. In the last of the afterglow he could see Manoli running from the workshop with a toolkit, Evadni ran behind pulling some electric power cable. Tourists scattered before them, little Leo fluttered around their heads. Behind them came Dafni and the bishop, carrying a great wicker basket full of shoes. Then he looked back at the children and crossed

himself. Somehow he had to find words to reach them, and in a language that was not his own. It was so difficult to explain. In the old way there was shame and punishment. In the new was guilt and forgiveness. Neither was right, neither was the way forward, and either was so much easier than accepting responsibility.

"Everything matters," he said. "This was an action you took," he could see some of the children whispering a translation to the others. "You did it, and you have to live with the consequences. Sometimes it is right to do things that are very terrible, and I think this was one of the times. Sometimes there are no easy answers." He sighed. "When it comes to it there is always a choice. But there is not always a good thing to do. You did what you thought was right. You did it. It is done."

Manoli came up, panting. Leo settled on the deck of the galley, Manoli handed the toolkit up to him, then with a nod to Pappa Andros and the children swung himself aboard. Evadni was still unrolling the cable. "Angle grinders!" she said to Pappa Andros as she passed him.

"Very good," he said. She passed the cable to Leo who threaded it under the rail. She swung herself up.

The other children were still where they were, looking at Pappa Andros, very solemn. He looked back at them, then he crouched down in the sand, arms outstretched. "Come here," he said, in Greek, where it is one word, "Ela!" And they came, in a rush, to his embrace. "Welcome," he said to each one as he held them. "Welcome home to Ithyka." He never knew afterwards how long it lasted, that time when he did his best in one great hug to show love and compassion and mercy to children who had known so little of any of these things. He only knew that before very long some of the children had purple patches instead of gold and there were many more of them than before. At last he tipped back on his heels so he was sitting on

the ground, surrounded by children who were about equal parts laughing and crying.

It was full dusk. Someone had lit a bonfire. Nearby, Yanni, Spiro, Costa and Katerina were fitting shoes on children. There seemed to be a wider age range of children among the purples. Some of them needed clothes, Eleni and Vraithi were dealing with them. Menelaos had arrived from somewhere with his motor-cart full of barrels of milk, which Taxeia, a tiny baby in the crook of one arm, was handing out in plastic cups by the light of the headlamp. Dafni was handing round trays of halva. Suddenly the whole town seemed to be on the beach helping with

the children. Pappa Andros smiled with relief as he saw Evadni jumping down from the galley with a loud splash.

"That's the lot!" she called. A moment after Manoli followed her down, rewinding the cable.

"Then let's make sure everyone is fed and shod," said Pappa Andros. "We have quite a way to walk tonight."

Stellio and one of his sons-in-law were setting up a grill on the stones. Old Mikalis started to play the bazouki, quietly. People were moving in and out of the shadows. Pappa Andros could still see the shapes of boats moving in the strait, darker than the dark water. He turned back to the beach, and saw Pappa Thomas and the bishop coming through the trees. With the help of one of the bigger boys he hauled himself to his feet and began brushing the sand off his robe as he advanced to greet them.

"Feeding everyone, I see!" the bishop said, smiling approvingly. Pappa Thomas was silent.

"We will eat before we set off," Pappa Andros said. "The moon will be up soon."

The bishop beamed and walked away towards the enticing smell of grilled fish. The two priests of the island of Ithyka stood together on the beach, looking at each other cautiously.

"You were right and I was wrong." Pappa Thomas said. "I have been a fool, and I know it. This is not at all what I was expecting of the future."

"Thomas—" Pappa Andros began, and then shook his head. He opened his arms once more and embraced the younger man exactly as he had embraced the children. "You're a good man," he said. "You can cope."

"You seem much more sure than I am," muttered Pappa Thomas. Then they walked together into the light.

When the food was all eaten and every child was shod and clothed, the moon began to rise. Stellio shoveled shingle over the fire until it was quite extinguished. Everyone gathered up their belongings. As the moon came full above the horizon a little breeze sprang up and a single wave rose out of the sea, to crash on the beach in a sudden rush of white horses that were galloping as they hit the shingle and gone before anyone could do more than stare in astonishment. Just then they caught sight of a light coming towards them through the trees. They waited, and a very beautiful young man came out onto the beach. There was a glow of a halo about his head and wings on his ankles. He stood for a moment at the edge of the trees looking at them.

"Ag. Hermes," rose a murmur. Pappa Andros bowed his head, and many of the others copied him. Then the young man turned and made his way onto the road. Everyone scrambled to follow him, all on their own feet, even Menelaos and Taxeia had no thought now of using the motor-cart. The whole town, and all the children, followed the shining god up the path towards the peak of the island and the grove that was called Pan's grave.

As they walked along in the moonlight Pappa Andros saw that the trees were following them. He looked closely. There were more trees than there had ever been, cypresses, cedars, laurels, oaks, hazel and flowering chestnut. Vines and ivy wreathed their steps as they walked. The trees were growing up all around the road and spreading all over the mountain. They seemed to be in all seasons at once, in flower, full leaf and fruit. He wondered whether they would still be there in the morning.

They sang as they walked. Sometimes Mikalis played the bazouki and sang his own songs. Pappa Andros walked mostly with the children. Some of the smaller children were soon tired, and he took a turn carrying one of them for a while. Other people carried them too, and after a while it seemed that while some of the children were running ahead and lagging behind many of them were awake or asleep in adult arms. Pappa Andros talked to them as he walked. Then he looked in the crowd for his wife and his friends and walked for a while with one, and then with another. As he moved through the crowd he saw others among them. Some were tourists who smiled at him in a slightly puzzled way. One snapped his picture, the flash of the camera startlingly bright. Pappa Andros smiled, and the man moved on to snap other people.

Some in the crowd were hard to see. The priest looked hard at these until he could make them out. He knew that these were the holy ones, walking among their people to see the world remade. He saw a sturdy man with a dark beard walking bowed as under a great burden, carrying a child on each arm. On his sweatshirt were the letters "INRI" and there were scars on his hands and feet. He saw a very beautiful woman walking with the lame hired worker he had seen at the boatyard earlier in the year. He saw the bishop arm-in-arm with a matronly woman in white and blue, helping her over the uneven ground. He saw a young man whose halo glowed around vine leaves giving the little girl Yita a ride on a leopard. He saw a woman who could only be seen in the moonlight and who faded away when they passed through shadows. He saw the old woman who sold flowers from a basket walking beside a man with a

dog. The dog had three heads. A tall pale girl walked with her hand on one of the heads, she smiled to see him looking at her. He saw his dear Ag. Nikolaos and Pappa Thomas walking together carrying one of the bigger children between them. Katerina walked on his other side, carrying Leo, fast asleep over her shoulder. He saw the Lord of Battle he had seen laughing in frenzy that afternoon walking beside a tall woman with an owl on her shoulder, arguing some point furiously. He saw a fair-haired man take Mikalis' bouzouki from him and begin to sing a hymn to Pan. Everyone listened as they walked, and the voice rose up and up into the night in unearthly beauty. He left the song unfinished and passed the instrument back to Mikalis, who picked out the tune but did not sing. Tears were streaming down the old man's face.

The tourist with the camera snapped and snapped. Pappa Andros set down the little girl he was carrying to let her run for a while. They were almost there. The moon was sinking yellow behind the hill. He reached into the bag he had brought and began passing out candles. They were the same Easter candles he used every year, this year he had ordered three times as many as he usually needed. They were white wax tapers, fifteen centimetres long, broader at the base than at the top. By the time they reached the grove everyone had one, including the holy ones. The Lord Messenger led them confidently. Nobody entered the grove. They spread out in a loose circle among the trees, holding their unlit candles. The children were at the front, all awake now. The children of the town and golds and purples from the galley mixed without discrimination. The adults mingled behind them.

It was the hour before dawn. The moon was gone behind the hill, and there was no light under the trees except the god light around the heads of the holy ones. Even as Pappa Andros thought this, all the holy ones among them reached up one by one and lifted off their halos. All together they cast them forward into the grove. In this light everything was clearly illuminated. The black rock was cracked across from one end to the other. A curved stone knife lay across the crack. Some shards of pottery were scattered on the ground nearby. In the shadows at the side of the rock were four heaped shapes, two men and two children. One of the men was sitting up, his back to the broken rock. His eyes met Pappa Andros' as they all waited and watched together in the silence. A little breeze blew, shaking the trees. Everyone waited, thinking their own thoughts of the past, of the future, and of the moment they were part of. All was still and quiet in that glow of the godlight in the darkness, as all around them something was being born.

Chapter 27

THE REBIRTH OF PAN

The loom below, the knife, the thread above
the change is made, and now the time has come
the breathing world is poised twixt breath and breath
and yours decision in the moment's choice.

(Elly)

The book says midnight. Emrys agrees. I never met such a willing sacrifice, it's scary. Sitting here in the dark waiting with the bright stars and the moon up above I can feel the weight of the knife in my bag. That strange old knife with symbols on the blade and symbols on the hilt. The blade is stone and the hilt is bone. I think it is human bone. The blade is curved, and both sides are sharp. That time in the smoke I saw myself with it in my hand. Things are bad when that knife is the safest thing to think about.

"Do you want to die, Emrys?"

He is sitting next to me on the rock, I can feel the warmth of him where he is cuddled up. On the other side of me is the jug of milk, the cups, the jar of honey and the bowls. He hesitates for a long time. "I am willing to die."

"That's not the same thing."

"Then I don't want to die." There's not much I can say to that. I put my arm round him, and he hugs me for a minute and then lets go. It's comforting, here in the dark. I have to kill him. He's quite right. It's the only way to make a new All Holy, and set a new pattern for the world. If I don't do it They will, or nobody will and either way we will have a terrible age, I can see that now. But nothing's right, somehow. Nothing's nice any more.

I wish Emrys could kill me instead. It would be so much easier. He's so much nicer than me, he deserves to live much more than I do. But that's why he has to die of course. It can't be just anyone. There's too much bad in me. And my grandfather is the devil. Oh Maman, are you really in

hell? After all your praying? I'll be there with you, I know I will. But doing sacrifices isn't wrong in itself. It's in the bible. Abraham and Isaac. But I hate it all the same. There ought to be something else if I only knew what.

(Emrys)

It is a surprise when Colin comes back. I hadn't seen him coming back. I thought he died in the battle, with Jenny. I've seen her die there so many times I felt sure that was going to happen. It was in all the threads. Mostly Colin dies there too. Sometimes he goes off into the sky with St. Ares, Lord of Battle and St. Jesus, Lord of Compassion, to be a god. I don't think I've ever seen him come into this clearing. But I never saw the bad man catch me on the bike either. Elly has her hand raised above me with the curved knife ready. I've seen this so many times. I know what comes next, the end, my end, my blood, and then when the sun rises the flowers. Consider the lilies, if they were pretty colours. But Colin comes. He seems bigger, I think he did find his power after all, even if he's decided not to be a god. He comes out of the trees, walking on the ground. He stands there in the moonlight. He looks at the knife, at me, and everything is hanging on this thread, this now.

It is cold. It has always been cold. I used to wake up screaming from dreams of the knife. I am calm now. I am ready. I am waiting. Everyone is waiting, the whole world. My mother is awake, standing by the window, looking east. I can feel her. The elm on the slope is burning again, a beacon of fire going up to mark a time. Beacons like that are going up all over, wherever there are the mothers of gods' children waiting, watching. This is the night, this is the time. Colin takes a breath.

"Wait, Elly," he says. "Now is not the time for more killing, that is not the way forward."

"I didn't want to do it." Elly says. Her voice catches, I think she wants to cry.

"I have walked among the gods and spoken to them, and I have made my choice to come back and be human, as best I know how." He puts his hand on her shoulder. "You have to chose for yourself. Everyone does. You have to face what you are, what you've done. But I love you."

"I'm so scared." she says.

"Now is a time to make an end of fear." He sits down on the rock next to me. His voice changes, sounds louder, and everything catches on it, everything is waiting still, for now the world is turning about this glade, this time, us. "I have been fearful so very much. I have been afraid of

making mistakes, afraid that nobody could love me, afraid to live and go forward after losing love, afraid to be a father, afraid to want what I wanted, afraid of my power, afraid to trust my judgement against other people's. I have done much harm in my fears. I feared failing others and in that fear I have failed them. I have feared my mother, because she gave me up I thought she did not love me and so nobody can love me."

As he makes this list of fears the knife wobbles in Elly's hand. It seems to glow a bit. It is taking his fear, drinking it, sucking it in. "Worst of all I have been afraid to act, and I have acted often too late, or not at all. I thought I had stepped over the line drawn around my fate and caused the gods to hate me and acted as if this were true because that was easier than facing my fear that I was myself not good enough. I feared that I was a fool, and so I was a fool. I feared that I could not be a whole man. I give up these fears, I cast it all into the dark. I shall be what I am, whoever I am, whatever I am, I shall strive from this time forwards to do the best I can, to be the best I can."

A little breeze blows against my face. I sit up next to him. He puts one big warm hand on my shoulder. He is smiling in the moonlight as if sacrificing his fears and regrets has lifted a great burden from him. Now it is me that the world waits for, it is my turn.

"I am afraid I won't do this right," I say, as clearly as I can. My voice sounds thin and childish after Colin's. "I have been afraid that the voices of my ancestors in my head would take me over and I wouldn't know which one was me. I have been afraid that they will go away forever and leave me alone and not knowing how to cope. I have been afraid of hurting my mother and not being what she wanted me to be. Most of all I have been afraid to die. And now I am afraid to live. I have been afraid of what I have seen in the future, and then I got to understand it and not be afraid. Now I am afraid of a future I have not seen. Nothing I ever saw in my life took me past this day, so I fear the unknown world that will come of this. I am afraid of having to find a way to live in it."

The knife takes my words, and I see that Elly is shaking. I try to remember exactly what Colin said, and echo it. I feel strong and free of my fears. "I give up all this fear, I throw it out into the dark. I shall be what I am, myself as I am, I shall strive from this time forwards to do the best I can to be the best I can." The breeze comes again, and I can hear a sound in it this time, the distant sound of reed pipes being blown.

Elly jumps up onto the rock beside me. Colin steadies her as she straightens up. She holds the knife high up in her hand, so that the polished stone blade catches the moonlight.

"I am so very afraid," she says, and her voice breaks again with a little sob in the middle. "I have been afraid of sin and death, of breaking the rules and being punished, of hell and damnation. I have been so afraid of crying, and letting people know how I feel. I have been afraid of caring about other people. I have been afraid to be myself. I have been very afraid of Them, of all the people around me. I was afraid of magic, and then I was afraid because I wasn't afraid of it any more. I was afraid that people were afraid of me, and then I was afraid that I liked that. I am afraid of the power in me. I am afraid I am a bad person, that I am just like Cloud. I am afraid of myself. I am afraid of doing the wrong thing and hurting people, and I am afraid that I try too hard to be nice and not hard enough to be good. I want to give up all this fear and cast it away into the dark, I want to go on fresh from now and strive to be myself as best I can, but I am afraid I do not know the way. I am afraid that what I have done is so bad that there is no forgiveness for it." Tears are running down her face, her voice shakes, and the knife is shining brightly. "I am afraid that everyone will always hate me. I am afraid to go on living."

She takes a ragged breath. "I am afraid to die. I am afraid of Mother Hekate's midnight knife here in my hand. I am afraid of Raymond, lying there in his own fear. I am afraid to leave him bound and afraid to let him go free. I take hold of all this fear and I cast it whole into the dark."

She takes another breath, a stronger one, and looks down at me, at Colin, at the cups and bowls and honeypot at the side of the rock, at the rock's rough black surface. Then she looks up again at the knife, the moon, the stars, the trees all round listening quietly. "I shall be all of myself, what I am, accepting what has made me what I am. I shall strive to do the best I can and be the best I can. And now I shall let fear free."

She sits down, on Colin's other side, so that he is between us. She sets the knife loosely on his lap so that the handle is on her own lap and the tip of the blade is on mine. For a minute I don't understand what she means, and then the bad man rises from the ground and laughs one mad laugh.

The moment hangs in the balance still, and starts to come back towards me and I can see the twisting threads of the future that lead forward from this place, and the breeze is blowing clear and strong and warm and bringing towards me the distant music of pipes.

"I am not afraid to kill a god." he says.

(Raymond)

I mean it. I will do it, if I can. She has let me loose and I come towards them, slowly. A wind is blowing from behind me. The three of them are sitting there on the rock, a shining curved knife like the sickle moon across their knees. I am going to kill them, kill all of them, kill them now.

"Then what do you fear?" the boy asks. He is smiling. "Now is the time to give up fear and make an end of it in this night, and start again."

"I'm not afraid of anything," I say, moving closer, ready to grab the knife. I'll kill her first, the kid, because she dared to freeze me and free me at her whim as if I'm nothing, as if I don't matter.

"That's not true," Colin says, and I take another step. He isn't moving but he doesn't need to move to stop me if he has his magic back. "Tell us what you fear."

"I'm not afraid, and I'm going to kill you." I'm going to leap for the knife, stab her, then slash it across his throat. I think I can do it in two moves. The little boy's no threat, I can kill him later. I have to get into the right place to do it. I never killed anyone with a curved knife before, maybe it won't stab. The point looks wickedly sharp though.

"You want to kill us," she says. She's not crying now, though her face is all blotchy in the little bit of moonlight and the brighter light from the knife. She said she was afraid of me, but she's not acting scared. "We'll let you, if you give up your fear first. We will be willing sacrifices, Raymond, if you will give up your fear and say out loud what you're scared of."

That's worth considering, if she means it. I look at her. Could she mean it? Blotchy face, hair all tangled, nothing else to see in the moonlight and the knife's light. I look at the others, Colin's not much more than a dark shape, leaning forward a little and shadowing his face. The boy's still smiling a big smile, he almost seems to be glowing himself.

"Do you all agree?" I ask. I bet he's the All Holy. If the girl and Colin will lie down and let me kill them it can be a real sacrifice, it can still wake him up. On this stone. Here. Tonight. Even if all the others didn't make it, I'm here, I can do it.

"Sacrifice your fears, Raymond, and I will let you free to choose, as I took away your choice at Siena." says Colin. Good. The little boy just nods and smiles away. Maybe it's the girl, she's got all that power. "Dedicate yourselves then." They won't do that if they don't mean it.

"In the name of all the bright and dark gods who care for the pattern of the world." Colin says. "And most especially in the name of Apollo, Holy Jesus, and Mother Hekate, whose gifts of self knowledge, compassion

and understanding I implore for you. If need be I will go willing into the dark for the sake of the World Remade. With love."

"For the New All Holy," says Elly. "In trust."

"For Great Pan reborn," the boy says. "In hope."

Their faces are shining in the knife's light. The wind ruffles their hair. I take the knife's handle and raise it, they do not stop me. My part of the bargain, if I break it it won't work. Fear. Fear. What do I fear, don't usually think about this sort of thing.

"I'm afraid this won't work. I'm afraid I've done it wrong, that I did it wrong in Siena and I went wrong again now. I'm afraid maybe the whole thing was wrong, that Claude made a mistake working it out and we were on the wrong track. I'm afraid the new world won't be what we thought it was going to be." Is that enough? I look at their faces. The knife's glowing brighter than ever in my hand. I don't think it is enough. Got to do this right or not at all.

"I'm afraid of being frozen again, afraid of being helpless before magic." Never again. Never, never, never again. "I'm afraid of magic, of people with magic, of you three most of all. I'm afraid of being afraid. I'm afraid I'll kill the wrong one of you. I'm afraid of making mistakes, of getting things wrong," It's all pouring out now, I can't stop, it's like being at confession. "I'm afraid that nobody will tell me what to do and there isn't any way of making it right. I'm afraid of being insignificant. I'm afraid people won't take any notice of me. I'm afraid the world doesn't make sense and nobody can explain it. I'm afraid—" How did I get to be on my knees and sobbing onto the knife? Is it more magic? "afraid people will laugh at me."

She reaches out a hand and touches my shoulder. "Oh Raymond," she says, as if she cares, as if she likes me. "Now give up your fear."

I stagger to my feet and raise the knife up. All three of them are looking at me. What was it they said? What do I have to do? "I cast out my fear into the dark, and I shall go forward striving to do and be the best I can." There is music in the wind and they're looking at me, and the knife is glowing so brightly that it casts shadows.

They are waiting, and I wait, and they look different. I blink. That's amazing. I see them differently. They look just the same, except that they look like people. They are people just like I am. It's hard to take in, I never realised before. People. They have their own hopes and fears. They are people held inside their own heads, alone unless they reach out. Like I am. I raise up the knife as high as I can and close my eyes. How can I kill someone who is as alive as I am, who wants to live, whose eyes are

looking at me and see me and do not judge? But they have dedicated themselves, they are all ready to die for the new world. I hear again the thin thread of distant music and close my eyes. I bring the knife crashing down as hard as I can. There is a tremendous crash, a sound like thunder or cracking ice or an earthquake.

I open my eyes. It is very dark, and I can't see what has happened. I rub my eyes. I feel someone's hand on my arm. I don't know whose it is. Then someone is hugging me, arms around me. There are tears on my face. Someone else is hugging me too. I put my arms out, clumsily, and hug back. Who did I—? No, there's someone else, and I sob, and then someone else is sobbing too, that's a man's sob, that must be Colin. We're all sobbing and hugging each other and there's a smell like summer afternoons in childhood in fields of clover.

"It's all right," says Elly.

"You broke the honey jar," says Emrys.

"He did more than that," says Colin, and there is joy as well as tears in his voice. "Though we will all have to wait together until morning to be sure. He broke the stone."

Chapter 28

ATROPOS

So few of you do ever seek to change
what's set to spin in time, you cannot know
how strange it sits with me to take a thread
that long hung slack, and draw it in again.

The three old women sat under the pomegranate tree in Pappa Andros' garden. They looked as if they had been sitting there for a long time. One spun thread, the second measured it and the third wove it into a tapestry that hung on the little loom beneath her. When Pappa Andros and the two children came into the garden they all three looked up and smiled toothless grins. They could have been any three of the ubiquitous old women in black that can be seen anywhere in the Mediterranean on any day.

Pappa Andros could still hear Dafni and Spiro in the little street outside, arguing over the merits of Parian over Melian marble.

"If we're raising a temple to honour Great Pan and the holy ones then we don't want to worry about the expense, we want the best!" Spiro was insisting.

"But what I'm saying is that Melian is better as well as cheaper," said Dafni. The brother and sister were laughing together as the gate swung shut. Pappa Thomas had gone to the telephone office. He was not afraid to tackle making international calls to tell strangers that their children were shod and safe and needing to be brought home from Ithyka. Colin, Raymond and Sarakina were searching the straits for floating bodies left from the battle, who would be given honourable burial on the island. The children were divided between the families who could look after them until their own families came for them. There would be a great feast after sunset in Stellio's taverna. Menelaos had brought three sheep down the mountain ready for roasting.

Pappa Andros nodded cautiously to the three ladies who looked somehow as if they had more right to be in his garden than he did. The children ran forward.

"The threads!" said Emrys.

"Is that what you mean by the pattern?" asked Elly. Pappa Andros looked at the tapestry. It was a confusing swirl of colours that made his head hurt. Clearly it meant something to the children.

"See! That's when the sun rose and Great Pan was reborn!" said Elly, excitedly, pointing. "There! Where everything came alive again. The flowers in the dawn."

"The flowers were of every colour I have names for, and many I do not." said the weaving woman. Her fingers did not stop moving on the loom.

Pappa Andros remembered the flowers that had suddenly sprung up everywhere on the ground around him. He had seen the flowers every Spring of his life, but they had always been white, now they were strange and wonderful colours. He could not have named all the colours himself. But colours the inexorable sister did not know the name of?

"Look, the goats standing up and being fauns. I liked that especially," said Emrys. "Oh, and Elly, you playing with those two lions, all of you rolling in the flowers."

"And dancing with the trees. The dryads." Elly hastily corrected herself. "There's Raymond dancing with the dryads, and trying to sing. We're all dancing on the flowers."

"There's Mikalis standing up on the cracked rock and singing the end of his poem."

Pappa Andros came forward, looking over the children's heads not at the tapestry but at the three women.

"Ladies," he said. "We all felt the joy and heard the music this morning. We heard the nymphs and the fauns rejoicing that Great Pan was reborn. We saw the flowers and felt a great rush of lust. We all rejoiced, and now we are going on and doing the next thing."

"That is always wise," said the first lady, spinning yarn that came out of nowhere to her spindle.

"But since you are here, I thought I would ask something that puzzled me. Is it just Ithyka? Or does this reach out farther?"

"Oh, didn't you know? It's everywhere," Elly said, turning to look at him, her hair falling into her face. "Look here." She pointed to a place in the swirling colours. "It began here, and spread out. Just before the sun rose, remember, at the end of that long long wait, your candles all lit?"

"Mine lit first, and then the fire flickered round the circle," said Pappa Andros, smiling to himself.

"Then the sun rose, and Great Pan was reborn." said Emrys. "And you and Pappa Thomas stepped forward and started to praise and name the gods."

"And then," went on Elly, "Before that, at dawn, as soon as Great Pan, the new All Holy, came into the world, the spirit flickered on, just like the candles flickered on. It jumped from here to lick its way around the world. That was when we all called out so loudly that Great Pan was not dead, that Great Pan could never die. The cry shook the trees and rocked the boats far out on the sea. It went on and out, touching everything. Everywhere now the gods are waking up, everything is coming alive for people who know how to talk to it. It's like great swirls of pattern as new gods are born and old gods wake up and—"

"What was possible passed into time," said the middle woman. "The knife-edge that you call now took the moment from possible time into fixed time. This happens each breathing moment. It happens now as my sister weaves and cuts the threads. Each choice and each action makes the pattern. But some choices and some actions send out wider threads and touch more than others. The whole world changed when Great Pan was born again."

"I think we made more choice for people," said Elly, looking up at him, seriously. "We killed fearfulness. That doesn't mean fear's dead. But it means that it doesn't always win now. It means people can choose to be brave. Some people always have. Now there will be more possibility of that. Everywhere. For everyone. Look, look there in the threads."

Pappa Andros looked at the threads. For a moment he thought he saw an old man sitting on an iceberg waking and stretching, his face unwrinkling and becoming young again even as he yawned. Then, as he looked down on the changing swirls of colour he caught the face of a broad-shouldered man in his prime, looking up from his computer and smiling. He had a thick fair beard and the eyes of a priest but he wore no priest's hat. He seemed to meet Pappa Andros' eyes for a moment, and then the face was gone in the jumbled confusion and Pappa Andros saw a different face, someone setting their chin resolutely and

taking a deep breath preparatory to speaking. The face turned to speak and in its place he saw a great white bird flying off into blue distance with sure and steady wingbeats. He looked up from the pattern straight into the wrinkled, smiling face of the weaver.

"Did you see?" asked Elly.

"I saw something. I don't think it is my part to see it the way you see it," said Pappa Andros, tentatively.

"Understanding is a rare gift, but the Oracles have tongues again now. People who try will be able to see things whole."

He looked from the weaver to the girl, slightly taken aback with her gravity and composure. "What will you do now?" Pappa Andros asked.

Elly reached out above the tapestry and took down a ripe red pomegranate from the looping lower branch of the tree. She took out a sharp curved knife from her shoulder bag and deftly sliced the fruit into six. She handed a wedge to the priest, to Emrys, and one each to the three ladies. She bit into the last herself. Juice ran down her chin. Then she wiped the knife carefully on her shirt-tail, and handed it to the weaving woman. Then she looked back at the priest.

"Well, now that's done, I think I'll go with Colin and Sarakina to take Emrys home to Ireland. We might stay there for a while. Then we might go to Delos, I think, the holy island, the centre of the world. Emrys' father's island. He isn't really my brother, you know, well, not in *blood*. We'll probably come here and see you if we're passing this way. But then, there are so many places to go, so many things to see. And we have, all of us, such an awful lot to learn."

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