

PROMETHIAN GREEKS AND YOUNG TURKS

By

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CHAPTER 1

The Young Aristocrat whose face was cleanly shaved, whose wavy light brown hair didn't match his olive skin and whose waistcoat looked like it was fresh from the tailor's shop sat as far away as he could from young crew on the boat, hoping that such would not be noticed by the old captain. A Greek fisherman clad in mismatched rags who called himself Captain, the entire domain of his command being his three young sons and, so he boasted to them so many times, the sea on which they made their living, especially when the small boat hit turbulent waters. "Mind the sail," the old coot barked to his eldest, a lad of no more than 14 years of age whose hands were already as wrinkled and blistered as a man of 40. "Mind the nets," he continued to his youngest, a scrawny 7 year old who was barely as tall as the fish they had caught earlier that day. "And mind the over-educated aristocrat bookworm at the stern," the Old Greek ranted on in a working class Crete dialect to his middle son, the one who seemed to have more brains than brawn. "See that if he loses his lunch in the ocean, that he doesn't also lose the rest of the money he said he would overpay us when we dump him in a place he's read and maybe written about but will never really be able to understand." The eldest and youngest sons smiled with a happy chuckle, lowering their heads so that their passenger would not see it, not completely anyway.

"You said something?" the 21 years-idealistic Aristocrat smiled at the old Greek, pretending to not have understood him. "I couldn't hear you," he continued in polite *kathevuse* Athenian academic Greek, not letting on that he could make out the meaning and subtext of what the old man had said to his sons.

"My father said that I should keep you in the boat in case the ocean gets rough," the middle son said to Aristocrat. "We want you to get to Crete in one piece," he went on in a diction which was as academic and Athenian as a fisherman's son from Crete born to the sea who will probably die in it could muster.

"And I want your fish to arrive safely, too," the Aristocrat replied as the waters got chopper and the sun ducked behind a grey cloud that was becoming very black. "Please, let me help you work the sails, secure the fish, and if the weather gets better on the way in, maybe help you catch some more fish," he offered.

"Your kind eat fish, ours catch them. It is just the way it is, Sir," the middle-son smiled, pitying the well-dressed and even-better-fed passenger as much as he perhaps hated him. "In the meantime, I'll help you keep these books and letters of yours from getting wet or becoming food for the fish."

The lad who was wise beyond his years, or perhaps merely practical given the way the world really was in the Aegean Sea in 1822, pulled out a faded sheep's hide from under the family 'kitchen' in the middle of the boat. He commenced to wrap it around the Aristocrat's books and other belongings just as the sky started to drizzle.

"Perhaps it was so he can steal what he says he's protecting," the over-educated Idealist said to himself as he noted the eyes of the boy become a man faster than he should be. "Then again, my kind has stolen from his kind in the guise of protecting them for so long, that there would be a justice in all of this," the young Aristocrat continued to ponder as he looked at the 14 year old, his younger brother, his older brother, and his very old but certainly not defeated father. "No, it's time for their kind to expel and destroy all of my kind. And time for me to become one of their kind, if I have any genuine kindness in me at all."

That desire to help, become like, and perhaps save the Old Fisherman's 'kind' was nearly lost to the deep six when the young Aristocrat saw the middle son 'accidentally' open up an envelope containing the most recent letters the sole passenger had written to his own father. With alacrity of thought and faster reflexes that he thankfully still had, the Young Aristocrat snuck a gold coin into the lad's weather-beaten palm. "For you, Elias," he said. "For, the loan of this leather blanket," he continued regarding the worn down fleece that was worth maybe one tenth of the coin, no matter what city Elias spent it in.

"And what else, Sir?" the peasant boy whispered to the Aristocratic young man. In a year when the sea they were sailing on was well on its way to being turned into a blood bath. "What else do you want me to do for this coin, Sir?" he inquired.

"To call me Dimitri," the Aristocrat requested. Before he could get a response, the Aristocrat's eye was once again held hostage by the remains of at least five human bodies in the fishing net. Arms, legs, and organs that could have belonged to Turks or Greeks. Both indistinguishable to anyone now.

"You are American, Dimitri?" Elias asked the young Aristocrat in his best English.

The Aristocrat packed up his belongings, securing anything on paper under wraps, sharing what was edible with his new 'pupil', and distributing the rest to his brothers and father.

The Old Fisherman's youngest and eldest devoured the bread, dried fruit and jerky. The Old Man instructed them not to. He offered his portion up to the clouds, saying a prayer to Jesus. He then looked at the sea, as if addressing King Neptune with a silent prayer he would never tell the priests about and subsequently held the food out to the waters. The choppy waves turned into a smooth surface. He crossed himself, instructing his sons to do the same. He then threw a small portion of his food into the ocean, eating the rest with slow gratitude. The kind wind speaking from a desired direction blew them forward.

Elias didn't seem to buy the magic of prayer. Perhaps he knew that his brothers were gullible and that his father had more predictive knowledge of the sea than they would ever know. Perhaps, Elias seemed to think, his father would one day teach all of his sons how the power of faith is merely the ability of the human mind to comprehend and coordinate the world around it. He then turned to Dimitri. "You come here to free our homeland from the Turks who have enslaved, tortured and starved us just like you freed your own homeland from the English?" Elias continued in his own tongue. "To end hunger, suffering, slavery!"

Dimitri contemplated how the only people in America who were free from slavery were White, land owning males. And that they lived in another prison far more terrible than the poverty stricken souls doing their bidding in the name of Free Market Capitalism. And that the best friend of the Greeks now that the War of Liberation from the Turks as afoot was now, paradoxically, the English. And maybe the migration of expatriate Americans who decided to get this European Revolution done Right. And maybe the Greeks could trust even fellow Greeks, assuming they could put aside their infighting to keep focused on killing Turks rather than each other. So much Dimitri could tell Elias about the world that was about to come tumbling down on him and his brothers, no matter how hard his father tried to keep them away from the fighting. And so little Dimitri could tell Elias about himself, starting with his real name, and real country of origin. But, Dimitri, as he now chose to call himself with the academic Greek he had learned in London and Paris, and the street Greek when he left the library, had to tell Elias something. Particularly when his brothers looked his way. Then his father, who risked everything he still had to smuggle Dimitri across the Aegean from a moonlight pick up spot near Cairo. And who could lose what was left of his family after the Turks took his homely wife into slavery as a palace cleaner. His two beautiful daughters into the harums until they lost their looks. And the sons from his first marriage, who were taken nearly twenty years ago as 4 and 6 year old sons by the Sultan's tax collectors to be raised as Turkish soldiers. Soldiers who were trained to kill Greeks, and who had perhaps taken part in the massacre of Heraklion in the 'great ravage', no more than 20 miles from where they were born, as Greeks.

"Well, my friend, 'Dimitri'" the old man asked, in English, his left hand on the rudder of the boat, his right discretely laying on the handles of a knife strapped to his waist and a pistol, both of which he seemed very proficient at using. He smiled at Dimitri, looking more like a soldier aboard a warship than a civilian refuge on a fishing boat which was now his only home. "My son Elias asked if you came here to free our homeland from the Turks like you Americans freed your homeland of your Colonial Masters. So, is this true?"

"If it weren't, wouldn't I have been bait for the sharks, or meat in your stew by now?" Dimitri replied in his best Bostonian English, grateful to have heard such from New Englanders in London whose fathers had chosen to support King George rather than General George in the American revolt.

The Old Man said nothing, perhaps because he didn't get the joke. Or because Dimitri was to be the brunt of the Old Fisherman's deadly sense of humor.

For a few moments that felt like years, the old man taught the young Scholar about what happened outside of books. The difference between literary tension and real, human fear. Then, just after Dimitri sent a silent prayer to the God that the ENLIGHTENED Turks and Greeks both worshipped, in private of course, the Old Man broke into laughter, then song. King Neptune added his own chorus with a wind that blew even stronger and truer, whisking the boat at an even faster speed towards the coast of Crete. A beautiful place prior to the revolt, as Dimitri remembered from his youth. A central one to the outcome of it now.

While the old man and his sons sang a song of liberation for their homeland and praise for their God, Dimitri looked at his letters. They were addressed to his father. To be mailed from a very discrete locations at specific dates. He recalled the words of the one he had written most recently.

"Father. Italy is astounding. Only by seeing Michalangelo's works of Art can one appreciate the mastery of them. And his insights about humanity. Even though they are housed in a place where there is a very defective knowledge of the True Creator. I am continuing of course to study science, mathematics and engineering here, and of course, biology and chemistry, so that I can continue to make our homeland strong, intelligent and in the Service of God as He really is. The money you are sending is going to those who think like us, and who share our Common Cause. I wish I could be there with you and my brothers, but someone has to educate the world in advance of what we have, and will continue to bring to it'

A standard letter of an Enlightenment-Obsessed Revolutionary son to an Established Order father, as was the custom and fashion in the England, France, the German States, Italy and America. But the language of the text was hardly European. Written right to left instead of left to right. And in the language that Mohamed spoke. Addressed to the Pasha of Cairo, whose sometimes employers and always friends were the Ottoman Turks. Sent to a home that 'Dimitri' loved as a privildged young boy, then learned to hate as an educated young man. 'The natural progression of things,' he recalled as he looked at his new homeland, Crete for the moment. Populated by Greeks, a race of 'Infidel scum and bottom feeders' that he now was dedicated to freeing from his own people. Once of course he could free himself from such.

CHAPTER 2

The village air reeked of fresh smoke, but not so much as anyone anticipated. The church lay in ashes, but the huts and open aired shops around it were still intact. As were the villagers who inhabited them. As for the Turks who had torched the largest building in the village, they lay dead in the middle of the town square, stripped down to the skin with

which they came out of the womb by the villagers. But there was still more booty to be had.

“No!” Father Basilis yelled out to a young woman who whipped out her kitchen knife and cut open the throat of a young Corporal, reaching inside to cut out his tongue, and wiping the blood off on her white klefti kilt which she definitely did not wear as a skirt.. “We are Christians!” Basilis continued. “Still in the service of God!”

“And they were Turks, still in the service of Pashas,” Voula Dragaris smiled back at him. “Servants of Islam who cut out our tongues, ears and eyes while we are still alive! Besides, Turkish flesh makes good meat for the dogs, and if you cook it well enough, is safe to feed our starving children too.”

“Is that why you klefti seem to have more muscle than skin on your bones?” the Priest blasted back at the head of the local ‘bandit’ pack who was barely old enough to conceive the children of her male comrades.

“We have muscle on our bones instead of misery because we use our bodies to fight the Turks,” Voula spat back as she rolled up the sleeves of her bloody coat. “Strong arms that have more scars on them than you have beads on your rosary,” she asserted, then proceeded to lift the hem of her kilt. “And wounds on my legs that would have broken a coward like you who---“

“---would prefer that you not show off those legs here in my village!” the Priest blasted back at Voula, pushing the hem of her skirt downward, after noticing the men in the village looking at those appendages with yearning, the women with envy. “This is MY village!” he asserted.

“Legally, I suppose so,” Voula smirked as she asked her fellow mountain bandits to throw her a cigar. She pulled out a match from her between her ample breasts and flicked it on the cross hanging under the Priest’s chest length grey beard. “The Turks lease land to the Church so that the Church can manage the people who you Priests say can use it,” she continued, after which she blew smoke out into the cold, windless morning air. “You do know that it was the Turks who decided to burn your Church before they got a chance to burn the rest of the village.”

“Because ‘someone’ told them that I knew where you and your klefti’s were hiding,” Father Basilis barked back.

Voula’s weather-beaten face broke into a proud smile.

“And I know you were hiding up there in the hills,” Basilis growled into her face. “Watching the Turks burn down my Church---“

“---But not your village!” she said. “Everyone here was witness to US coming in from the mountains armed with old guns, rusty swords and sling shots, massacring the Turks before they could do any more damage.”

“Some of my people were badly wounded before they were forced to lay down their arms,” Basilis said. “Some of them children!”

“Such is necessary motivation to get them to fight for their freedom instead of just praying for it,” Voula remarked. “A trick that Old Man Kolikotronis in Pelopenesis used more than once to get dedicated recruits, that the history books may record one day.”

“YOU are not Kolikotronis, Voula!” Basilis admonished the cynical-before-her-time woman who he baptized as a baby girl from the other side of a wagging index finger and clenched fist. “And you are not Queen of the Cretan kleftis,” he continued after opening up his fingers, and his heart. “Voula, the winners in a war lose as much as the losers. Perhaps even more. I know this because---”

“---I fought the Turks and the Bulgars when you were young,” she blabbed back with a condescending eye-roll, mockingly imitating the old man’s constant lectures he added to his sermons. “And I realized the futility of it all when God came into my heart and opened my mind to logic and reason.”

“What do you want, Voula?” Basilis asked the most armed individual in his thus far non-combative village.

“Justice, Father!” Voula asserted. “For all the things that the Turks did to me, and what used to be my family. Things that...” she continued, unable to go on about the details, about to break into tears as her arms shook with fear, her eyes fixed onto horrific recollections behind them. “Things that...that...”

“...I tried to stop. All of us here tried to stop them,” Basilis offered. He opened his bear-sized arms and edged his way to provide a haven within them for Voula.

But before he could do so, Voula pushed Basilis into the back of a Turkish canon, attached to a wagon which no doubt was ready to take away whatever goods and people the village valued most.

This time Voula, the long black haired beauty with the small European nose and thick expressive lips was the one who growled behind an accusing finger. “YOU don’t know what it is like to see your brother tied to a tree and have his bones broken one by one because he dared to smile at the Pasha’s daughter. YOU don’t know what it is like to have your father killed and mother raped in front of your eyes. YOU don’t know what it is like to be passed around a harem like a piece of meat, and then get whipped down to the bone because you allowed yourself to become pregnant!” she screamed. Then, she laughed. A mad laughter. “And YOU also don’t know what it is like to finally take the whip from your master, use it on him more sadistically than he ever used it on you or

your fellow slaves, and liberate those slaves from bondage. Those who still had enough life in them to leave, anyway. And YOU don't know what it is like to come back home---

“---And be treated like a whore instead of a hero,” Basilis said with shame. “Yes, I know.” He looked up at her beet red face with the kind of fear a man has before he is about to overcome that paralytic state of being with a brave, and perhaps final, leap off the cliff. “What do you want me to do, Voula?” he inquired.

“Bless this gun, and all of the other guns we've taken from the Turks or can make ourselves,” Voula smiled, patting the Turkish canons with the affection one would a trusted dog, or a loving husband.

“They are killing machines,” Basilis replied as he approached the cannon, his eyes drawn to it, his shaking fingers still with enough memory in them to avoid touching the demon it channelled. “Those that come under their spell become killers themselves, sending their own souls further into a living hell with every life they take. And speaking of taking, you klefis feel just as entitled to steal from Turks as you 'burrow indefinitely' from your fellow Greeks.”

“If you don't bless these guns, in front of the whole village, I'll kill you,” Voula said, discretely pointing her pistol at the old man's head.

“Another one of Old Man Kolikotronis' diplomatic strategies, no doubt,” Basilis smiled. “Which won't work here, Voula. Kill a Greek Priest and you kill any chance of getting ANY Greek in this village or any other village to follow you into rebellion against the Turks.”

“A rebellion which is here, and won't go away,” Basilis and Voula heard from a young, reasonable and fresh young man's voice. “The Ottoman Turks belong to an Old Order which logic, reason and applied mathematics says will be replaced by a New One,” an Aristocrat in the dirty but still intact tailored suit said from atop his steed. “The Church can be a part of the People's Movement for Freedom. Freedom which, I am sure, Father, would be best served if the people are still devoted to God rather than just each other.” He paused a moment to let his words settle into thoughts between the ears of his hosts. “My friends, and comrades, call me Dimitri.”

“And you know this political prophesy like you're the Oracle of Delphi, 'Dimitri', because?” Voula said to the young man.

“Because it is true,” Basilis conceded. He turned to Voula. “Gather your people and mine, and I will bless the guns.”

“And let us melt down the icons for musket balls, and grind prayer books into cartridges?” Voula pressed.

“Melted icons make good shot, but soldiers should have something to read between battles,” the Aristocrat offered.

“Agreed,” Basilis said, taking off his cross and handing it to Voula.

Voula looked at the cross, then the new man who made the arrangement possible. “Who are you, who conveniently comes in to this village, speaking to we peasants in kathetuse, after we did the dirty work of killing these Turks?”

“Someone who wants to become one of you,” the Aristocrat said. He got off his horse, then unloaded most of the contents of his overloaded saddle bag in front of Voula and Basilis’ feet. “Food, money, medical supplies, clothing,” he said by way of explanation, showing his hosts the view of such. “It’s harder for an elephant to get through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven, right?”

“Actually, it’s a camel, not an elephant,” Father Basilis smiled back.

“Which a kathelevuse-speaking Saint Nicholas should have known,” Voula smirked. “But for now, show me, what is in that saddle bag which you chose to keep for yourself,” she continued, pointing the business end of her pistol at the non-Greek bearing gifts for her Revolution.

“Surgical instruments,” he asserted. “MY surgical instruments, which I paid for. Along with this horse.”

“Which he should keep,” Father Basilis said.

“As long as he puts this to good use too,” Voula barked out, after which she threw her pistol at the stranger.

“For our wounded, and theirs,” Basilis added, pointing to five live Turks lying on the ground guarded by three of Voula’s fellow klefti in front of village bakery. Mumbling incoherently.

“We have to interrogate them,” Voula asserted. “You have ways to make them feel more pain so they’ll talk more and mumble less, Doctor Dimitri?”

“A tortured man will say anything to end the pain,” Dimitri said as he unloaded his instruments, placing the pistol into the saddle. “And it usually isn’t the truth. And if you give a dying man another chance at life, his life will be lived in your service.”

“And you read this gibberish in which of these books?” Voula pressed, as she thumbed through the second bag that THIS glory-seeking liberator from another land had in the recesses of his saddle bag. Then let her fingers ‘accidentally’ thumb through triple wrapped package of letters between them in sealed envelopes.

“Voula!” Basilis shouted out just as Voula’s fingers were about to open the first layer of string on the package of letter. “Gather the people for the blessing of the guns in front of the livry stable before they run away or lose their nerve. And bring the wounded into the town hall for Doctor Dimitri.”

“Thank you,” Dimitri said in kathevuse, then repeated in ‘commoner’ Greek. “And thank YOU!” Dimitri said to the sky as he saw Voula storm away, his apprehension for this strange woman who was made of more fire than warmth turned into fascination.

“The Lord moves in mysterious ways,” Basilis commented to Dimitri, putting his left arm around the lad’s shoulder. “But also remember, that Heaven watches, and earth works,” he continued, inserting Voula’s pistol under Dimitri’s belt.

“Anything else?” Dimitri asked.

Basilis stared into Dimitri’s face, perusing every inch of it.

“Something wrong?” Dimitri inquired.

“Above your upper lip, something wrong,” Basilis said. “Something very wrong.”

“That I’m willing to fix,” Dimitri replied as he wiped the sweat off the hairless skin between his smoke-filled nostrils and parched lips.

“No, that’s alright,” Basilis answered. “But if one day you can grow a mustache, it would show everyone that you’re a real man. And not a boy, or a, well... You aren’t one of ‘those’ are you? But, no the way you look at Voula, and the way you stood up to her, you’re not one of ‘them;’”

Having passed the first test, Dimitri accompanied the Priest to the center of the village. One that was being converted to a fortress.

CHAPTER 3

“So, give me a reason why I should leave your entrails in your belly, or the head on your neck, or not feed both of your arms to my dogs?” the Turkish Major said to the prisoner in front of him from the hand carved chair in his quarters that had once, according to rumor anyway, wrapped the ass of Spartan King Lineitus himself. Having realized that his own ass was bigger than that of the Spartan hero of old, the Major got up and paced in front of his terrified host, whose legs were locked at attention while his fingers shook like autumn leaves in a brisk wind. “You were second in command of a company that was supposed to take care of Greek peasants, but instead they took care of you, or rather every one of your comrades, all of which you say were killed, or taken prisoner. By mountain bandits who hide behind rocks shooting sling shots, and shoot their muskets from their hips like drunken sailors.”

“Kleftis, Sir,” the Lieutenant, stripped of his insignia and trousers replied.

“Led by a woman, so you said. Who stole your pants,” he laughed as the Lieutenant nearly soiled his drawers. “A crazy Rayah who was possessed by Satan himself, my hand to Allah on that,” he continued, raising his right arm.

“You were wounded, I see,” the Major said regarding that appendage, inspecting the wound. “And it was repaired, and far better than a country doctor in a shitty backwater Crete village would have done. Does that mean that the central command of Greek resistance in Athens sees fit to send Athenian doctors to Crete?”

“I don’t know, Sir,” the Lieutenant answered. “But the doctor wasn’t Greek.”

“So this miracle doctor who was able to keep this arm attached to your body instead of hacking it off was maybe another European aristocrat, like Lord Byron?” he laughed. “Who will write poems about his exploits helping the Greeks do what they are unable to do themselves and recite them for his student?”

“This one will probably write a novel, Sir. Maybe two,” the soldier-turned—prisoner replied.

“About how he let you just get back on your horse and ride back here like a whipped schoolgirl, PRIVATE?”

“To deliver the note I left on your desk from the doctor, and the map that fell out of the pocket of the crazy bitch when she spit at my face and kicked me in the ribs, Sir.”

“A note which is written in our language, without any grammatical mistakes,” the Turkish Major noted, reading it yet again. “Let the Greeks have their freedom, so they can become your friends in this and future generations instead of your exterminators with the help of their new European friends, your new European enemies. In the name of Allah!”

“And a map that says what the Greek rebels are going to do next,” the Lieutenant said.

“Or where they WANT us to think they are,” the Major pointed out. “Which I suppose you didn’t think about.”

“No, Sir, I didn’t,” the Lieutenant confessed, realising yet another one of his multiple failings.

“Just like you didn’t think about if the crazy woman and the idealistic doctor were working together, or alone?”

“No, I didn’t,” the Lieutenant mumbled, bowing his head even closer to his shaking neck.

“So I have the right and obligation to execute you not only for cowardice but stupidity, Private?” the Major calmly requested.

“Yes, Sir, you do,” the once proud junior officer said, finding a new kind of dignity in resigning himself to death.

There was something about this new brand of courage that made the Major think twice about killing the demoted junior officer. And consider how he could use these two mismatched young Greek rebels to get himself promoted. And as a side effect, put an end to the rebel resistance in Crete. One which was about to get even fiercer, for both sides.

CHAPTER 4

From atop the grey horse that Dimitri was determined to keep as his own, he looked behind him at the mass of humanity collected from ten villages, each of them clad in different attire, carrying their own brand of weaponry and walking at a pace which was like none other in their ‘ranks’. “So, who is in charge of this army?” he asked Voula.

“Everyone who’s in it,” she smiled proudly from atop a shiny black steed.

“And who gets to be cavalry?” he asked, noting that barely one in twenty Greeks were on horseback.

“Whoever has a horse of their own, can find one, or who shoots a Turkish officer off of one,” she smiled. “Isn’t that so, Captain?” she said as she pulled the head of the former owner of her horse out of a sac tied to her armament loaded saddle bag.

Dimitri had asked Voula two villages back why she had been holding onto the head of the slain Turkish Captain, to which she had said that the Turkish heads make good fences for open aired Greek campgrounds that kept away more Turks than a hundred armed guards. Which they did. And their entrails made good suture material and bandages for injured Greeks. Which they did. And that their flesh would make good eating for starving Greeks left to fend on their own after their villages and crops had been burned. Which maybe they did. But there was some other reason why Voula was so obsessed with driving the Turks out of her country. It had nothing to do with Greece having been the seat of Democracy, the provider of more scholars and scientists than any other civilization before the time of Christ, or the fact that Greece was a region which was never a single country yet considered itself such for hundreds of years. No, for Voula this War was about something personal. Something that maybe she would tell Dimitri about one day. Dimitri stared at her beautiful face, flowing waist-long black hair and vulnerable eyes, envisioning what that day would be like.

“I hope you’re looking my way because you’re wondering what we’ll do about those Turks over the hill to my left,” she said.

“Yes,” Dimitri replied, noticing that the wind blew the trees to his right in different directions, and that there was no wind anywhere else. Except in the trees to his left.

A heavily-mustached klefti singing a folk song with the joy of a young, ugly man who just had his way with an older, beautiful woman rode up with a drunken stooper to Voula, offering her a drink from his leather sac. “Turks to the right of us, Turks to the left,” he whispered, trying to hide his fear. “And ahead of us a cliff.”

“And behind the Turks on both our flanks, Panos?” she inquired.

“Mountains, on which we put as many men as we could, as you ordered,” Panos replied with a boy.

“And women?” she said. “Who went up there to collect nuts, figs and olives?”

“With arsenic in those olives for their Turkish masters,” Panos smiled. “And breasts made of volcanic explosive fire.”

“And ALL of those women have hairless faces, I hope,” she said.

“Father Basilis resisted at first, but he said that Jesus would forgive him,” Panos said.

“For dressing up like a woman, or taking off his beard?” Dimitri mused. “But if he gets pregnant with the Turkish commander’s baby before we kill everyone in his command, I won’t ‘take care of the accident’.”

Dimitri looked at Panos, who was shocked that he knew about the plan. Then at Voula, who knew that he shouldn’t have known about it. Which he didn’t. But Voula seemed ‘penetrated’ by the referral of Turkish babies born to Greek mothers as ‘accidents’. A joke in poor taste, which Dimitri recalled wasn’t dinner conversation at his father’s table in Egypt. A table he would most probably never be able to go home to, as long as he remained true to his new convictions here. Those convictions were about to be tested very fast, as the first round of ‘ladies’ from the hills worked their way down to the Turkish Army hidden behind the bushes below them. Soldiers armed with the best muskets Istanbul could manufacture, clad in beautiful uniforms which framed ugly, and cruel, eyes. As Dimitri saw them now anyway.

“So, what time does that pocketwatch you took as payment for liberating the last village say, Panos?” Voula asked.

“A minute,” the barely literate 25 going on 75 worrywart klefti said as he tried to make out the letters on the Turkish timepiece. “Or whenever the first woman up there in the hills blows thunder out of her breasts or cunt!” he smiled through a dislocated jaw and

mouth filled with dislocated teeth that had been kicked during his brief but unforgettable capture by the Turks.

While Dimitri waited for the signal regarding the plan that, apparently, only he was not told about. He contemplated what the books had said about the first time a peace-observing man encounters a combat-infused world. What kind of creature would Dimitri be transformed into once the balls were shot out of the musket barrels and the swords were whipped out of their sheaths? Would he be the kind of creature who would run for fear of his life? One that would embrace the killing like a rabid dog? A paralytic mess whose body and mind froze with terror, becoming an easy target for his enemies or, more dangerously, a liability to his comrades? Or someone who---

“---Scatter! Advance! Fire!” Dimitri heard from Voula after the first blast from the left flank just behind the trees. With that, the klefti amongst the voluntarily conscripted villagers ran towards the right and left flank, shooting Turks who were facing them as well as those trying to deal with the female clad bi-gender army behind them. The villagers gave them cover, then ran towards the Turkish lines themselves. Many didn't make it past their points of cover. But for every Greek hero, there were still five Turkish devils, armed with the best weaponry the Devil could provide.

Dimitri observed one of the Turkish cannons firing into the center of the villagers. Then he observed Turkish cavalry leading a charge against whoever could still poke their head up from the ground. Then he observed himself riding his horse at full gallop towards the Turkish cavalry, firing his pistol at their leader and with one shot putting him on the ground. Then, Dimitri observed his horse rear up, throwing him onto the ground. Then he observed himself taking the Turkish officers sabre and slashing the arm off the next Turk trying to lead the charge. Then pulling two other riders off their horses, getting on one of them, and charging the cannon, slashing the head off of the head of the battery before he could yell 'fire'. Then Dimitri observed himself being followed by the rest of the villagers, running towards the Turkish lines in a blind rage that made them forget about their lacerated legs, blood-soaked foreheads or blown off arms.

The rest faded into Dimitri's memory as he was living too much in the present to record any of it for future memory recall. The deafening blasts of battle merged into a kind of Silence that was like nothing he had ever read, been told or even imagined in his own attempt to write about such events. The guns finally turned silent, replaced by screams of agony. Mostly from the Turks, whose handsome uniforms were now indistinguishable from the blood that covered them.

“I have to help my own people first,” Dimitri found himself pondering as he looked over the unwashed and probably uneducated mass of peasants who were now applauding him as a hero. “The worst of the wounded first,” he observed himself thinking as he let his body fall off the horse he had stolen, thankful that the one he had ridden into battle was still standing on four sound feet. “I'm a doctor, not a killer,” he told himself, ingoring for the moment the fact that the Turkish 'patients' whose flesh he has lacerated would never breath again. But there was one patient, a Greek, who woke Dimitri out of his nightmare.

“Father Basilis,” he said as he rode to the recently-shaved priest clad in a black dress caked with Turkish blood. Dimitri dismounted and slowly approached the Priest who was about to sacrifice the flesh of a Turkish Officer to some kind of god, while said officer was still very much alive. “Don’t do it!” Dimitri pleaded as Father Basilis tied the last of the officer’s limbs to a small tree, then whipped out a butcher knife.

“I have to!” Basilis growled, with a voice possessed by a demon Dimitri had never heard from the mouth of the ever-thinking and always-reasonable Priest. “This is sacred ground!” he grunted as he made the first cut into the Turk’s arm and peeled off a healthy strip of skin, all the way down to the bone.

The young Turk screamed out for his God, then his mother. Neither of them were of any help. But Voula was. She rushed to Basilis and grabbed hold of the old man’s frail cutting arm, but the demon possessing him gave that limb enough strength to push Voula back, and into Dimitri’s arms. Panos and three members of Basilis’ congregation stepped in to stop him from cutting any further.

“Remember Daskalogiannis!” Basilis yelled out. “Who was skinned alive, very close to this spot.”

“Who must be avenged,” Voula said. “By Father Basilis,” she continued. “This is close enough to Heraklion to be Heraklion.”

Panos and the villagers agreed. They pulled away, letting Basilis continue to skin the Turk alive. The screams drove as much horror into Dimitri as the pain drove terror into the Turk’s heart. A young Turk who didn’t look too much different than Dimitri did, or members of his family back home. A Turk who made Dimitri hate the people he had now vowed to love, until Voula explained the reason for Basilis’ unexplained dive into the darkness.

“Daskalogeannis was the son of a rich shipbuilder here in Crete who studied in Russia, Dimitri,” she explained. “With the help of Russian Count, he bravely and smartly organized an uprising here in Crete 50 years ago. For the first time since anyone could remember, the flag of Freedom was raised on the Church in Anapolis. March, 1770. We Cretans were few, and the Turks were many. But the Russian Count decided to not send his ships to help us and then the Turks became TOO many. The Turks skinned Daskalogeannis alive, as an example to everyone, and made his brother watch.”

“As I also watched!” Basilis screamed out again and again as the ‘Turkish leather rug’ he was carving out of the still-conscious Turk grew to included the skin from both arms, the chest and in a few more cuts and tugs, the testicals and legs. “As I watched and did nothing!”

“What happened to Daskalogeinnis?” Dimitri asked Voula, as discretely as he could. “He went on to lead another revolution?”

“Maybe in the land of his own imagination,” Voula lamented.

“He went insane,” Dimitri concluded.

“Like I won’t, and you won’t either,” Voula promised.

“True enough, as long as I can use this,” Dimitri said as he pulled out a pistol, fondling its handle.

“Indeed yes,” Voula smiled proudly.

“Yes, indeed,” Dimitri replied, after which he aimed the pistol at the head of the Turk and shot him dead. Basilis turned around, ready to use the blood stained butcher knife on Dimitri. Growling in inaudible animal tones what he was going to do with it.

Never had Dimitri done anything that angered the people around him more. And never was he more prepared to handle it. Dimitri threw down his pistol and put his arms up in the air. “Do to me what you have to! All of you! Get it over with, if you have the balls!”

The crowd, which was now a mob, was eager to oblige. All except Voula. “Brains before balls,” she interjected. “And we need a doctor more than we need a foreign adventurer leather coat!” she said to the mob. “Right?” she asked them, individually and collectively, until all of them came to their senses. All except Basilis, who spit at Dimitri, then put the hide extracted from the Turk over his back, wrapping himself around it like a young wife with the first fur coat covered with jewels. He wandered off amidst the blood soaked field, laughing with a ghost to his left, and arguing with one to his right.

Dimitri looked at Voula, sensing that for the first time in her life she felt alone. REALLY alone. Maybe Father Basilis was the closest thing she really did have as a father, friend or lover, he considered. He wanted to ask her to give voice to what she was feeling behind her fearful eyes, but before he could release the words from his mouth---

“We have wounded to care for, Voula,” Panos said. “Doctor.”

Dimitri and Voula went about their business of saving everyone else, ignoring the very vital job of understanding, and therefore saving, each other. Or themselves.

CHAPTER 5

The visitor at the tavern table in Cairo looked once more around him, noting that no one recognized him. He felt relief at knowing he was unnoticed here. Then he felt anger at being considered no more than a common aristocratic merchant. But he was hungry after

his long trip, and his host had ordered a full table of food in front of him in the dimly lit dining establishment. Some of the aromas were familiar, but most of them were strange to his palate and cultural sensibilities.

“Ful Medamis,” Muhamed Ali, clad as one of the people he ruled, said regarding the lava bean garlic mixture covered with a layer of fresh lemon juice which he dipped in bread and offered to his guest. “Gibna Domiati, a local cheese made from buffalo milk, this batch aged at least three years,” he continued. “And if you want something closer to home, Konafah,” he said with pride regarding the sweet noodle-like pastry covered with figs.

“Just like my Turkish mother’s servants used to make,” the visitor smiled as the first bite brought him back to memories of being head of state in Turkey when the Ottoman’s were on their way to being the greatest power in the world instead of now fighting to hold on to the territories their ancestors had seized from the Infidels. But Sultan Mahmud II’s nose and eye soon became drawn to a dish he did not recognize.

“We call it Kukshari,” the youngest and most brilliant ruler of Egypt since the time of the Pharaohs smiled regarding the plate of pasta covered with tomato sauce embroiled in a bed of rice, lentils, caramelized onions and chick peas. “Originally brought here by the British Army after they helped us throw out the French when Napoleon decided to ‘protect us from ourselves’ us for a brief time.”

“The same British who maybe helped you get rid of the Mamluks, who ruled your country for 600 years?” the Sultan pressed.

Mumamed Ali threw back an assertive yet polite denial of the accusation that he had had foreign help in liberating his country from the foreigners who held it hostage for half a millennium. “You eat this food with this,” he said to his guest, aiming a sharp metal object with many pointed tips at his guest.

“A fork,” the Sultan commented. “We do know about such things in Turkey. We too know how to impress our Semetic enemies by imitating our European neighbors,” he said. “Which I heard you have done as well,” he said, looking around the tavern. “These fellow diners smell like farmers, not merchants”

“Getting five times the wages they did when they were farming on their own, selling all of their goods to the state, and getting well paid for them. You can taste the pride they put in their food, can’t you?”

The Sultan took a bite of the Kukshari, loading his fork with chick peas. “Yes,” he agreed.

“And the garments there are wearing,” Ali said as he showed off his people, none of whom knew his real identity in this place.

“Very European,” the Sultan commented regarding the very non-Byzantine attire of the diners, and those serving them, with envy. Attire which trousers that were straight and long rather than short and baggy.

“Made of Egyptian cotton, manufactured into shirts, trousers and scarves in factories right here,” Ali boasted.

“Like the guns and warships you make in your factories now,” the Turkish Sultan said. “Built with the help of British Engineers?”

“But owned by us,” Ali smiled as he inhaled a large bite of the Kukshari, then sipped beer from his mug. “It is time for Egypt to be great again.”

“In the service of Allah, of course,” the Sultan said as he sipped from his cup of thick Turkish coffee, the only customer in the tavern who had such a beverage. In a country that had once served not only Turkish food, but the whims and wishes of its Turkish ‘neighbors’. “And it is now time for all good Moslems to fight together,” he continued.

“To protect weaker Moslems who can’t hold onto their Greek colonies?” Ali replied, paying more attention to his stomach than the twisted gut of the Sultan who risked honor and position to come meet with him. “That we’ll have to give back to you after we’ve done your dirty work?” Ali continued, taking a large bite of konafah, allowing the juices to flow through his thick mustache and down his beard. “What do we get out of helping you Ottoman Turks put down the Greek rebels, who seem to have the support of the British, Russians and now the Americans?”

“Gold for you, booty for your men,” the Sultan offered, more concerned with using his mouth to talk rather than eat.

“I have enough gold,” Ali replied as he requested the waiter to refill the plates that he had emptied into his belly. “And the men in my MODERN Army get paid in regular wages. Not like your soldiers who pay themselves by looting villages they plunder, then wondering why their enemies come back ten times stronger in the next ‘battle’.”

“Influence, then,” the Sultan offered. “With my connections in Europe, I can have your sons and the sons of your friends be educated in the best universities in the world.”

“My sons are already studying in Europe,” Ali said. “And every day, they get smarter, stronger and, if they don’t get involved with the wrong women, wiser. Why I just got a letter from Ibrahim last week via a courier in Crete. Asking for more money of course for his studies on the Continent somewhere, which I will send him, because I know he’ll put it to good use. Like spending his time translating the Ancient Greek books into Arabic in London rather than in the middle of a war zone.”

“You say he may be in Crete?” the Sultan said, putting together intelligence from his officers in the field about a strange foreign doctor with miraculous skills of treating

wounds, as well as inflicting them. And combining such with knowledge he had of the youth he considered as a godson when growing up. “Which would explain why he used a courier from there?”

“You know where he is?” Ali asked, desperately. Reading something in the Sultan’s eyes that he needed to know about far more than any foreign policy information about the centuries old Ottoman Turkish and emerging Egyptian Empires. “Under which woman’s spell is he now?”

“Mother Earth,” the Sultan said, constructing the story as it came to his still able and manipulative mind. “Some rumors have it that he is buried under her.”

“No!” Ali said, letting his fork fall onto the table, his jaw dropping so low that the food in his mouth spilt onto his beard.

“And there are other rumors that he was captured by the Greek rebels, in Crete,” the Sultan said, helping himself to a large bite of Kukshari.

“Allah forbid!” Ali gasped.

“And there are also rumors that he has fallen under the spell of a woman who has converted him into a Greek rebel,” the Sultan continued, cutting off a large chunk of Gina Domiati and letting it melt in his mouth. “And that he is making GOAT’S milk cheese in the hills while telling stories to the rebels about how backward we Ottoman’s and Egyptians are. Who are publishing books about us that will be believed all over the world.”

While Ali fumed in agony, the Sultan ate with delight.. Finally, when all of the food was gone, and there was nothing more to be shared over the table, the Sultan made him an offer. “You give us troops, ships and guns to find Ibriham, and I give you Crete. And whatever has happened, or will happen with Ibrahim, none of it will be in any of the history books. Unless, of course, he died fighting the Greeks in the service of Allah, and you.”

Ali remained silent.

“I’ll take that as a ‘yes’,” the Sultan smiled. He got up and paid laid three coins on the table. “And you can tell whoever writes the history books about what is happening between us, that it was me who wanted YOUR help, and not the other way around.”

It was a generous offer, but one which was of course academic. Whichever side survived this Revolution would write the history books the way they wanted to. And the world in future generations would not be the wiser. Allah help it!

CHAPTER 6

Dimitri hid many things from the Greeks who he now considered brothers and sisters, but one of them was the set of clothing he had in the lining of his saddlebag. A suit spun from Egyptian cotton in a textile factory in Alexandria, tailored to show off the latest in European fashion and the flashiest in Ottoman-Turkish palace garb. Trousers which were straight and long rather than short and baggy. A vest that was as ornamental as any in Ciaro or Istanbul. And boots, made of leather, which featured European spurs. On his face, a large mustache firmly glued a lip he had shaved down to the skin just after his departure from Ciaro. He wore the ensemble it as he rode to the heavily guarded and therefore probably most connected Turkish fortress in Crete. A facility that was originally built by the Venetians in the 16th century to protect -the Greek-speaking peasants of Crete, and of course themselves. A well protected fortress with at least ten cannon facing in every direction, and guards on the turrets who were actually awake, silently looking over the horizon. But from inside the castle, screams of agony, in Greek, punctuated by soft-spoken ‘requests’ from Turkish officers for information that the prisoners didn’t have, or were still unwilling to give.

The first face to greet Dimitri at the fort in Gramvousa was a Greek with a blood stained wooden cross around his neck, whose wide open eyes spooked his horse alongside of the road several hundred yards from the main gate. “So, you are one of the lucky ones,” Dimitri asked the young woman. “And you do look familiar,” he said.

She said nothing, continuing to stare into his face, but he continued anyway.

“I wonder if, when all of this is over, we can get to know each other in more peaceful ways,” he proposed. “I am sure that my God and yours will approve of such, if we ask him respectfully.”

Still she remained silent.

“So, what happened to you in there?” he asked. “I’ve come to make whatever did happen to you right again,” he insisted, feeling her stare even deeper into his soul, starting with the most obvious appendage he was using to hide it. “I know, this mustache, is fake, but the man behind it is not. And his intentions are very, very---”

“---Who are you and what is your business?” a man barked behind Dimitri. All he could see of him was the shadow of his large torso and a large musket emerging from it. A musket that shook with each breath the man took. Upon turning around to the man, Dimitri discovered that the musket was larger than its shadow, as was the man.

“Who are you and what is your business?” the young Turkish Corporal barked from behind his mustache, which was no doubt real.

Dimitri handed him the passage papers which his father had given him before leaving home, just in case he needed to cross through Ottoman territory on his way to medical

school in Europe. It was outdated, but thankfully the Corporal seemed to be more drawn to the pictures than the print.

“I have a package waiting for me inside,” Dimitri said in aristocratic Turkish, as he arched his back to make him look like the Caste that hired peons like the overly mustached and probably inexperienced Corporal to do their dirty work. “My horse needs grain. And my stomach requires some quality food instead of the crap the Greek cafe owners tried to sell me after I took it from him.”

“Why are you talking to dead Greeks, and in their own language, if I may ask?” the Corporal asked Dimitri regarding the head of the decapitated woman staked on the road as he continued to look at his travel papers, pretending to be able to read them as he held them upside down.

“You had the inappropriate arrogance or courage to ask, so I will tell you,” Dimitri said regarding the head of the dead young woman which resembled Voula, though perhaps not with the terrified eyes. “Dead Infidel Greek ghosts can turn into demons on their way to hell, and if we give them our blessings, in their own language, they go to Purgatory faster and stop haunting us,” he replied while looking with complete detachment at the head of the young woman who had no doubt been forced to see the devil himself before she was decapitated. “It is in the Koran,” Dimitri continued, staring at the Corporal. “Which I’m sure you have read several times.”

“Yes, Sir,” the young Corporal said. “Yes indeed, Sir,” he continued with a bow, while he handed Dimitri back his papers. “The dispatch office is inside the gates at the fortress.”

Dimitri reflected on how interesting a tactic it was to post the heads of your enemies around your camp. Those who feared you would go no further and run away. Those who were horrified would stare at the eyes of the dead, just long enough to be creep up on from behind. The Greeks had learned to do that with wayward Turks in their camps, thanks to Voula’s suggestion of using Turkish heads as a portable ‘fence’. Maybe she had learned that trick from the Turks, or, he found himself fearing, she came up with that idea herself.

The Corporal yelled out in Turkish to the guards closer to the castle to let Dimitri pass. Whatever he said made them all bow to him like a foreign dignitary, or an arrogant prick. Either way, Dimitri played the part assigned to him by circumstance, feeling that it was not so different than who he had been back home in Egypt. But thoughts of home now were as distant as the breath of life to the bodyless Greek woman. Dimitri’s thoughts as he rode his horse at a proud, arrogant trot to the main gate were about his Greek comrades and what he said to them upon seeing them last. Another set of lies he would have to convert into the truth, somehow.

The story Dimitri had given to Voula, Panos and anyone else who thought they had a right to know regarding his solitary journey away from that now very mobile Rebel Army

was that he had a liason with an elderly Russian Countess who had lots of money, and who liked to give it to 'interesting' younger men who gave her the love that her husband in Moscow could not, or would not. "If I go alone, Countess Katerina will shut down the floodgates forever," Dimitri claimed. "And she can connect me to some highly influential British investors."

After some grumbling, growling and groaning, Dimitri had been given permission to visit the Countess by 'the assembly', a collection of 5 Greeks who decided that any important military decision would be determined by majority vote. How the 'collective' voted changed with the wind, of course. After all, these Greeks were descended from the same race of innovators who voted to put Socrates to death for corrupting the youth, then decided by majority vote not one month afterwards to commission a statue in his honor. Perhaps it was a mistake to invent a story about a Russian Countess, but it made sense, as four of the five members of the 'central committee' were men, and would certainly outnumber Voula's klefti spirit and female mind.

"You're nothing more than a glorified tax collector, you know," Voula had said to him as he left camp two long days ago. "But until we Greeks figure out a currency that works, other than bartering the loot we can steal and take back from the Turks, we need Turkish denars to do business with profit oriented Greeks and to bribe greedy Turks," she has smiled. And appended with three kisses. One on each cheek for the crowd watching her. And one on the lips she snuck in when no one was looking, afterwhich she marched back to her horse, yelled out some commands to her fellow klefti and rode off into the mountains to scout out the next village to liberate, or Turkish platoon to mutilate, whichever came first.

"Yes, I do have a close friend in Voula," Dimitri said to himself. A friend who give him more than any Russian Countess ever could. It was important to have Voula as a friend, and confidant. And of course to have God as a friend, and confidant, as well. And his horse, who he had asked to do thing far in excess of what the equine beast's biology was intended for, and from whom he would ask far more in the near future. But there was one life who Dimitri, as he now chose to call himself as well as be called by, needed to have as a friend and confidant far more than anyone else, above the clouds or atop the earth below them. His name was Carlo Meratti, an Italian who set up shop in Alexandria, the Cairo, as someone who could deliver a package to or from anyone on the Continent discretely and on time, for the right price. As for what Dimitri had paid him after leaving home as Ibriham, it was far more valuable than any envelope of money or bank note within the enclosed letters with 'creative' stamps and seals put on them. No one better than the son of the future ruler of Egypt knew more about the secrets of men who had risen to power, and the women who held those secrets hostage. In truth, Carlo stood to make more money delivering confidential love letters between forbidden admirers than as a courier for intelligence information about armies or bank notes between always-watched kings and never-identified capitalists. But today very pre-arranged mail pick up was about money, for the next year's tuition and explorative expense money in Italy, to be sent to Dimitri directly from his father, Muhamad Ali. To insure that communication between father and son remained confidential and reliable, Carlo devised a clever system.

“So, who did you say you are?” the Turkish clerk at the dispatch office who thought himself a High Cleric grumbled as he held the parcel in his grubby hands.

“Achmed Elimud,” Dimitri said, using the code name Carlo put on all of the correspondences from his father.

“And this was sent to you from...” the Clerk said he tried to read the name on upper left margin of the heavily-wrapped paper package.

“My Uncle, Yassar Romanu,” Dimitri replied, proudly. “Who works at the court of the Great Mumamad Ali’s court, as you can see by this Seal, which thankful for you is still unbroken.’

“And he is delivering this package to you here because?” the Clerk inquired.

“I can answer that after you give me a chance to open it,” Dimitri replied. “IN private, Private!” he blasted at the grumpy old man with an overgrown black mustache and even blacker heart.

The Clerk bowed apologetically, gave the package to Dimitri, then turned his back, pretending that he was not looking. Dimitri pretended to not care if the Clerk saw anything. But when he opened the package, the hand made family shirts that were usually stuffed with bank notes or paper currency of countries far more stable than Egypt was nothing but confetti. Inside of it, a letter. “Only a fool sends money from the land of the living to the land of the dead. If this reaches you in the land of the dead, remember that my firmest wish was that you inherit this country I am building for our people, and you. If this reaches you in the land of the living, I require that you come home, now so we can talk about your education, and legacy. If this reaches you when you are occupied with anyone or anything other than dedication to Allah, the greatness of our beloved Islamic country, and a father’s love for a once loyal and grateful son, know that you are dead to me. And that no one here will mourn you. Including your mother.”

Dimitri’s ability to pretend had never been more tested as he left the castle. He was in far better shape than the emaciated and tortured Greek Christians still held in the dungeon of that facility struggling to survive another day, but he was not without his own challenges. Though clad as a rich aristocrat and still, for the right guards, papered as such, Dimitri was now as poor as any Turkish conscript. And as penniless as the Greek rebels who were now dedicated to throwing off the Ottoman yolk that had been chocking the life out of them for the last four hundred years. Unless, of course, the Christian Greeks enthusiastically had converted to Islam, being rewarded for such by being given land and wealth stolen from Greeks who chose to remain Christian, or Greek. Unenthusiastic conversion of Greek Christian parents to Islam could save the lives of their children, but ultimately the souls of their offspring. But such was not an option after the first shot was fired in May of 1821. The only good Greek was a dead Greek to any Turk wearing the Sultan’s uniform. A mandate that fueled the Greeks, uniting them in a way that a

common language, history or religion had never done before. Fighting a revolution that by all rules of Greek story-telling the Hellenic rebels were destined to win. But a credo that never made it into any Greek rendition of Homer's tales in Athens or Arabic book about the exploits of the Prophet in Alexandria was that he who has the money and the guns makes the rules, and by the looks of the routinely armed fortress in Gramvousa, the Turks were in charge of the printing press and anything coming out of it.

CHAPTER 7

In a world filled with non-constants, it was something as reliable as dark night following foggy days, and death following disease, and pregnant mistresses following happy men drinking at any taverna. Whichever of the guns that Father Basilis blessed most killed the most Turks, and the new recruits he blessed most became the most effective killing machines. "Maybe the die-hard-pacifist Priest knows more about guns and military training than he lets on about," Voula speculated as she observed Basilis in front of her en route to the next campaign, on a horse better than here, conferring with all of the men who used to ask HER about the best way to fight the Turks. "What is his secret, Panos?"

"Maybe he is touched by the gods," the klefti who loved Voula more than she could ever really love herself replied from atop his mount, a once sound four legged mare who tried her best to hide the lameness in her left hind so she could keep up with the other horses, and not end up as stew for their riders. "Or he is blessed by God," the barely-literate Panos continued, trying to act as scholarly as he could. "Who exerts his Will through the gods," he smiled.

"Yeah, I used to be," Voula answered. "Tell me, honestly, Panos, why is it that I'm less effective at finding Turks and killing them than I used to be?"

"Maybe because you value life more than death?" he proposed. "Which is a good thing," he continued, imagining himself with Voula after the War. Living in a home that does not have to be a hideout in the mountains. Maybe a village house with children she would bear him that would carry on the best qualities of her slain family and what was left of his. And, with the help of the gods, and the intervention of the Almighty God, with himself. Not the clean shaven aristocratic miracle doctor and dream warrior to whom everything seemed to come to easily.

"Maybe I've become less valuable since I...with Dimitri, you know," Voula confessed, eyes held hostage by the ground in front of her bowed head, her courage held hostage by love for the foreigner from abroad whose history before coming here no one except Panos seemed to care about now.

"Every one of the Greeks in this Army YOU made possible values you more than you can imagine, Voula" Panos assured the lovestruck Queen of the Klefti. "Including the other four members of the central committee," he continued, referring to the four men around Basilis. They sought his advice about the whereabouts of the Turks and what to

do about them like pilgrims at the Oracles of Delphi, scratching down everything he said on their maps, charts and diagrams. "Each member of that committee is dedicated to our Cause," Panos noted regarding their most useful feature.

"And dedicated to the belief that every woman needs a man to protect her because she can't protect herself," she snarled back at the men who represented every external expression of manhood known to the Greeks, one way or another. From handsome white-haired Yanis Ilspryus, most educated, emotionally insecure and arrogant man in his village who naturally was allowed to become mayor of his village. To bald as a mutton Nikos Eliatis, whose overgrown mustache and bear-like body made him the fiercest animal in the woods, and the kindest if you pleased him in the belly or between the legs. "Who decided that we should have a committee to decide what we all do anyway?" Voula inquired angrily.

"You did," Panos replied, as gently as he could. "After Dimitri told you about how his Uncle's city in America is run. Each member elected by popular vote, like his Uncle in England who is a member of Parliament. Each committee member with rights and responsibilities that his Uncle in France had in the Revolution when----"

"---Enough already about Dimitri's Uncles," Voula blasted out. "And him," she muttered softly, after which she said nothing.

Panos allowed her to stew over her thoughts and feelings, hoping that the merging of those two faculties would bring her to a sound conclusion. Such as that a self-educated klefti like himself was a far better catch than an over-educated foreigner. After all, if the Greeks would have a future, they should invest their lives, honor and whatever 'fortunes' they had in their knapsacks to each other. It was how the Greeks survived the Turks, the Venetians, the Goths and the Romans. Giving up the Revolution to outside help would make the Greeks slaves yet again. But as a klefti, exiled by his own people to scrounge a living in the hills as an 'atheistic bandit' while 'respectable' Greeks got to live in comfortable houses near the church in the valley, he knew that unless Greeks learned how to not fight each other, the Turks would win. And even if the Greeks beat the Turks with the aide of their 'democracy-loving' allies, those allies would eventually assign a King to rule Greece, converting his country into a 'buffer state' which would provide trade opportunities for the Europeans, and Americans, as well as a place where the Lords and Ladies from those foreign land could take leisurely vacations from their 'oppressive' lives of abusing peasants in their own homeland. But even so, such was necessary to beat the Turks, and to allow the Turks to rule again would mean the worst kind of slavery for ALL Greeks.

Panos' projections about the future were rudely interrupted by the present. Father Basilis had another one of his Visions. He got off his horse, touched the ground, said some prayers that were Christian and others which were either Pagan or of the design of a New god who he was an instrument of, then proclaimed the new direction for the group. "We go that way," Father, now 'Soothsayer' Basilis said as he pointed his fingers toward the coast, with his eyes closed. "Fast!" he said with glee.

“The Coast,” Voula said as she sniffed the air with her still powerful sense of olfaction. “Which smells of something other than just ocean,” she noted.

The armada of civilians turned soldiers proceeded at full march, run and gallop towards the cliffs to the left.

When they arrived, Voula requested that everyone approach the bush covered cliffs overlooking the beach slowly, crawling to a position of viewing. The four members of the committee did a ‘women, always scared of their own shadow’ eyeroll amongst themselves, which was stopped by Panos drawing his pistol on them. Basilis, honoring Voula’s request, crawled out to the cliff and took a look for himself. Then he invited everyone to follow, which they did, staying low, at his request. “Gifts from the gods and Blessings from the Christ should be opened slowly,” he said by way of explanation.

True to Basilis’ predictions, there was an armada of ships putting into shore. More ships than Panos or Voula had ever seen in one place, and many men on board. A least a hundred crusaders to every Greek, all with muskets that were alike. All in fresh brightly colored uniforms and confident smiles.

“Red, white and blue,” Basilis noted. “The colors of our allies, the English!” he proclaimed.

“And our friends, Americans,” Voula smiled, warmly. “And maybe Dimitri amongst them, who I will call James now, to make him feel more at home.”

“Who I suppose we should give a proper welcome,” Panos conceded as he stood up, reaching for the Greek banner to identify his presence.

“Not until we take away their muskets, purses and pride!” Dimitri yelled out from behind Panos, pulling down the flag just before it could be seen by the armada that now swelled to 30 warships and twice as many transport ships emerging beyond the foggy horizon. Dimitri grabbed hold of Yanis’ spy glass, while the other two members of the committee held back Nikos’ sword from cutting off Dimitri’s fat, arrogant, foreign head.

“Those are Egyptians,” Dimitri said.

“Who are not fighting with the Turks,” Yannis pointed out.

“But being greeted by them with open arms,” Dimitri replied, handing over the spyglass to Voula.

“The bastards, I told you the Egyptians can’t be trusted!” Voula replied as she saw a detachment of Turkish Cavalry ride out to the isolated stretch of beach being converted into a military base. She offered each of the other members of the committee a view of

the beach, grabbing hold of each of spyglass for herself between unspoken apologies from the elected 'men of wisdom'. She then offered a view of the beach through the spyglass to Basilis at point, who remained on the ground, broken in spirit. Doubting his Visions with one breath, then himself with the next.

Panos' was concerned enough about the many soldiers who had landed on his home soil with the intent of taking it away from him or burying him under it. But he was more worried about one man who Dimitri saw leaving the main warship, being greeted by the most senior Turkish Cavalry officer.

"Hasan Pasha," Dimitri said regarding the armada's leader, with a tone that scared Panos. A tone that seemed to be not the way a man would address an enemy in battle. But a friend, or a brother.

Panos sensed that to get any answers from Dimitri, he would have to use very indirect questions. "How did you find us?" he asked.

"The hand of Fate," Dimitri replied with a secret behind his smile. "And by following the trail of Turkish body parts, horse shit, and dysentery from people after they ate the food that Father Basilis insisted on cooking himself," he mused. "Voula!" he yelled out. "I'd suggest that we find and merge forces with Emmanuel Tombazis."

"Who the Revolutionary Committee in Athens says is our boss here in Crete?" Yannis sneared.

"Who is a Greek like the rest of us," Panos argued back. "If we don't band together now, we'll all perish separately. Athens and Sparta beat the Persians when they banded together, and after they fought each other afterwards, the Romans came in and conquered us all," he continued. "Right Voula?"

"Very much right," she conceded. As did everyone else in the mobile camp of rugged individualist who now had to become a unified Army, defending forts rather than mountain villages. Attacking fleets en masse rather than picking off individual Turkish boats like pirates.

Panos had the good fortune of seeing a book written by a British scholar about the Greeks of old four liberated villages ago. He recalled that it was Alexander of Macedonia who conquered Athens and Sparta after those two rivals had it at each other, not the Romans. But such was an acceptable inaccuracy. In a War in which one had to watch one's friends as closely as one's enemies.

CHAPTER 8

"So, your messengers told me you bring soldiers and you bring me all these women," Emmanuel Tombazis said to the foreigner who identified himself as ' Doctor Dimitri',

and his female klefti companion who referred to herself as ‘Captain Voula’. They both helped themselves to plates in his makeshift ‘dining tent’ filled with figs stolen from the Turks, cheese donated by liberated villagers and meat paddies made from horses too wounded to carry on the fight. Though they had hungry bellies, and thin waists, they both ate slowly, so as to not appear desperate.

Tombazis looked over the rabble of civilians the handsome doctor and beautiful-under-her-battle scars klefti had brought into his, by Cretan standards anyway, very military camp. They all gorged themselves on bread, fruit, and whatever meat was available. “So many women,” he noted of at least a quarter of them.

“Who are not here to entertain our men, or yours,” the foreign doctor who was beginning to grow in a mustache asserted, with an aristocratic bow.

“And who can fight as well as any man in YOUR Army!” Voula yelled back at the newly appointed head of Revolutionary forces like a madam whose female employees were being underpaid as well as insulted by arrogant clients. She pointed to the thirty four women who had joined ranks with the men who had joined her horde of a hundred and forty. “They can sneak in behind the back of Turks, and are even willing to let those vermin get on top of them,” she noted.

“And sneak a knife into their back before they can even find their penis. Then excise their testicals and insert them into their mouths,” the good doctor boasted.

“Or into their assholes!” Voula sneared.

“Yes, I know,” Tombasiz said as he ran his fingers through his grey mustache, so as to not let these two young upstarts know what he was really thinking. “Our men have seen what your women do,” he said, recalling the stories from escaping Turks regarding how their comrades were routed or killed.

“And they also take part in frontal assaults!” Voula boasted with a snide smile.

“Militarily speaking, she means,” Dimitri explained, denying the new General a chance to enjoy a much needed joke.

“Every man and woman in our Army would be honored if you joined us in this War against the Turks,” the klefti Captain smiled at the officially-appointed Greek General. “And now the Egyptians,” she sneared. “Who I trust even less than the Turks, and even less than Greek aristocrats more concerned with their social status and finances than in this fight for EVERYone’s freedom.”

“Except for the freedom of one Greek to own, or enslave, another, of course,” Dimitri added with a courtly bow.

“Yes, of course,” Tombazis noted, wondering if this foreigner who spoke perfect aristocrat kathevuse Greek really understood how Greek aristocrats really operated. How they were better at enslaving, or subjugating, fellow Greeks than the Turks. And how they would betray each other after the Turks left. The handwriting was already on the wall in the walls of the upscale taverns about how Old Man Kolokotronis, the head klefti of Peleponesis and now General of most of the Greek ‘army’, would be put out to pasture after he cleared out the Turks. And how the aristocrats would be the new ‘protectors’ of democracy. But maybe such would not happen. Maybe with Revolutionaries as idealistic as this doctor and as dedicated as this female klefti would force the old farts into not bullshitting the Greek people, or themselves. But, Tombasiz did have more experience in the world as it is than the handsome doctor and beautiful klefti.

“There are a few things that we have to agree on before I decide to join your army,” Tombasiz said to his two new fellow Revolutionaries.

The doctor smiled at Tombazis’s framing of the proposal. Voula seemed to think that it was a literal statement. “Go on,” she said. “Please.”

It was odd for the aristocratic-born and European-educated Tombazis to hear a klefti say ‘please’ to his kind, but it was a start.

“First, we don’t kill prisoners,” Tombazis said. “They are more valuable to us alive than dead.”

“As slaves, after we have castrated them and broken their left knee,” Voula said, as a matter of course.

“They can provide us information,” Tombasiz said. “Which is more reliable if we trick it out of them than force it,” he continued.

“Agreed,” Doctor Dimitri said.

“I suppose so,” Queen Klefti Voula conceded.

“And I heard that Mohamud Ali, the Egyptian ruler who has now been promised Crete if he can take it from us, is willing to the exchange of prisoners,” Tombazis said. “Ours for theirs.”

“The Turks never did that!” the klefti bitch, whore and emerging matriarch growled.

“But Ali will,” the doctor said. “He values his place in history more than his position in Court,” he continued. “He’s modernizing Egypt’s agriculture and economy according to the European model, and along with that, goes a European morality, which of course he will adjust to his believe in Islam. He believes in mercy, as long as of course he is the one on top and everyone else is on the bottom.”

“You seem to know a lot about the new ruler of Egypt,” Tombazis thought, but did not say. As a man of intelligence, he trained himself to think before talking, or acting. Such was a flaw according to some of his comrades, and superiors, but as the Greek Way was a matter of balance, hot headed and smart assed revolutionaries needed to be restrained by caution. They also had to think about living more than dying, and what would happen after the Revolution. Such led Tombazis to his next set of requests for his army of 1000 to be incorporated into this very accomplished duo’s pack of 150.

“Your people learn to fire muskets by aiming them with their shoulders and firing on command, not blasting their guns from the hip whenever they feel like it,” Tombazis said. “Such a strategy is required when we face the Turks in the open field, and the British have used these tactics very effectively against Napoleon.”

“Yes, they have,” Dimitri said.

“I suppose they have,” Voula conceded. “But my kleftis, and everyone else, get to wear whatever they want into battle, and in camp.”

“Agreed,” Tombazis said.

“And if they get scared of dying, or get tired of fighting, or need to go home to what’s left of their families, they can do so with honor, without one of your officers shooting them in the back for desertion,” Dimitri asserted.

“Agreed,” Tombazis said, after a thoughtful delay. He reached into the always guarded reservoir of coins, some Turkish, some English, some Egyptian, all of them hard but not necessarily legally earned, and did a quick count. “As a start towards paying our Army in coin rather than loot, one coin for each man in your Army,”

“And the women?” Voula shot back.

“Two coins,” Tombazis replied. “And a third if they decide to have the good sense to stay away from the fighting,”

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“Right, to pump out babies!” Voula barked out sarcastically.

“Yes!” Tombazis insisted. “Because it’s our CHILDREN who will benefit most from what we do here. And without healthy Greek women to bear Greek children, there will be no more Greece, even if we kick out every Turk and Egyption from this country.”

“I have as much of a right to fight as the men do!” Voula said. “You want me to tell you what the Turks did to me?”

“No,” Tombazis said. “I see it in your eyes, feel it in your tortured soul. Which will be avenged,” he asserted.

“By allowing me and my women to fight alongside you men!” Voula growled.

“By allowing you to have fertile wombs,” the old General said to Voula as if she was his own daughter back in Hydra. A daughter who he yearned to see again more than he could ever admit to his men, or Voula’s women. Women who no doubt had been raped by Turks, one way or another. “And to have children with a man of your choice,” he continued, as a father. He put Voula’s angry fist into Dimitri’s open palm. “Your children need both of you to survive this War.”

“Victoriously,” Voula proposed, looking into Dimitri’s eyes.

“Effectively,” he replied.

Dimitri and Voula were now ruled by the heart between them, as well as the ‘third brain’ that was thinking for both of them. And with them.

“And with that, I declare you both...hmmm,” Tombazis said, having forgotten the War for a moment, thinking himself to be back at home in Hydra, matching lovers instead of organizing combatants. “I declare you both.---”

“---Needed out here,” a young klefti with the concerned eyes of an angry father said, looking at Dimitri. “The wounded here need your help,” he said.

“On my way Panos,” Dimitri replied, grabbing hold of his physician’s bag.

Meanwhile Voula angrily stared down Panos, who gave her no apology by mouth or gesture.

Tombazis knew that though you can command people to fight logically, and to die effectively, you can never order an injured heart to be healed by a sound mind. And as for the minds of these new recruits, he hoped that he had read them right. But he knew that they still had secrets. Secrets which could be useful, or deadly. Perhaps like his own as well.

CHAPTER 10

Muhamud Ali sat back in his chair at the head of the table, further back and more elevated than his palace dinner guests. He stroked his beard, which now reached down to his chest, considering what he should be called in the country which was now his to either elevate into the 19th century where advances in machinery decided who was really on top, or to plunder back into the ‘magnificence’ of the 7th Century when the only machinery available to a man was the muscles of his arms or the whipped backs of his broken slaves. His guests were all eating heartily, with big grins on their faces.

Turned to the first of his guests, a representative of a British textile manufacturer from London whose company boasted the most modern advancement in weaving cotton into cloth, whose son was a down and out archeologist looking for a way back into the academic circles at Oxford. “So, how is the Gibna Domiati?” Ali asked his esteemed English guest.

“Excellent, your Excellency” he replied with mouthful of cheese dipped in bread. “Never had better cheese east or West of Gibraltar.

“Good then,” Ali smiled, sadly. He turned to his next guest, a small-framed, scrawny bookworm no older twenty-five, the nephew of the Sultan of Damascus who aspired to be a General in any Islamic Army that would have him, as long as he didn’t have to do any of the fighting of course. “And how is the Kukshara?” he inquired of the lad. “Tell me, honestly, please.”

“As if it was made by the Prophet’s best cooks in Heaven and sent down to us by special chariot, your Highness,” he replied as he threw down another bolus of pasta covered in special sauce that had English and Italian origins. “A chariot which stopped off in Manchester and Venice so the horses could be fed and watered,” he added, bowing the English dignitary.

While the rest of the group shared a laugh, Ali sighed, keeping his thoughts to himself. He turned to a third guest, the Caliph of Albania, who made a healthy commission on every mercenary who ‘volunteered’ to fight for the Turks, a slick-talking merchant who could sell fertile Pagan women to a celebrate Christian monk who had taken off his own testicals. “So, Caliph. How is your hiloksha? A very traditional Egyptian dish with Albanian spices that we prepared especially for you. Tell me honestly what you think of it, please.”

“Better than any I have had a home, Affendi,” the short-bearded Caliph bowed to the long-bearded Ali.

“Good then,” Ali said from his seat atop his guests, thinking something completely different. Knowing fully well that the Gibna cheese was generously pissed on by the cook before serving it, on Ali’s orders. That the chick peas in the kushkara were dried up peices of manure. And that the ‘tradition’ of hiloksha was barely an hour old, the ingredients of such unknown to anyone except the cat who watched the drunken, half-blind assistant potscrubber gather whatever he could from the waste buckets to throw into a pan to be fried in whatever oil he could find.

“Yes, they are all lying to me,” Ali said to himself as he indulged in carefully worded chit-chat between himself and his guests, no one saying what they really mean. And meaning what they are not saying. “My horses are the only creatures I can really like, respect and trust,” he went on to himself in the silent conversation between his ears. “And they want something out of the deal I made with them so I can get on their backs and make them do what I want as well,” he lamented. “But, such is the world,” he

concluded regarding it all. “All of it is horse trading, and while trying to be smart or maybe compassionate about it, honor can find its way into the transactions, somehow, by the grace of Allah.” Before Ali dared to consider the horse trading between man and Creator with regard to The Almighty, he was catapulted from the frying pan into the fire when he was delivered a sketch from the Court Artist, who showed him the most recent rendition of his work as his guest were chit-chatting about what they were not meaning to each other 2 feet below him.

“This is what we think he looks like now,” the Artist said. “I sketched out a number of options.”

“But not this one!” Ali said regarding his son being portrayed as a long haired Greek whore with ruby red lips and long eye lashes in a low-cut blouse.

“These Greeks, they pull off many deceptions so they can stab us in the back,” the Artist said. “So say the military reports,” he concluded.

“So, he has been spotted with the Greek rebels?” Ali said, not believing the words himself.

“Amongst them, as a doctor, some of the time anyway,” the Artist said, hoping he would not absorb the bullet Ali intended to end the life of his once most beloved son.

“According to military intelligence, your Excellency,” he bowed. “From your brother in law, who you sent to retrieve him.”

“There must be a woman involved in all of this,” Ali said, staring into space. “Only a woman can turn a man against his God, his people and his own soul.

“So maybe we should put a price on this woman’s head and not your son’s?” the Artist suggested. “If we can capture her alive, of course. These Greeks can be threatened into being co-operative and I am sure that there is some family she values more than herself.”

Ali contemplated the matter. “I need more time to consider what to do,” he said.

“The boat is leaving for Crete in an hour,” the Artist said. “The winds are with us now, and they will be very much not with us for by nightfall, and for the next two days, according to Captain Ikilo. Who knows the sea like you know the Will of Allah, Your Excellency.”

Ali was smart enough to not let on that he knew as little about the Will of Allah as the potwasher knew the ingredients of the new ancient Egyptian dish he created in the last hour. But experience said that Captain Ikilo knew the sea better than any man alive, and that Navy Officers who listened to him always came home with their ships, goods and bodies intact.

“So,” the Artist inquired as the time clock ticked down. “These wanted posters are to be distributed to our soldiers in Crete?”

“And distributed to the Greeks, who would sell out their comrades to save their children, or themselves, no matter what the history books they are writing about themselves say,” Ali insisted.

“The price is right?” the Artist said regarding the amount of gold promised to whoever brought in Ali’s son, Ibrimah for a ‘thank you’ fee of 20,000 lira, enough for any senior officer to retire in comfort with honor, and sufficient for any enlisted man to own his own private army or town.

“The price is payable,” Ali replied. “And appropriate.”

“And the condition of capture?”

Ali prayed for an answer. How to get his son back. His body and, perhaps, his loyalty once again. Once the demon had been purged from his infested soul of course, by whatever means necessary. Then there was the matter of Ali’s country, Egypt, which he did see as the most powerful Instrument to instill Allah’s Will in the world. A Will which was just, merciful and unstoppable, theoretically anyway. Finally he gave his answer. “The amount listed if dead. Double if alive. Triple if converted. For my son,” he said, feeling tears going down his cheek which, for the moment, were hidden by his long ‘unbreakable father’ beard. “Four times that amount for the demoness who has taken his soul,” he continued as grief gave way to anger. That same rage which put him on the throne where he stood today, and he was determined to never be deposed from.

CHAPTER 11

As Tombazis’ army grew, the number of Turks and Egyptian mercenaries on Crete escalated. So did the consequences of their encounters. Many died from battle. More died of disease. And when times were ‘merciful’, a plethora died of wounds, or wished they had.

It was said that no peacetime training as a physician and scientist could prepare you for war, but in Dimitri’s case such did. At least with regard to things medical. As for psychological aspects pertaining to the aftermath of men and women tearing themselves to peices, he seemed immune to it. Perhaps because unlike the nurses and orderlies he could end human suffering. Sometimes with medical procedures. And sometimes with a drink of hemlock or related toxins which were reserved for those in special pain, or who had done something special in the line of duty.

Each patient was unique and specia case or, as Dimitri said only to Voula, ‘experiment’. Panos knew that Dimitri considered himself an Instrument of God rather than a god, and

that he spent just as much energy praying for luck than actually using that luck which God, or the gods, had allocated to him in the service of his patients. Another 'experiment' lay in front of Dimitri in the ever-mobile field hospital, this time a facility that actually had part of roof covering it. Pano was at his side to 'assist' yet again.

"This one, I think we can save," Dimitri said of the 15 year old Cretan boy who became a man two hours earlier when he charged into three musket-armed Turks with his father's one-shot-on-a-good-day pistol and his mother's kitchen knife. "How are you feeling?" Dimitri asked the lad.

"Like I want and need to get out of here and kill more Turks!" the boy said. "And cut apart the Egyptian mercenaries who showed my father and mother NO mercy when they raided our village."

"You need medicine first," Dimitri informed the self-made young hero who was barely old enough to grow peach fuzz on his upper lip. "And some surgery," he continued, looking at the boy's mangled left leg.

"A gulp of oozo, a stump to run on, and the kiss of a woman sending me off to battle is all I need!" the fifteen year old man said, the elixir of battle still in his veins.

But by the look of the wound, the pallor of the boy's cheeks, and the stench of the purulent leg, that elixir would wear off. Once again, Dimitri was caught between doing his best to re-attach the mangled leg or send the boy over to a lesser-trained doctor on hand, referred to amongst patients as 'the carpenter', to have it sawed off. Maybe the medicines from the toothless, arthritic old women in the Greek hills which were donated to him would stop the infection and cool down the fever, but maybe not. Prayer was usually more effective than any of their medicines, and it worked 38 percent of the time, the same incidence of cure that one got by giving patients sugar pills and reading from the Koran back home. The medical supplies that Dimitri KNEW would work that he had bought before his father sent him the 'come home now or forever be dead to me' letter were now nearly exhausted, enabling him to save maybe 4 more legs. And there were at least forty more patients behind this boy with injured hindlimbs.

Dimitri did the medical math in his head, taking in as many factors as he could, waiting for the numbers to give him an answer. Or even a working hypothesis that followed the rules of logic and was inspired by the wisdom of intuition.

"So, what are we going to do, Doctor?" Panos asked Dimitri, shaking him back from the theoretical plane to 'just do something and live with it later' which was the present reality.

"Save the leg, and body attached to it," Dimitri promised, after which he turned to the boy. "But if things don't work out..."

"God will know you did your best," he smiled back.

“As he will with the next patients,” Panos bowed as he moved Dimitri to the ‘recovery room’, an appendum to the still-standing barn ventilated with cannon ball holes with a straw covered dirt floor still stinking of the manure that had lined it three hours ago.

“So, are you going to tell me why you are guarding me like a mother hen, Panos,” Dimitri whispered from behind an all is well doctorly smile as he examined the next set of patients, or soon to be corpses. “It isn’t because you know a whole lot about medicine,” he continued, noting that Panos still was handing him iodine when the situation called for alcohol, and giving him strands of dusty horse hair when he pointed to strips of freshly washed cotton cloth.

“God told Father Basili that it is necessary to keep you away from the fighting, and Tombazis said that one good doctor is worth ten brilliant generals, or klefthi captains, Doctor Dimitri.”

“And where is Voula?” Dimitri inquired.

“Looking after the women, according to Tombazis, Doctor,” Panos shot back, after which he took a small swig of moonshine from the jug labelled ‘anesthesia’. “And I find it interesting that you grew that large caterpillar on your upper lip, and died your hair black,” he continued as he stroked his own moustache, then wiped the sweat away from the blood-stained short hairs on his pre-maturing balding scalp.

“Greek men in this country respect other men with large mustaches and dark hair,” Dimitri replied by way of explanation as he examined an arm that somehow was still attached to its owner after he had pieced it together with horse hair suture, metal wire and applied theoretical physics.

“And Greek women like Voula like mustaches,” Panos surmised, correctly. “She also hates long hair on men, and thinks that bald men are distinguished,” he continued, as he picked up a pair of scissors and a sharp razor. “I can make you more distinguished to her if you like,” he smiled.

“No thanks,” Dimitri replied, recalling that Voula liked most everything about Panos except his balding head, and his persistent habit of doing whatever he could to keep suitors from coming into her life. Not as a lover, she said. But as an over protected brother. But Dimitri knew differently. Still, the gentlemanly thing to do was to let Voula decide for herself what man would own her, or perhaps more accurately, what man she would own.

Dimitri was about to begin discussion with Panos regarding Voula, for the hundredth time. And, thank Allah and Jesus, circumstance prevented the talk from taking place, yet again.

“Three more prisoners,” a very well-armed Greek with more scar than skin on both arms said regarding the disarmed men in front of him. The first was an Egyptian private who looked more like an officer between his ears, an oversized multicolored ‘bandage’ wrapped around his bloody left leg. The second was an officer who looked more like a private, his arm in a sling that was packed with red-stained cotton. The third was a Turkish Sergeant, whose eyes were covered by a cloth, burns on his forehead and cheeks. “The War is over for them, but General Tomazis says we have to keep them alive.

“So we can cook them in stew to feed to the dogs,” Panos sneared.

“Or extract information from them so we can win this War and send them all home,” Dimitri countered.

“Only if the Sultan pays their passage!” Panos grunted. “Move them over to the palace suite in the North Room of the mansion,” he said regarding the recently vacated corner of the barn, on which three wooden planks were placed, making them better ‘beds’ than most of the Greeks shared.

While being escorted to their place in the overcrowded waiting room, each of the prisoners thanked Panos, and bowed an especially deep gesture of appreciation to Dimitri.

“I don’t know about them,” Panos said, after the prisoners were escorted out of hearing range. “Something smells wrong about bringing them in here.”

“You always smell something wrong about Turks, and Egyptians, Panos,” Dimitri said. “After all of this is done with and we win, our children will have to deal with their children, and if their fathers say that we were kind when they were merciless, it means less wars we have to fight with them later when---“

“---the one with the wounded left leg,” Panos whispered to Dimitri after pulling him over to him, very discretely. “He was limping on the right when he came in, and now he’s limping on the left,” he continued as he snuck a loaded double barrel pistol into Dimitri’s boot under his operating gown. “And the blind one seems to be looking around alot, and walks with a stride rather than shouffle. And the one with the broken arm,”..

“I know, is reaching for something inside of the sling that could be an explosive that---“

Before Dimitri could devise a plan, Panos set one in motion. With his spare pistol, he shot the good arm of the Egyptian officer, then the sling off his ‘bad’ left one. Two small grenades and a duel barrel pistol fell on the floor. Dimitri shot at into the wounded left leg of the Egyptian private then aimed into the blind Turk, whose eye-covering bandage slipped down to his chin. He turned around immediately and stared him at Dimitri with two very functional ocular portholes, his hands up and trousers wet. Every wounded Greek who had a functional arm reached for something to aim at the three new Turkish patients. Be then muskets, swords or canes.

“I think we should take this medical examination outside,” Panos said. “Wouldn’t you agree, Doctor.”

“Yes indeed,” Dimitri replied, as an honorary aristocratic kelfti and an overly trained European medical student.

Panos and Dimitri escorted the three still heavily-bandaged prisoners, all of whom were very healthy, through the wounded Greeks and legitimately injured Turks. All of them spat, hit or threw objects at now cursed trio. Those that couldn’t do that hurled insults out of their blood-soaked mouths.

Once outside, and away from everyone else, Dimitri pushed the three Turks against trees well outside the hearing range of the Greek camp and make-shift hospital. Panos secured them to the trunks with ropes. The trio raised their hands up, prayed to Allah, then looked to their executioners.

“After you, Doctor,” Panos said. “Send them to Allah.” .

“No, not like this,” Dimitri sneared. “First we strip them down,” he insisted in a rage, as he removed their tunics, then cut open their trousers, under which he found healthy, unsoiled well fed flesh. “Makes good eating,” he growled, to Panos’ delight. Dimitri then touched and smelled of their bandages.

“As clean as these vermin who are wearing them are dirty?” Panos smirked.

“We need those bandages for people who are REALLY sick,” Dimitri barked out, grabbing hold of the overly wrapped leg with one hand, then the sling with his left, allowing the anger inside of him to have full, unbridled expression.

After several unwrappings of the thick bandages, three more grenades fell to the ground, along with as many small pistols and two daggers. But something else far more deadly was amongst them as well.

“So,” Dimitri said as he looked at the rolled up stacks of wanted posters. Some for for him, and an equal number for ‘the Greek demoness’ who perverted him “My father’s found me, making his intentions known in Egyptian and Turkish,”

“...,,And Greek,” Panos noted regarding the larger stack of wanted posters in very readable, peasant Cretan Greek. “Just like the ones I found in Dimiakis.”

“The village where we’re heading next,” Dimitri said. “That you and Father Basilis scouted out. Which had stores bread, shot, powder, wine, livestock and no people.”

“A few people, Dimitri” Panos replied, referring to his fellow revolutionary as a Greek rather than a foreign adventurer. “Who we killed after they exchanged stories about what they could do with 20 thousand lira. For themselves, of course.”

“And if they were going to donate that 20 thousand lira reward to our Revolution?” Dimitri postulated. “I could have you turn me in, then sneak you out of Egypt with enough money to buy an army that can defeat my father’s mercenaries. And buy you and Voula a comfortable home on one of the islands. Or maybe an whole island.”

“A workable idea,” Panos pondered as stroked his mustache, for a very long moment. “But, I am a mountain klefti and I get seasick. And Voula does too.”

“I didn’t know,” Dimitri said.

“There’s a lot you don’t know about Voula,” Panos said, as a true friend. “And I pray to God that you never have to find out,” he continued as a warning. The kind a brother would only entrust to another brother. “But in the meantime, we will burn these posters, yes?”

“Perhaps a good idea,” Dimitri replied. “And as for the men who were going to act on them, or distribute more of them—“

Before Dimitri could act on what was necessary, Panos did. Three shots later, the klefti put his smoking pistols back under his belt. He retrieved a shovel from his backpack and began digging. “Each gives according to our abilities, Doctor. You are good at selling dreams to injured patients so that their prayers translate into getting better, and my job is to get rid of the garbage,” he continued.

“I should help you bury these bounty hunters,” Dimitri insisted, grabbing hold of the shovel.

“No!” Panos said, pulling it back. “You will have enough bodies to bury soon enough. Please go back down to our camp and save some more people from the grave now. While you can.”

CHAPTER 12

Normally after a battle, Emmanuel Tombazis allowed his men to recover for a week. But this time, the rest break was less than three days. Once again, the rebels were on the move, those who wanted to be on the move anyway. And though everyone in that Army was there by choice, Voula was feeling fenced in. On this day, though she rode her horse in front of the nearly 800 strong army, she felt more and more like she had been shuttled to the back lines. Most particularly by the man riding next to her.

Dimitri was quieter than usual, and when he did talk, he was exceptionally polite. And apologetic. No matter what Voula said, he never stood up for himself or his particular point of view. Indeed, the lion from abroad she had learned to respect, like and in her own twisted way love, had become a lamb. Maybe because she challenged it too much. But before that beast had lost all of its roar, or backbone, she pressed on with the questions that she needed answers on most, if indeed she was going to have anything to do with him anymore.

“Dimitri,” she asked him with a womanly smile as she turned to him, riding her horse side-saddle to as to appear more ladylike. “You never did tell me what kind of weapons those three prisoners you executed had under those fake bandages.”

“Powerful and dangerous weapons, Voula,” the doctor-warrior replied, keeping his eyes looking forward, somewhere on the distant horizon, his sweat smelling of fear.

“Explosives?” she asked. “The kind that would blow themselves up along with the rest of us?”

“Powerful and dangerous weapons,” he repeated, this time with a pale, ghostlike complexion made all the more noticeable by his darkened hair and black mustache.

“I thought that only we Greeks were desperate or dedicated enough to blow ourselves up in a room filled with Turks,” she replied. “But if we did, according to Father Basilis, we’re committing suicide. And suicide is a sin, according to God, the Virgin Mary and Jesus, somewhere in the Bible, according to Basilis. But didn’t Jesus go the cross willingly? Knowing he would die? And therefore, would that not mean that Jesus did commit suicide, and by inference? The saints were all martyrs who welcomed death in the service of the Faith. Didn’t they also commit suicide, in the quest to bring Eternal Life into the world? And therefore, does that not mean that suicide is the highest form of Life, which can defeat and transcend death?” After completing her Socratic discourse using as many kathevuse words as she could remember.

From Dimitri, nothing. No intellectual sparing. No moral argument. And certainly no joke to bring perspective to the jovial battle of wits and wills that he normally enjoyed having with her.

“Alright then,” Voula replied, after which she put her right leg back on the effective side of the saddle, riding like a man rather than a lady. And asking questions as such as well, complete with chewing tobacco and spitting a wad of phlegm out between thoughts and/or sentences. “It’s interesting that General Tombazis has lifted the ban on shooting prisoners. Did he tell you why? Aside from the fear of them having dangerous explosive weapons on them.”

“Change in policy, I suppose,” Dimitri replied, his eyes and mind focused again on the distant horizon somewhere.

“And it’s also interesting that wherever I am, there’s you. Or Father Basilis, Panos or General Tombazis no more than twenty feet from me,” she noted. “Do you not think that I can defend and take care of myself? Do you think that because I’m a woman I’m weak and helpless? Are you all planning to get me drunk so one of you can get me pregnant, so I can have a baby, for my own good, and raise the next Alexandra the Great who will make the world Greece’s colony rather than have us Greeks being colonized by everyone else?”

“No,” Dimitri replied, looking straight at her.

“No’ to what question?” Voula inquired, gently. Giving Dimitri every opportunity to answer without retribution.

“No’ to all of them,” he replied, facing forward again, getting lost behind a world of fear which Voula knew first hand was the most dangerous thing to have if you are anywhere near Turks. But before she could stop the demon of fear in Dimitri, she had to diffuse its powerful first cousin.

“You know, you worry too much, Dimitri,” she smiled at him as she shook her long, black hair with her hand, then put her fingers between her breasts. “You know what happens to men like you who worry too much?”

“We stay alive?” he offered with a kind smile, thinking it to be a joke. “And keep others alive?”

“Maybe, or maybe not,” the ‘act first and contemplate what you did when you’re old and grey’ Queen klefti replied, as she rode her horse in front of Dimitri, then circled him into one spot. “I’ll tell you what happens to men when they worry too much. They go weak in the hands. Shaky with the legs. Weak in the bladder. And bald on top of the head, like Panos,” she said to the man who valued his long, wavy hair as much as any woman she knew values her mane. “Do you have an answer to growing bald from worrying?”

“No grass grows on busy streets?” the young man she fell in love with replied as an old man. And one looked very guilty about something. “I’m sorry,” he replied, seeming to refer to far more than a lame attempt at humor.

“What’s going on here?” Basilis said as he rode up to Voula before she could inquire about the real secrets behind Dimitri’s eyes, if indeed that was his real name. “We have to keep moving,” Basilis informed her. “And to do that, we need you to organize the rear of the column.”

“You mean protect the stragglers in the back so that the Turks don’t come up behind us,” she said. “And discourage anyone who has forgotten why we’re fighting the Turks to sneak off back home as deserters. Hmmm...like I may be tempted to do, if I had a home, and someone to share it with. Something and someone to live for instead of only having

a country to die for,” she found herself saying, becoming more of a woman than she ever had been, or wanted to be.

“Yes, Voula,” Basilis said. “Panos can’t guard the rear alone.”

“Of course he can’t!” Voula growled as she pulled her horse to the left, then trotted back to the rear of the ‘column’, a mass of civilians who had become soldiers by necessity. Perhaps the most effective kind of soldier, or perhaps not.

CHAPTER 13

Though Emmanuel Tombazis was not as colorful in gaining recruits, he was more effective. As was his army in battle, or threatening to engage as such. Particularly after the Cretan governor from Hydra had laid siege for all of three days to the under-provisioned Turkish fortress at Kisamis. Rather than spilling any blood, Tombazis offered the Turks inside safe passage to Kydonia on Greek ships, on which the soldiers and their families would be both unarmed and required to pay the Greek captains for passage. Nearly a thousand Greek prisoners walked, hobbled or were carried out of the dungeons that marvelous day in May of 1823, sharing a vision of a new Crete. An island that would be sub-divided into four provinces, each ruled by the same constitution. A document that proclaimed Crete an Eastern Orthodox Christian country which would tolerate other faiths, tax all equally, and give all inhabitants of the island equal protection under the law. If ever there was a highpoint for Cretan independence, a struggle which started two thousand years ago under the yolk of the Romans, it was then. “A time to build a peace,” Tombazis proclaimed it, during which he put less money, time and energy into War. An arrangement that the battle-weary Cretans accepted eagerly for many justifiable and perhaps right reasons.

Hasan Pasha, Ali’s most favored son in law, vanished from the battlefield and the world of the living, along with much of his Army. But he was soon replaced by Hussan Bay, his second most favored son in law, who arrived with nearly twelve thousand men, including the best cavalry and artillery divisions in the Egyptian Army. As Herikan was the landing site, Tombazis thought it best to get some more men, and perhaps some women who could fight like men, or if necessary, woman who could make men feel like men after the days’ fighting and marching were over. His destination was Gergeri, an area of Crete still occupied by free Greeks, and healthy ones, spared from one plague which nature had provided and another that perhaps was inflicted by the Turks when they sent stray donkeys loaded with diseased blankets and infected food into villages filled with hungry Greek civilians. If indeed there was anyone who was a ‘civilian’ left in Crete by the Spring of 1823. “Passion is the most powerful tool accessible to mortals who want to do godlike things, but it is also the most transient,” the Commissioner turned General recalled from his ‘library’ days when he was younger than most of recruits in his very transient army.

Tombazis was reluctant to understand that paradox, as he sipped he dipped his rock-hard, and miraculously fungus-free bread into his morning tea, a concoction made from herbs snatched out of the thawed ground before any stray emaciated goats and sheep could get them. He was reminded of it when he looked over camp, noting the large number of rebels who were not there. Then the sky, which answered with a drizzle of rain that the dry soil ate up with as much eagerness as gratitude. He sipped his tea, concocted with whatever herbs had been hiding under the ground that had been burned by the Turks and their Egyptian allies as they swept through Crete once again, massacring men, enslaving women and children, and turning villages that they had build into piles of charred rubble. Unlike the Saphakians, mountain people who made a new home of wherever their feet were, the rest of the Creatans did have a right to defend or rebuild what was left of each of their homes.

“It’s the growing season,” Panos said regarding the sparsely-populated camp to Tombazis. The self-taught klefti sat down next to his officially superior and ate the last of the acorns, carob pods and shell snails in his bag of rations, slowly and with the kind of reverancy only a Christian Pagan could feel. “Time for farmers to go home to plant seeds for the upcoming harvest.”

“And plant seeds into the wombs of their wives,” the General, Commissioner and functional governor of the Revolution in Crete smiled, recalling his own wife back in Hydra, who had been going to bed every night alone for the last 2 years, or so he hoped anyway.

“And if our fighting men are able to bring their loving women, or even nagging ones, with them?” Panos proposed, yet again.

“Is that what the klefti do, Panos?” Tombazis said, turning to the most reliable bandit in his Army. “How do you kleftis plant the seeds for other kleftis? How is the torch of being an illegal but for the most part honorable bandit passed on to the next generations?” It was a question that the home-oriented, aristocratically-raised General had always wondered about. Perhaps because he was publically proud of his own sons having become respectable aristocrats, though he secretly wanted them to become effective and innovative klefti.

“Well,” Panos said as he stroked his left cheek, taking another special moment to recall the events that led to the old scars under the stubble, and the more recent gash under his chin that nearly slashed through his jawbone. “It would be more effective if new klefti came from the womb of my Queen, Voula, than from voluntary recruits who have no family to go home to, and no priest to welcome them into the Seminary,” he smiled.

“But I heard that Old Man Kolikotronis, king of the klefti and now head of a respectable Army in Peloponesis, has two sons,” Tombazis pointed out. “What is the story about their mother?”

“Nothing that the history books will write about, and nothing that Old Man Kolikotronis ever talked about either,” Panos related. “To me, or Voula.”

“So Voula wants to be a fighter rather than a mother because she won’t be remembered by the history books?” Tombazis inquired.

“What Voula does with her womb is NONE of your business!” Panos blasted out. “And what the Turks did to it, and her, is also none of your affair!” he blasted as he stood up. “And who do you think YOU are? Do you think that you are will be more noble than the men who went home to defend and care for their families if you stay here and fight for the revolution out here?”

“Someone has to stay behind and keep the Revolution alive,” Tombazis said as he counted the tents still left in Camp, and the number of men still huddled under them. “George Washington never went home to his wife for seven years,” he said to Panos. “According to his diary.”

“No one writes in their diary what they really feel, or did,” Panos said “I heard that the only entry Old Man Kolikotronis made in his diary, or military reports, about one of his sons dying in a battle that his army won, was one line. He referred to him by first and last name, but not as his son.”

“And that’s why they call him ‘hard assed’ Kolokotronis,” Tombazis asserted. “Who sends his men into battle thinking more about winning the battle than keeping his men alive.”

“Which is why he wins battles and afterwards has more men still alive than you do,” Panos related. “Caution is for cowards and academics. And if you want to have me shot for saying that to you---“

“---I don’t ask ANYONE to do anything that I won’t and don’t do!” Tombazis growled back, grabbing the klefti by his blood-soaked lapels. “It’s ME in front of the charge every time we attack a platoon, column or company of Turks, or Egyptians!” he screamed.

“But never a battalion,” Panos related, calmly. “And if you keep letting those battalions go on their way, and ordering my men to not attack them either, a battalion becomes an Army.”

Noticing that some of the men in what was left of the camp focused their attention up the hill, Tombazis let go of Panos’ coat, offered him a cup of tea, and pretended to have been giving him a manly hug. Panos saw fit to go along with the charade.

“We are still outnumbered and outgunned,” Tombazis informed Panos, as the klefti tasted the putrid brew that the now very thin General called ‘breakfast.

“Maybe here,” Panos conceded regarding his pistols. “But not here,” he continued, pointing to his heart. And informing Tombazis that he, and others who he still cared too much about to respect effectively, were willing to die for what now seemed like an impossible Cause.

“I’ll take it under consideration,” Tombazis replied. “Here,” he asserted pointing to his head. “And here,” he continued, pointing to his heart. An organ which he could feel pumping in his chest louder than ever.

“Good then,” Panos said, satisfied with the answer and feeling behind it. “And the matter of Voula and Dimitri?” Panos inquired as he put some of his own herbs into the tea, so that it was at least swallow-able. “You want to keep them on special assignment?”

“As long as no one other than you, me or Basilis know why they are on that assignment,” Tombazis said.

“And this special assignment is to protect them, or us?” Panos asked. “Or maybe protect Voula from me?”

“Or you from Voula,” Panos shot back. “If everything you tell me about her and didn’t tell me about her is really true...”

Panos felt himself hit between the eyes. Yet again, he seemed outsmarted by those more formally educated and socially privileged than himself. But Tombazis knew that that condition would not last for long. And that time was on the side of the Turks and their Egyptian allies, not the Revolution, no matter what Basilis said after having his always inspiring but increasingly bizarre Visions.

CHAPTER 14

There were many unsaid agreements between Voula and Dimitri. One was that he never asked her last name or family history, and she never inquired of him which home country he was going back to after the War to share his stories about his exploits fighting with the peasants in Crete. Another was that they would spare each other complements. Still, Dimitri couldn’t resist giving her one from his seat on the buckboard of the wagon being pulled by their two more reluctant than cooperative saddle horses as they rolled over another hill in a landscape desolate of anything green or two legged.

“You do look beautiful you know,” Dimitri said with a smile delivered to her face. “And you are beautiful,” looking away, braced for retribution for the kind gesture.

“Because of what I am or what I’m wearing?” Voula inquired from under the French umbrella she was assigned to hold, looking down at the British lady dress which was the required uniform of the day, and flipping the long blonde wig flowing down to a waist made five inches smaller by the tight corset strangling her gut. “And whose idea was it to

travel like this? Father Basilis, who thinks that if I look like a lady on the outside I'll feel like a woman on the inside? One thing that I will see changed in this Revolution is that Priests can to arrange marriages between the souls of Christians and their Heavenly Father, but are not permitted to determine who marries who here on earth."

"Still, you look and are beautiful," Dimitri said, straight into her terrified yet touched green eyes.

"Thank you," Voula found herself saying in English as an English Duchess, and meaning as a Greek woman in a language that was far more expressive and accurate than English or any other Continental language could ever be. She then looked at Dimitri, who adjusted his hat, a garment he up till now had never worn, being sure the wind would not blow it off again. She gently pulled the English bolar off his head, running her finger over his scalp. "You look distinguished," she smiled. "And handsome."

"You're lying," Dimitri said, as he felt the wind blow on the hairless surface of his freshly shaved head, feeling the tufts of the whitened rim of hair around his ears and neck touching follicle-less skin on top. "I look old, and ugly. Like...my father who..."

"Your father who 'what'?" Voula inquired of her European Aristocratic companion. "What kind of hat does he wear?"

"Whatever covers his bald, big fat, arrogant head," Dimitri replied.

"Still, you ARE handsome, and distinguished," Voula said.

"Under all this old and ugly?" Dimitri replied, observing himself smiling for the first time since he did the transformation into someone no one would recognize. And insisting that Voula do the same. It was only a matter of time till an escaped Turkish prisoner or a Greek deserter informed the sketch artists working for Dimitri's father about Voula's appearance so the bounty hunters would find their way to the Wanted posters. Thus far, she hadn't seen the posters or the hunters. And her mind was on the present. She took out a map, glancing at it yet again.

"The village we're supposed to scout out as neutral European aristocrats should be just over this hill, to the right," she said. "According to the map anyway."

"But according to the flag there---" Dimitri said, pointing to a valley to the left. "A black flag," he noted. "Indicating plague. Which we put up to work to keep the Turks from coming in stealing ammunition, food---"

"---or old women and children," Voula interjected, after which she sniffed the air.

"It smells of death," she said. The wind shifted direction, delivering the odor of rotting human flesh to the horses, then finally to Dimitri.

Voula yelled at the restless horses in Cretan expletives to make them pull the wagon in closer. Dimitri asked them in a more poetic language and tone to do so. Eventually, the steeds obeyed their perhaps self-destructive masters.

“So, what Greek boy or girl did you fuck to deserve this honor as the flagbearer?” Voula said to the barely breathing, pustule-covered Turkish Captain lying next to the black flag on the outskirts of the town.

The underaged officer tried to form words with his mouth, but more blood than words came out and those words were in Egyptian.

“Speak Greek, you bastard!” Voula yelled into his face. “You rape us, pillage us, and torture us, the least you can do is to learn our language! And if you’re asking me for mercy----”

“---He’s warning you to leave, while you still can,” Dimitri said as he approached her from behind, giving her a neck to toe garment with gloves to protect her from the contagions. “And he’s trying to tell you to take your father, me, with you so he can die in his bed rather than in his own blood and feces,” he continued, pointing to the pool of feces and blood around the Egyptian ‘advisor’s’ ass.

The officer pointed to the pistol stashed under Dimitri’s very British coat, motioning that he wanted him to aim it at his forehead.

“Maybe the second shot, but the first one,” Voula barked.

Before Dimitri could do or see anything, Voula had removed the pistol from under her petticoat and shot the Turkish Captain once in the groin and once in the kneecap. She smiled with satisfaction. “At least hour before the next one goes into his head,” she barked at Dimitri, as she took his pocketwatch. “Any sooner than that and I give you a headshave two inches below the scalp,” she smirked at Dimitri, afterwhich she put a scarf around her face, suited up in the protective plague gown and walked around the village, gathering what arms and booty she could with a gloved hand. Thankfully she was careful to not step in any body secretion, fluid or dismembered part amongst the dead. She gave blessings to the dead Greeks and spit at the bodies of the deceased Turks. She added curses of her own devise from Pagan and Christian sources to the Egyptian mercenaries amongst the dead.

The young private looked at Dimitri, begging for mercy. Through his screams of agony, he pointed to his knife. “Please old man, have mercy on a young one!” he forced out of his bloody mouth, in badly pronounced Greek.

“Only if you confess to me your secrets, before you die,” Dimitri said, in his still native tongue. “Like who was your commanding officer and what he is planning to do.”

“I can’t betray my Comrades!” he whispered. “And my family!”

“Who will be rewarded if you tell me what I need to know,” Dimitri said. “My hand to Allah on it!” he continued, and meant. As a gesture of good faith Dimitri retrieved a vial of opium extract from the recesses of his pocket and inserted three drops under the Captain’s tongue. He then whipped off a strip of the officer’s sleeve and inserted it around the base of his scrotum, tight enough to stop the bleeding, for the moment anyway.

“You serve Allah and the Greeks?” the Captain asked, feeling less pain and more energy. “And give aid and comfort to the enemy?”

“In the service of MY family, ultimately,” Dimitri smiled back, examining the wounds the plague and Voula’s bullets inflicted on his dying body. “That’s why we are all fighting. To take care of our families. And your family is where, and who?” he inquired.

“Maybe you already know,” the Captain said. “You do look familiar, and the way you look at me, I look familiar to you too?”

“We all look familiar to each other at the time of dying,” Dimitri replied, lying to the best of his abilities, recognising the officer all too well from his teen-aged years in Cairo. “And we both want this War to end.”

“Yes, even if you Greeks win,” the officer replied. “By the hand of Allah, this war was not my idea and it is time that Crete is ruled by Cretans, particularly after my men and my superiors had their way with this village before the plague had its way with us. God’s way to tell me that His Will is that you Greeks win your freedom as soon as possible so we can go home and enjoy what’s left of ours.”

“So, you want to help us?” Dimitri said.

“My hand to Allah on it!” he replied as the effect of the opium diminished, the agony of the plague taking possession of his putrifying body.

Dimitri gathered the information as best as he could, scribbling down what he had to, remembering what he could. Then the Egyptian ‘consultant’ to the Turks asked for Dimitri’s knife.

Seeing that Voula was clearly occupied at the other end of the village, and taking all the necessary medical pre-cautions regarding her becoming infected, Dimitri took out his dagger. Taking careful aim and being well aware of how to find the descending branches of the aorta inside his abdomen, he stabbed the closest thing he had as a best friend during his childhood and early manhood.

It was a clean and fast kill, appended by Dimitri putting Achmed’s fingers around the knife in clenched fist just as life left them. While his old friend died, Dimitri said a

prayer for his Soul to a God he hadn't spoken or listened to in years. And asked the God who he thought he still was serving to forgive him for what he was thinking. It was a new method of fighting wars that would be effective and deadly, which didn't require Dimitri or Voula firing a single shot. Allah help him!

CHAPTER 15

After another reflective and wishful read, Tombazis put down the most recent revision of the new Cretan Constitution in his ever-mobile 'office', this time the only table left in a Gergeri cafe which once had a roof over it. He wanted it simplified, but knew that until honor replaced law, carefully worded laws would be required to insure justice for all so that the new experience of freedom in Crete would not be a licence for the strong to colonize the weak, as was the case for the last 2,000 years. But, as his mother in Hydra said, 'buckwheat cereal before baklava.' And that cereal had some interesting ingredients, spices that contradicted yet complimented each other. Its servers continued their proposal. Still, he had to point out the flaws of the plan.

"What you are proposing is nothing new, Lord Elridge," he said to Dimitri, noting that no one in the town that the Greeks now re-occupied recognized him, and not one soul in his army recognised him as the doctor who had patched up their wounds and listened to their not-so-heroic stories about loved ones while healing, or drunk. "Our fathers and grandfathers catapulted bodies of dead Turks inflected with plague over the walls of castles in an attempt to make the dwellers inside sick. And the threat of throwing live Turks infected with leprey over the walls secured our last victory," he said to the hunched back old man with the rim of white hair around the top of his still-smoothly-shaved head. "And as the real history books you have read said," he whispered, "It was plague that came up through Pireas into Athens that enabled Sparta to conquer their rival. And, according to the history books that no one wrote, the plague backfired on the Spartans."

"Yes, but if we want to get rid of the Turks, and Egyptians, for good, there is a golden opportunity to do it, now!" Voula added, still clad in her English Lady's garb. Sipping her tea and twirling her toes as a lady, for perhaps the first time since the Turks had violated her womanhood. "They huddle inside castles like rats!"

"In Gramvousa, according to the Egyptian advisor to the Turks," Dimitri added.

"And Panos," Voula confirmed.

"A castle which I've visited myself, and know from the inside," Dimitri said. "Where we can deliver the plague to the Turks and Egyptians who deserve it most, and nobody else, with this," he continued, opening up a sac filled with what looked like the kind of pastry Tombazis remembered from his childhood and manhood back in Hydra.

"The crème inside grows germs like sun-drenched mud grows grass," Voula explained.

“Germs?” Tombazis inquired.

“Small creatures you can only see with a microscope that bring down larger creatures, once they find fertile ground in a host tissue,” Voula continued. “With a fast incubation time, a day or two at most, according to the infected Turkish Captain we interrogated.”

“Hmmm, Lord Eldridge” Tombazis smiled, looking at Dimitri as two recently promoted officers in the Cretan army seemed to be looking at him. “Your daughter the Duchess seems to have acquired a rather extensive medical education,” he continued, in kathevse Greek.

“We are teaching each other,” Voula smiled, in perfectly accented High Brow Greek. The common-born girl who became a klefti by necessity seemed...happy. A luxury that few could afford in war torn Crete, and one that had to be valued when achieved. Dimitri seemed to share in such. For a moment, it seemed that they both forgot they were at war. But Tombazis couldn't.

“What did this Egyptian in a Turkish Captain's uniform say about troops which were not huddled behind castles built by the Venetians, or us when we were enslaved by them?” the governor –general inquired.

“They're heading towards Amourgellis,” Voula said. “With an army of no more than three thousand, marginally armed. All the forces they have left.”

“The only soldiers in Crete in good enough spirits or health to put up a fight,” Dimitri added. “Their last hope, moving fast.”

“Who we can defeat with our three thousand men,” Tombazis pondered.

“And in the process, capture Hussan Bey himself!” Dimitri said. “Who, according to the Captain, is not right in the head.”

“Due to a slow growing infection that's spread to his spinal cord, and ocular portholes, making his mentation defective,” Voula added.

Tombazis never thought that Dimitri would learn to speak clear, from the gut Greek. And imagined that it would take a miracle for the aristocratic hating klefti Voula to embrace kathelevuse with all of its highbrow scientific trimmings. But maybe it was time for miracles, with of course, the appropriate confirmations.

“You believe what this Captain told you?” he asked Dimitri, who seemed to know more about the now dead informant than he should have..

“Yes,” Voula replied, taking Dimitri's hand. “We do,” she assured her superior Tombazis and her culturally-mismatched soul-mate, Dimitri.

Tombazis let everything settle into his mind, and soul. After careful thinking and bold reflection, God had delivered to him a plan. He retrieved a map from his pocket, placing it over the constitution. “This is the fastest route to Amourgellis?” he asked Voula as he plotted out a course with a piece of charcoal.

“And the safest,” Dimitri assured him.

“And this is the route you two take,” Tombazis continued, drawing a course toward the other direction.

“I can fight!” Voula growled back.

“And just because I look like an old man, that doesn’t mean I am one!” Dimitri barked.

“I know,” Tombazis replied. “But we need great doctors and strategic thinkers,” he said bowing to Dimitri and Voula, respectively. “To be around after the battle is over, and to figure out a way to ferret out Turkish rats who will no doubt hide in well protected castles after we have defeated them in the field,” he continued. He looked at Dimitri, addressing him with the most careful consideration. Then at the ‘pastries’ the scientist-physician-surgeon had prepared and kept in a triple wrapped sac. “You will need a laboratory to bake more selectively-toxic pastries, doctor,” he said. “In a place where no one can find you, or your assistant.”

“Associate!” Voula insisted.

“Partner,” Dimitri asserted with a warm smile.

“You two are too smart for your own good,” Tombazis thought, but didn’t say. “Too good to be believed,” he continued, keeping the darkest thoughts about these two aberrations to himself.

CHAPTER 16

The idea that small organisms caused plague rather than toxic chemicals was theoretical, but then again so were that credos that the world was flat, and that God gave Kings and Sultans the divine right to rule over everybody else. And that men were intrinsically stronger than women. Voula disproved that last ‘immutable fact’ by bringing in two large sacs of grain that had been stored under a board in a secret compartment in the outhouse into the stone-walled one room ‘house’ nestled into the recesses of three mountains. The distillery apparatus inside had been spared by Turkish soldiers, Greek citizen-rebels and even Cretan klefi for the last 50 years. Maybe because the elixirs from that still were better than any that could be produced in Athens, Istanbul or Cairo. Or that the place had a ‘curse’ put on any trespassers, any uninvited guests having been met by fumes of foul-smelling gas from the earth with demonic-looking lights and even scarier

sounds coming from the 'temple'. Legend-oriented souls said that the gods of Olympus left their most valued messenger here to protect this place during their temporary absence and that Jesus visited this location to have a glass of wine before resurrecting to Heaven. More fact-oriented people, such as Tombazis knew that the house's hermit owner Nikos Mensulakis was a genius chemist and inventor who knew how to set traps that made unwelcomed guests smell foul odors and hear murmurs that sounded like ghosts.

Mensulakis was feared as a young man, and seldom seen as an older one. He now lived in a world beyond that could be measured or perceived by any of the physical senses. Though not a fan of the ethereal, and religiously atheistic, Voula had been curious all day about what Old Nikos was seeing in front of his eyes as he sat at his desk, waiting for his hand to 'channel' something else to write in his fifth volume of formulas and diagrams. Her curiosity turned into fascination, then obsession, each time the wrinkled old, deep wrinkled, arthritic sage actively discouraged her from looking at his notes by turning his back on her, turning to the next page as she tried to read the one he just wrote, or requesting that Voula fetch him some chemicals, jars and distillation devices he had loaned her and Dimitri. But this time, Old Man Nikos stared at the wall, not moving a muscle except for his lips, which mumbled something to someone, smiling, growling and finally agreeing with his ethereal co-worker. It seemed as if he was talking with God, nay, negotiating with God. Voula really did want to know what He was thinking, feeling and had in store for his Creation. She edged her way to the page upon which the genius inventor whose devices had saved more Cretans from starvation and death than Voula and her kleftis could in a hundred years. This time he let her see the writing.

It was like no language she had ever seen. But the words seemed familiar. She heard Dimitri come in, though Old Man Nikos didn't seem to. Dimitri seemed fascinated with what the old man was writing, then became enlightened about such when he put up a mirror, allowing the words to be inverted.

"Yes, it says 'you two mind your own business on your side of the laboratory'," Nikos smiled. "And 'develop some cures for these diseases you will be inflicting on our enemies, such as...'" Nikos turned back notebook ten pages back, then showed his two students their assignment. "I call them antibiotics," he said. "Chemicals you can grow in mold, mice, dogs or dishes that you test on the dishes of microbes you're concentrating from the body parts of those who died of the plague. A man, or woman, made way to speed up inoculation."

"Which looks fascinating," Dimitri said. "And very doable."

"In ten years, maybe," Voula added.

"More like a hundred," Nikos lamented, ripping out the pages and handing them to Voula. "Give them to the child you have in there," he said.

Dimitri was shocked to hear that Voula was pregnant. "I didn't know that---"

“---yes, it’s yours,” Voula assured him with a warm smile. She then turned to Old Man Nikos. “And YOU better not die before the Christening.”

“I thought you didn’t believe in God,” Dimitri said.

“After Tombazis wipes out what’s left of the Egyptian Army in Amourgelles, and we selectively give the plague, and maybe SOME of the cures for such, to the Turks who hiding behind the castle walls, Crete is going to be a Christian country,” she said. “Christians will get more priviledges than Moslems or Pagans, and even Jews, no matter what the constitution says.”

“I thought that you hated Christians who had converted to become Moslems so they could get social advantages under the Ottomans,” Dimitri pointed out. “Even if it was for their children.”

“Sometimes we have to pretend to believe certain things for them to become true,” Old Man Nikos offered, after which he opened up a bottle of brew which had a foul odor neither Dimitri nor Voula recognised. “Like that three swallows of this five times a day enables me to make wines, liquors and beer that everyone likes to swallow. Including Moslems who say they’re forbidden to let alcohol pass their lips. Which is impossible for anyone who doesn’t boil, dry or fry whatever he eats immediately before the microbes turn the sugar in it into fermented...” he hesitated, taking note of the fluid covering the visitor who came into his temple unannounced, and angry.

“Blood,” Panos announced regarding the white kilt and coat which was now beet red. “From our own people,” he reported, after which he grabbed hold of the most powerful whiskey available on Nikos’ shelf and swallowed a large gulp. “Our own people who fought valiantly, then ran like cowards,” he continued, taking another swig. “Smart cowards who saved their own skin instead of wasting their lives like sheep to the slaughter.” He took another gulp, hoping to lose all memory of what he had just seen, but it only made the visions of it worse. “Three thousand Cretan sheep, wolves, lions and foxes, or maybe some combination of those creatures, who beaten by the three thousand Egyptians who were actually twelve thousand, or more. Led by Housan Bay, who was very much in his Right mind.”

“That’s impossible! Achmed would never tell a lie after swearing to Allah!” Dimitri observed himself saying. “And as for my brother in law....”

“---Housan Bey?” Panos interjected. “The leader of the 12,000 very well armed Egyptians who was very Right in the head when he set up a trap for us?”

“With my help, Goddamn me!” Dimitri growled as he rammed his fist into the wall, inflicting damage to both.

“And Achmed’s, whoever he was,” Panos interjected. “Who you knew from...”

“...someplace and somewhere you want to tell me about, Dimitri?” Voula gently requested of her beloved as his fist was set for another battle with a stone pillar with broken bones in all of his fingers this time.

“Ibriham,” Panos offered. “Who maybe has something to tell us both?”

“Us ALL,” Old Man Nikos interjected.

Dimitri kept his eyes on the wall, seeing his reflection in it somehow. And having to face for the first time the mirror in front of him that which he had ignored ever since coming to Crete. “It wasn’t supposed to happen like this,” he confessed, and meant.

“But it did,” Panos said, with regret. “And it’s too late to do anything about it now.”

“Too late to do anything about what?” Voula asked.

Panos reached into his pocket, asking Dimitri for permission to take the paper out of it. Before he could say ‘yes or no’ to it, Voula grabbed hold of one of the posters. Her jaws dropped in horror. “So that’s why you didn’t want me to show my face to any of the Turks or my long black hair to any Greeks,” she said regarding the likeness of her as Queen of the Klefti with a long, wavy mane, whose witchlike powers to pervert honorable men came from Satan. “I suppose I really am worth more dead than alive.”

“As are you, ‘Ibriham’,” Nikos said regarding the other posters, showing Dimitri in different looks. “No matter how hard you try to look like an old, common man, your eyes say who and what you really are.”

“And I am what now?” Dimitri said to all three of his fellow rebels.

“Someone who was tricked by the enemy, just as we were,” Panos offered.

“After he tricked me!” Voula blasted out, after which she stormed out of hut, slamming the door behind her.

“So what do we do now?” Dimitri asked Panos.

“Don’t ask me,” Panos replied as he grabbed hold of his weapons, along with every bit of food and ammunition he could. “It’s every man for himself now.”

“And every klefti for each other,” Nikos interjected. “You bandits may be the only honest men we have left. You’re certainly the most effective now.”

Panos hesitated, then finally answered. “Yes, we are,” he replied, after which he threw three handfuls of weapons and explosives into Dimitri’s hands. “Klefti rules now, Dimitri.”

“And Voula?” Dimitri inquired.

“Can stay here with me,” Nikos said.

“WILL stay here with you!” Panos barked back. “Or I’ll come back here and pour every jug of moonshine up your ass, along with the broken jugs!”

CHAPTER 17

Prior to May, 1821, when the plugged up volcano of Greek Liberation burst open, time was measured in Crete by the passing of the seasons. Between the summer of 1821 and the Spring of 1823, time was measured by pocket watches stolen from the Turks by heroic Greek rebels. After the defeat of Tombazis’ army at Amougelles, it was measured by the number of massacres inflicted by the Turks and their Egyptian allies on small enclaves of Cretans hiding in whatever hole nature could provide for them. The events around each of them ran like clockwork, as designed and orchestrated by the Turkish watchmakers. The women, children and severely infirmed would hide inside a mountain cave or some other ‘castle’ provided by Mother Nature. A small group of men would insert themselves as the entrance to said castles, armed with everything from muskets to rocks. And a mishap would happen, in which the easiest way into the castle would become known to the Turks. In the case of Silini, it was two stray donkeys which trotted from the castle walls across a ‘moat’ which was barely a foot deep, though the defenders of such were hoping that the Turks would still perceive it as a forty-foot deep abyss with underlying currents that would snatch any invader out of the land of the living. In the case of Silini, most of six hundred Cretans were massacred. None would convert to Islam to spare themselves the knife. Even the atheists became devout Christians. Three of the survivors made a run for it, the young boy dying of dysentery en route, his younger sister succumbing to a wound on her leg. The third, their guilt-ridden mother, lay motionless on Nikos’s bed, staring at the sky above the route, begging God to send her to Hell for her letting her children die, and for her voluntarily killing the new life incubating in her womb after being raped by a Turk who promised to spare her brothers if she pleased him.

“So, can you do something for her?” Voula asked Old Man Nikos.

“For the wounds on her body, yes,” he said, as he retrieved three jars of concoctions which were labelled in mirror writing, smelling the vaginal cavity of the young woman who did not want to become any older. “But for the damage to her mind...” he replied. “Maybe Dimitri has some answers.”

“The bastard’s name is Ibriham!” Voula yelled at the old man.. “I hate him and everything he did!”

“But you still value one thing that he did,” Nikos said, pointing to Voula’s belly, now swollen out into the eighth month of pregnancy. “You could have done what this woman did.”

“I did do such, many times, when I was a guest of the Turks,” Voula replied. “And the Fate cursed me by making me fertile again,” she screamed at the life in her womb. “I should have gotten rid of you when I had the chance! But like a vulnerable food, I didn’t!”

“Because you heard it speak to you in the fifth month, when the Soul entered the body?” Nikos inquired. “Or because you really do love Dimitri.”

“His name is Ibriham!” Voula yelled back, her soul now drawn and quartered by anger, grief, love and hate. “And my name is idiot!” she continued, running her fingers through her hair, which she had shorn to a man’s length the day after Dimitri ran off to be a klefti with Panos. “Ugly idiot,” she said, glancing herself in the cracked mirror. “Why did I do it?” she asked Nikos.

“Because you are more effective as a spy amongst the Turks as a boy they didn’t know, an attractive woman they desire to know, or Queen of the Klefti who still has a price on her head,” Nikos informed her. “Four thousand lira.”

“Five,” Voula said with a proud smile. “And after we get grow more effective germ bombs, and place them with the Turks, ten!” she continued, as she fondled the eight jars containing what Nikos said, and her work confirmed, were the most toxic batches of ‘plague in a bottle’ in the lab. “Maybe after we give plague to the Turks and the Egyptians, we could sell ourselves to the highest bidder on the Continent. Let the French, British and Prussians hire us to give them plague bombs they can use on each other. Then we clean up afterwards, and make Europe a ‘protectorate’ of Crete rather than the other way around?”

“Something you can do, technically anyway,” Nikos replied with a solemn smile. “You are a brilliant chemist. Smarter than Dimitri, and maybe even me.”

“Thank you,” Voula bowed proudly.

“But you have much to learn about the heart,” Nikos replied. “And the consequences of not listening to it.”

“And YOU are the pillar of Wisdom of the Soul!” Voula spat back. “YOU, old man, whose only family is science. And who is only fighting for Greek freedom because it’s an interesting experiment?” she barked.

“There is that,” he said, stroking his thin white beard.

“And when this woman came in with her story about horror inflicted by the Turks, and the others with tales just as gruesome, it was me who got angry with them! Cried with them! Made offerings to God, the gods and the Fates so that those bastards would be cursed!” she yelled back. “You are an empty shell who has done nothing to make the world better in your lifetime, and who wants to take credit for us, your ‘students’ making it a better place! And as for your other failed experiments.”

Nikos said nothing, but felt everything, particularly as he glanced at a shelf of books he had written that neither Voula, Dimitri nor any other young souls were very impressed with.

“These literary books of yours,” Voula said as she opened up one of the volumes. “Your attempt to channel the spirit of Homer and combine it with the wisdom of Socrates and the artistic expressions of Cervalis and Dan Kiktoa.”

“CervANTIS,” Nikos spat back. “Who wrote Don Quitote.”

“Which has more insights, expressions and wisdom in it that you ever had, or you’ll ever be able to ‘synthesize’ in this laboratory,” Voula smirked. “But maybe if I read it differently, to this woman who is in world of her own,” she continued regarding the very childless mother who was now 90 percent on the way to joining them, between her ears anyway. “Let me read this novel of yours which you say will save the world from itself, to her, as an ‘experiment.’”

Voula read ‘Platonic Oddessy’ to the despondent Silinian woman with color, flair and ridicule. Every noble idea Nikos had agonized to put into that literary work was taken apart and destroyed by Voula’s biting, colorful tone. Nikos felt worthless, his true life accomplishments, the Works that would survive him and his inventions, stomped on by feet he could not stop. And feet that perhaps had their own validity to them. Most of Voula’s sarcastic digs at the drama he worked so hard to write and the comedic elements of such that he sweated blood to put on the page were just plain cruel. But some registered with this ‘new generation.’ Voula was able with some of the digs to make the Silinian woman smile. Sometimes growl. And sometimes cry.

“It’s a trick, that the devil is pulling on me again,” Nikos told himself. “Making me think then feel that what God channeled through my fingers is boring, procedural, lifeless and emotionally simplistic,” he continued in the dialog between Mind and Soul. He had been through this before, and survived it. But there was something about Voula and her contemporaries that was even more dangerous than her eagerness to kill every man, woman and child in the Ottoman Empire who wasn’t a Christian Greek. When Nikos was a young man, he sought to disarm the old farts who were destroying his world. This new generation was bent on humiliating the old farts, destroying their souls and the possibility of ANYthing of vital Importance and Worth to survive for any next generations.

“I pity you, more than any of us dare imagine,” he silently said to the life inside of Voula’s womb, hoping that it was listening more to him than its mother, fearing that he would not live long enough to tell him or her that.

CHAPTER 18

All things considered, it was a good day for Panos and his comrades in Ilikos. They had killed 12 Turks, lost half as many of their own, and evacuated 200 Christian Cretans with the help of the Greek Navy, which still did rule some of the seas. On the other side of the coin, Panos and the remaining 200 fighters in the main rebel army were held up even further up the mountains again and the village of Ilikos had been burnt to the ground. But he was determined to turn this day into a victory rather than an effective retreat. The evidence of such was on the piece of paper he had hidden from the arms collectors to make cartridges. After careful reflection in front of a dim campfire at the entrance of the cave, to the accompaniment of the aroma of bloody and putrid flesh from the wounded inside, he looked at the last verse of the poem that he had forced out of his fractured right hand. He read it outloud to his fellow diner, who was finally able to crush the dried carob pods in his hand into swallowable ‘nutrient’ with what was left of his punched out teeth.

“The ashes of Ilikos returned to the earth,
Transformed by their dead defenders into a rose which made it all worth
The sacrifices of the men women and children whose lot,
Was to do what God and the angels could not,
To transform the ashes of death and pain,
Into roses and flowers which will bloom again and again.” Panos read. He looked to the black-clad figure beside him, who washed down the herbal ‘entree’ with ‘weed’ tea that smelled like it could be kept down without too much effort.

“So, is this worthy of saving for our children, if God ever allows us to have them, or should this paper better used as cartridges or asswipe?” he inquired of the man whose eyes were fixed on the low burning flames. “I know I am not Lord Byron, but then again, better for a Greek to write about Greeks than an Englishman who aspires to be one, no matter how many slashes he encounters at the hands of the Turks or diseases the devil inflicts on him for doing a good deed for.---”

Father Basilis answered with a disapproving grunt, then went into a rant about something he alone seemed to be seeing in the fire, and smelling in the smoke that emerged from it.

Panos thought about asking Basilis yet again about his attempts to become a learned, artistic Greek writer rather than merely an effective, courageous and still-alive klefti Cretan fighter. But Basilis was in a world of his own now, speaking to whoever was there with him in a language that neither Panos nor any other member of the constantly-mobile and ever-retreating army could recognise. Still, Panos hoped and prayed that Basilis still had one of his ten toes on earth. For better or worse, Basilis had become the

advisor, mentor and confidant that Panos had lost back in 1816, when the Turks made him an orphan, without mother, father, aunts, uncles or brothers, Then in 1818, the klefti chief, who chose to only be known as Hard Ass Yannis, died of a disease that he claimed the Turks gave him, but which was actually the result of sleeping with a Greek maiden who turned out to be a blood-sucking whore. Such was the story that Voula told Panos about 'Uncle Yannis'.

Panos looked over the poem he had written, wondering what the world HE was living in and still serving would think about it. But more concerned about what Voula would say and feel about it. It was her who he ultimately trusted to tell him whether he should become more literate, or give up the art of writing and convert all of the peices of paper he had acquired over the last two years and convert them into cartridges. Perhaps to use to shoot himself, he pondered, on dark days when his perspective was, as he felt it anyway, possessed by the devil. But better that Voula was safe with Old Man Nikos, the chemist who some say could convert sheep dung into gold, and who all knew could get you drunk enough on sweet-tasting brew to make any poor man feel like he was a rich one, with the right woman, who loved him for what he was rather than what she could convert him into.

Panos looked at the 'camp', taking count of the number of wounded and their prognosis for becoming effective again as something other than sacrificial lambs who would throw themselves at the enemy so that their more healthy comrades could make a run for it and fight another day. Nearly half of those once- healthy men were able to use their limbs without winching, grunting or limping. But thanks to a new member to their number, they still had limbs attached to their wounded torsos, and lungs that still breathed out fire whenever the Turks or their Egyptian allies came around.

"Yes, I suppose I am responsible for what this man has become," Panos said to Basilis, knowing fully well that the once-cogent Priest had sunk into another 'dip' into the valley of madness. "He has been transformed into a kefti's klefti," Panos continued as he observed Dimitri giving each of the wounded the best of medical care, along with booty taken from the Turks. Gold watches, shiny knives, and badly needed food. Along with other items of 'motivation' such as eyes, ears and scalps he had extracted from the enemy, often before the life left their bodies.

Dimitri had of course let his hair grow out on the top of his head, along with a full beard to compliment it. He cared little about what others thought of how he looked, or who he was. Such was perhaps a reason why no one was concerned with who he was, and didn't know that the scalps, eyes, ears and testicals he had extracted were perhaps from those he had gone to school with, rode horses with, or chased down Egyptian women who had escaped from their mother's eye and father's wrath. But no one was better at taking enemy lives and, thus far anyway, saving the lives of fellow rebels. Still, Dimitri was on his way to becoming just as mad as Basilis had become. "Something that would make it easier for me to become a sometimes-frustrating husband to Voula rather than merely an eternally-beloved brother," he pondered. "But as long as he lives on this side of the sanity line, and has experienced the learned greatness of the Continent and beyond,

maybe Dimitri can tell me if I have a future or destiny as a writer,” he thought, stroking his blood-stained mustache.

It was an innovative thought, accessing the insights of a man who was half mad and half sane, half-aristocrat and half klefti. Panos stood up and prepared to ask his former rival in love and now friend in battle for his opinions. A bold move on Panos’ part, as he feared rejection from the Aristocrats more than death at the hands of the Turks. Life rewarded his courage with another postponement of the ultimate confrontation.

“We need your friend, Doctor Dimtri, to go back to Old Man Nikos,” Dimitri Kallerges informed Panos.

“To continue to develop the weapons we’ll need for the next stage of this war,” fellow Commander Emmanuel Antoniadis added.

“The plan that Governor Tomazis approved only if we can protect our fighters and civilians from those weapons,” Panos said, finding himself agreeing with that position.

“Governor Tomazis has been relieved of duty,” Kallerges explained.

“For being ineffective?” Panos said. “He did what he could against impossible odds!”

“He was too cautious,” Antoniadis said. “He’ll make an excellent governor, but we need bold generals now.”

“And brave doctors,” Kallerges added.

“For what purpose?” Panos asked.

“That’s between General Kallerges and me,” Antoniadis replied.

“And me, who brought him here, along with telling you who he really is, or rather,....was,” Panos shot back. “Which I hope, ‘Sirs’, you had the good sense to keep to yourselves and not yap on about like fishmongering farm wives! And since I have a personal investment in this, and it involves my sister, I have a right to know where this ‘special mission’ is.”

The two Generals looked at each other, then after a tense pause, turned to the klefti who was one more insult, or blatant expression of the truth, from being shot for insubordination. “Gramvousa, Panos,” Antoniadis said. “A castle where we can protect ourselves and the seacoast better than these mountains, hills and beaches.”

“A fortress which your friend has visited once before,” Kallerges added.

Panos was always a horrible liar. He knew it would cost him, as it did now.

“So, you didn’t know about his visiting the castle at Gramvousa a year ago,” Antoniadis smiled.

“No, I didn’t,” Panos replied, worried about being caught in another lie, and letting the two Generals who were the only hope left for the Cretan resistance know what he was really thinking regarding Dimitri and Voula. “But if I can help,” he said by way of offer.

“You will be of greater help in all of this than you ever imagine,” Kallerges assured Panos, putting his small hand on the klefti’s large, shaking shoulders.

“Will me or my poems get written up in the history books?” Panos inquired, feeling safe with these two surrogate fathers. One of whom commented positively on his writing.

“We take Gramavousa and Kissmos first, then we will let history write itself,” Antoniadis said. With that the two General bid Panos good night and retired to their tent, while Panos pulled up a blanket around the campfire. Basilis was shaking now, feeling the cool air as frigid cold, another stage of the ‘blessing’ which God had inflicted on him, Panos put his blanket over the old Priest. “If God won’t take care of you, I will,” he assured him.

Basilis cracked a smile and muttered something in one of his other worldly tongues. It sounded like a ‘thank you’. It was a short lived moment of happy reflection between the klefti who had given up on God and the mad priest who seemed to be talking to Him.

“None of this can ever get written in the history books, or in any of your poems, Panos, or any tales Voula tells the doctor’s child,” Kallerges said, as he gave him another blanket. “Or even be inferred in Old Man Nikos’ books.”

“We took the castle of Gramvousa armed only with our own courage and Faith, fighting with honorable weapons that inflicted harm only on the enemy soldiers and no civilians, even members of the soldiers’ family.” Panos said. “Can I write that?”

“If you wish,” Kallerges said as his final remark. “But battling the publishers, that is your own battle, son.”

Panos didn’t consider the high born, and still-stationed Kallerges a father any more than he considered Basilis a model for sanity. But the General’s advise was as sound as any he had heard in a month or more during a year which would end early for the klefti who now felt closer to death than life. And NOT in a way that makes you feel more Alive.

CHAPTER 19

Panos had been on many horses since the Revolution began, and had got nearly as many wounds as the beasts of burdon had acquired. Dimitri still rode the same mount with upon which he came into the conflict. Both rider and horse had not gotten anything more

than a superficial scratch. A curse and a blessing, particularly because the effective, and sometimes good, Doctor's wounds were between his ears. The same affliction that had occurred to Basilis. "God protects fools and drunks," Panos recalled, trying to find a way to put that concept into his own words in a next poem, sometime. Along with an expansion of that credo that he was discovering on his own now. "And God puts demons into his most effective angels," he considered, trying to find the words to make it rhyme. Of course, what came out of his mouth on the long ride from the rebel camp to the 'laboratory' was about matters more earthly. Comments about the weather which highlighted expressions of Mother Nature pleasing to the body and lamented things painful to such, personifying her as a woman of many moods and maladies. Jokes about the Turks which made them less frightful, and perhaps more understandable. Satirical digs about the 'officer rebels' who were sometimes as much trouble as the Turks.

But Panos' attempts to get Dimitri to talk, about anything, on the way to Old Man Nikos' mountain laboratory was as successful as his many attempts to use herbal concoctions to grow hair on his balding head. Finally, they reached their destination.

"Well, all is as we left it," Panos commented as he let his horse drink a well deserved bucket filled with water from the well. He allowed his ears to hear the sounds of this isolated place, noting the sensory stimulation which hit him hardest. "Quiet," he comment. "No, Silence. It's very loud here," he said.

"Too loud," came out of Dimitri's mouth, as his pre-occupation with his own demons shifted to concern about why there was no activity inside the cabin, or outside of it. He dismounted, discretely retrieved two pistols from under his coat, and approached the door, walking as softly on the muddy ground as he could. Ground that, as he pointed out to Panos, had multiple footprints in it, from many kinds of footwear, along with tinges of blood between them.

"Those dark clouds above us," Dimitri commented as he pretended to cool down his horse by walking it back and forth in front of the hut, using the torso of the animal as a barrier between his shooting hand and the hut, assessing what was going on inside through the corner of his eye. "Do you think you could tell the gods to send those rain-clouds to the dry valleys below that need it?" he continued as he discretely motioned for Panos to check the back.

"The gods don't listen when I talk to them," Panos replied as he slithered to the other side of the laboratory from which no smoke was coming, restacking the firewood that was now scattered on the ground.

"Then maybe you should sing your request to them," Dimitri mused.

"Or we should," Panos smirked as he started the first lyric of a tune the mountain folk would sing to the gods after the Christian Priest from the village had offered up prayers to the Heavenly Father with usually no result coming from such.

Reluctantly, Dimitri joined in, doing his best to follow the tune. Clearly, the overly educated and therefore under-expressive doctor-scholar had not taken any music lessons, or was banned from taking them by instructors who recognized an unteachable student. But it was loud enough to musical ability to cover the Silence, and convincing enough to allow Dimitri and Panos to kick open the door to the hut from the front and back both at the same time, their double pistols cocked and ready to open fire.

But the only thing to shoot at were ghosts, hiding around shelves empty of their contents. And the keeper of those shelves on the floor in front of them, tied, gagged and soiled from his own urine and feces.

Panos cut the ropes around Old Man Nikos' wrists and ankles, while Dimitri whipped off the gag around his mouth. "I didn't piss or shit when they left, and did my best to hold it in for the next day, but..."

"What did they take?" Panos asked as he looked at the emptied shelves and helped Nikos up onto his shaky feet, which had been beaten severely, almost down to the bone.

"Whiskey, rum, wine and beer, all I had, for the money no doubt," the old man said. "Bandits that hid their faces and national identity. They left the books, thankfully. The laboratory notes and my literary investigations. And some of the toxins and cures we've been working on."

"And WHO did they take?" Dimitri continued, noting that the corner room of the hut in which Voula had slept, with him alone, was empty of everything except a cot and large, closed burlap sac.

"She took herself and the baby," Nikos said as he pointed to the note on the wall. "And everything she owned."

"And everything I gave her," Dimitri said, proceeding to open up the sac. "Except my books," he chuckled sadly. He allowed his feet to carry him over to the note on the wall and ripped it off. "Interesting handwriting," he noted. "Like whoever wrote this had mixed feelings, and life agendas."

"Which is what Voula was all about," Nikos said as he pulled himself up to his desk, retrieved his 'curative medicine' and poured the remainder of what was left down his parched throat. "She left, with the baby, saying it was better this way. And meaning it, for the right reasons."

"When!?" Dimitri screamed into Nikos' face as he grabbed hold of his collar, choking the life out of the old man.

"Three days ago," Nikos replied. "In the dead of night. When I was sleeping."

"Not true! Not true!!" Dimitri screamed again and again.

“Yes, it is true,” Panos said as he pulled the angry young man off the life-tired and dying old one. “Just as we have to deliver the toxins Voula helped to develop here to the Turks.”

“And the preventive treatments to our people,” Nikos added through a cough echoing with a death rattle. “So that your child, Dimitri, can grow up free AND healthy.”

Panos and the Old Man were right. But the plan in Dimitri’s head regarding delivery of the plague to selected Turks involved Voula. Like everything else in his life, that plan would have to be revised. As well as whatever poem Panos was thinking about its execution.

CHAPTER 20

Panos had broken all of the Ten Commandments at least a hundred times each in the service of the God who created them. Most every Greek who still valued Christianity and the lives of fellow Christians did after 1821. But what he was doing now seemed to violate the eleventh, twelve and thirtieth Commandment.

“Don’t look so guilty,” Dimitri said to him from atop of his horse as they reached the top of the first hill overlooking the Turkish held fort at Gravouma (CHECK SPELLING). “Someone of your stature is supposed to have servants to be guilty for him, or should I say, for her,” he continued, with a friendly smirk.

“This is a dumb idea, a stupid idea, and a perverted idea,” Panos grumbled back from underneath the blonde wig Voula had worn when posing as a roaming European heiress, and from inside the dress that she wore for those reconnaissance missions which fit Panos better than it fit her. “And since this idea was yours, it’s YOU who should be wearing this dress.”

“A dress is just a kilt with a few more undergarments,” Dimitri mused as he twirled his mustache and did a last minute polish on the Turkish Colonel’s uniform which was ‘donated’ from the last batch of prisoners just before they volunteered to be shot. “And underneath those undergarments is.---”

“---the best hiding place for toxic germs, which the Turks will never look for there, as you keep saying,” Panos replied as he did another check on the sealed bags of ‘plague bombs’ tied to his garters and nuzzled into his oversized breasts. “But they will look at my face, no matter how closely I shaved and how much powder is over the stubble, and know I am not you say I am.”

“In this uniform I outrank in that fort. And if anyone looks at my new French wife without permission, I can and will have him shot,” Dimitri asserted in perfect Military Turkish. “It is the least I can do to a woman of your breeding who I have invited into my culture, life and Cause,” he smiled, warmly and convincingly.

Panos observed the edges of his ruby red lips moving upward. Maybe he was a better actor than he thought he was. Or maybe there was something inside of him that was less than manly which made Voula always seek the company of men other than himself. But like all feelings, speculations and internal investigations, delivering plague bombs selectively into the bodies of Turkish soldiers, their officers and military Egyptian allies was the what God Himself wanted done. Panos saw the first canons on the wall of the castle. His memory brought him back to the horror that those guns inflicted. Shratnel which blasted away at anything within twenty yards of where they landed, falling soldier, horse and civilian alike. He then pondered God's weapon of choice to eliminate useless or destructive beings, such as the flood, which spared no one except Noah and his family. And as for naturally-occurring plague, when such a beast created by Mother Nature came to a city it had its way with anyone in its path, without regard to race, religion or national affiliation. But as for these plague bombs, Dimitri and Nikos were sure that if delivered in the right way, to the right people, it would kill them effectively and cleanly. The bodies would be burned and the rest of the castle would be occupyable by what was left of the rebel Army. Or even better, by the Greek Prisoners still kept in the dungeons of that fortress. Protecting them from the weapon which was to be unleashed on the Turks was now a top priority, and a doable one. Thanks to Dimitri's scientific know-how, Old Man Nikos' alchemetic wisdom and now Panos' 'womanly charms'.

"So, does all of this look familiar?" Panos said to Dimitri as the dots on the watchtowers became bodies, then discernable faces. "How much has it changed?"

"Changed since when?" Dimitri inquired, not sure why his new travelling partner knew about his last visit to the castle, and hopefully not anything about the letter he got from his father when there which cut him off from his money, friends, and country. "I'm as new to all of this as you are," he continued, hoping to couch the truth within another lie, a skill he was very good at as long as he could use words to manufacture his deception.

"Whatever you say, dear," Panos replied as 'Lady 'Whatever' in a gruff- high pitched voice. In that same manner that Voula displayed to Dimitri when she chose to accept a functional lie as a provisional truth.

The first moment of truth was six footsteps away. He approached with long, bold strides, a Prussian rifle in his strong arms. A replica of a weapon which was merely a proto-type four long years ago when Dimitri was studying physics in Berlin. "State your business," the non-commissioned Turkish officer barked out through a thick mustache surrounded by a freshly-shaved face.

"To inspect your fortifications, and report to the Sultan," Dimitri proclaimed with his chin up, and nose in the air. Sniffing the sentry's breath. "And, IF you have imprisoned your quota of Greeks, and obtained your quota of information from them, maybe ignor that stench that is coming out of your mouth. A vile and unholy stench."

“Fig cider,” the guard said in his defense regarding his alcoholic breath, fearing the wrath of not only a superior officer but perhaps Allah as well.

“Which must have fermented without your realizing it,” Dimitri said with a smile, offering the guard a drink from his canteen. “It happens to all of us, and Allah forgives such transgressions as long as we kill enough infidels in his Service.”

The guard smacked his lips, enjoying the brew. “Excellent cider, Colonel,” he bowed. Clearly he was used to drowning his conscience in alcohol so that he could do the most horrific harm imaginable to Christian rebels, who had done no harm to him, nor given any insult to his God. A necessary thing all Turkish officers did for, and to, the men under their command. As was the next slur of crude words from the pot bellied, overfed guard. “And excellent looking merchandise,” he continued, staring at Panos’ legs, arms and breasts as he kept his head bowed. “If I may say so, Sir.”

“She is my wife,” Dimitri proclaimed, proudly. “My fifth wife, to be exact,” he continued. “A continental who will be very useful to us.”

“Most of the continentals I know are useful to the Greeks,” the guard snarled. “Scum of the earth, these Greeks, who have no pride, dignity or real backbone.” He went on with insults in very non-kathevuse Greek so vulgar that Dimitri hadn’t even heard them.

Panos raised head, about to spit back equally humiliating insults in Turkish, when Dimitri wacked him with his riding crop.

“Yes, she’s not so attractive when you get up to her close up, and she has a mental condition that makes her an embarrassment to her father, the Baron von Hoffstedder, but she does have one skill that makes her the best bargain East and West of Cyprus,” Dimitri stated. “Despite the fact that she doesn’t speak a word of our language, not yet anyway. And she could be useful to your detachment during my stay here.”

“We have enough whores already, Sir,” the guard replied. “And it would be inappropriate to ask you to share your wife with anyone, even our most decorated soldiers who risked their lives to.---”

“---Sergeant, and I use that word only TEMPORARILY,” Dimitri assertively interjected. “I was referring to her skills as a cook.” He retrieved a bisquit from his saddlebag and handed it to the Sergeant. “A sample of what she can do in ten minutes.”

The guard took a moderate sized bite out of the bisquit, more interested in its taste rather than its nutritional value, as a man who was clearly very well fed. Too well fed, and too pampered. But with the second and third bite, he clearly enjoyed the fruit and nut-containing bisquit which contained processed herbs from Nikos’ shelf on the north side of his abode that made it more palatable, and special chemicals from the shelves on the east ‘wing’ of his single room scientific and distillery temple that took away any will to fight, question or intentionally tell any lies.

“Yes, very good,” the guard said as he ate up every crumb then licked his fingers. “You have any more?” he inquired with glassy eyes and a light head.

“After dinner,” Dimitri replied, confident that the calculations done back at Nikos’ laboratory were correct. One biscuit equals one compliant yet not passed-out guard. And by the way the guard’s other very well armed comrades were looking at Dimitri and his newly acquired High Born Continental wife, appearances had to be maintained until the entire plan was put into place, from inside the castle. A fortress which was now armed with three times more canon than Dimitri remembered from his last visit, and nearly four times the men, said men being not only Turkish, but Egyptian and Albanian as well.

“So, Colonel, what is this dish that looks so Turkish,” Major Osmiglu asked Dimitri at the dinner table, while stuffing his belly with the first course delivered to the Officer’s dining room.

“And tastes so...Greek,” a slender, though well muscled Egyptian captain added.

“My wife has many skills,” Dimitri informed his subordinates. “One of them is stealing secret recipes from the Greeks.”

“I hope not secret recipes for ‘democracy’, as they call it,” Major Osmiglu replied through a mouth overloaded with food. “‘Rule of the people’, they call it.”

“But we know it’s rule of the mob, led by the most ignorant or manipulative,” Dimitri added. “And speaking of mobs, tell me, which one of you has killed the most number of Greek rebels, or should I say, minions of irresponsible evil? I mean with your own hands.”

The junior officers all raised their hands, providing numbers, the lowest being twenty, the highest boast at a hundred. Dimitri turned to the Major, who verified those counts, with pride.

“Very acceptable,” Dimitri said, writing the numbers down on a parchment of paper. “More than most officers in my inspection tour.”

“A tour that was ordered by who again, Colonel?” The Captain inquired.

“The Sultan,” Dimitri replied as he put his pencil down. “Who is pleased to have our Moslem brothers in Egypt joining in this fight against the Infidels. Who would be even more pleased if any of you gentlemen have devised ways of convincing these rebels to go back to their farms, families, imaginary God, growing babies and wheat instead of delusions of revolutionary grandeur .”

“ We’ve offered them money, food and clothing to give up their arms. More if they turn in their comrades,” one of the junior officers replied.

“Or offer to save their brother, sister, father, mother, child or mistress from the slave ships if they help us capture any boat carrying ten rebels who are strangers to them,” another offered.

“Which haven’t worked,” Osmiglu sighed. “The ignorant, self-destructive and ungrateful scum!”

“And what about negative re-enforcement?” Dimitri inquired.

The term was as foreign to the Officers at the table as an Arabic reading from the Koran at the University in Cairo was to a Greek alter boy in the hills of Peleponesis. With the exception of the Captain. “You mean what things we do to the Greeks to that causes them enough pain to make them stop fighting us, Colonel?” he said, as he began a conversation ‘between eyes’ with Dimitri.

“Shaving the heads and faces of the priests so that their congregation can see them bald and naked,” one of the officers related.

“Burning the valley villages to the ground, one hut at a time, until they tell us where the rebels are in the hill,” another offered.

“Skinning their leaders alive while their devoted followers watch,” a third related with a proud smile.

“Stripping their women down and making them pleasure us,” a fourth stated, evoking smiles of ‘accomplishment’ from the others at the table.

“And if they give us more trouble than pleasure, pouring tar into their vagina,” from the next in line.

“A good way to stop them from making more babies that will go hungry,” said officer number six.

“And save us the trouble of killing them when they grow up to be vicious, sadistic, ignorant, uneducated peasant vermin,” from number seven.

“So we can all go home with our own wives, and children, who live here with us, on this island,” number eight lamented.

“An island that is rightfully ours, and has been for the last four hundred years!” number nine asserted. “Where my grandfather raised my father, and my father raised me.”

“And where our sons and grandsons will raise their families, if they choose to!” Major Osmiglu proclaimed, after which the table burst out into a Turkish anthem he had not heard, one which was particularly aggressive, and shared with the Egyptian Captain. The madness of pride for one’s own country and the dehumanization of the other spread through the wolf pack like a boatload of unspoken-for fish in besieged harbor town.

Feeling unnoticed, Dimitri looked into the face of Cretan-born Turkish, Islamic officer ‘number nine’. The olive-skinned, generously-nosed, heavily-mustached forty year old didn’t look very much different than any of the Greeks. Yet he had a determination to defend his land against intruders, those invaders, to him anyway, being the Christian Greek speaking Cretans. With each stanza of the song, the lyrics got more vicious towards the Greeks and more complimentary for the Turks. Indeed, the men who wrote these songs were the real masters of manipulation. Devising words and music that would destroy any sense of reason towards humanity under the guise of quenching fear for the enemy. A toxin that was infectious, which would have to be neutralized by another kind of toxin.

The carrier of such walked into the room, head bowed. Panos was indeed playing his part well as ‘Colonel Dimitri’s’ high-born European wife who sought above all else to serve her husband, and his friends. As for what she was serving within the next course, and how much, Dimitri gave Panos hand signals with regard to how many culinary ‘plague bombs’ would be put onto each of the officer’s plates. He discretely requested three ‘specially-spiced’ bread balls for most of the junior officers except for officer number eight, who looked like a family man by the way he avoided looking at Panos’ breasts. And the forty-year-old Cretan-born junior officer who seemed more like an Uncle than a father. A matter of justice, and perhaps practicality. As for the Major, his prescribed ration was 6 bread balls went to him due to his rank, and the fact that his body mass was twice that of any men under his command. With regard to the Egyptian Captain, Dimitri told Panos to give him five plague-infused bread balls. But when he tried to pinch Panos’ ass, he snuck an extra five within his food. Dimitri had no objections to the adhoc adjustment.

Having served everyone, Panos bowed and bid the diners a very femininely-pitched ‘eat hearty, gentlemen’ to all. As Panos sasheed back into the fortress kitchen, every eye was on his ass, which he did wiggle for them, in a way that made each think it was for them alone. Dimitri looked at his stopwatch, feeling the seconds pass by more slowly with each tick, in rhythm with caution, which was now escalating very rapidly towards fear. Fear that he could not show anyone. Fear that Voula would have not had, or shown anyway.

As the diners shared stories about wives, slaves girls, and mistresses, Dimitri thought about Voula. Hoping that she was alright. Knowing that, most probably, she was better off without him, as was his child. The inverse of that of course not being true, but a fact of life he had to accept now.

CHAPTER 21

Dimitri looked through a spyglass at the fortress from atop a hill which he wished was a mountain two days after his visit as Inspector Colonel Jikoglu. “Staggering privates and sergeants guards on the ramparts, pueking over the side,” he noted. “And dead officers inside the fort, by the informality they are wearing their uniforms, and the way they are drinking their wine,” he continued.

“It would have been easier if we poisoned them the usual way,” Panos said commented as he stroked the stubble just growing in on his upper lip. To cover up his facial nakedness, he slapped mud on his face. “And more reliable!”

“You did your job well, Lady Jikoglu,” Dimitri said. “Giving the enlisted men enough plague to make them sick, higher doses to the officers who I am certain died painful deaths a day after I wrote them glowing reports about them. Which, if they reach central headquarters in Istanbul, would be ironic,” he chuckled.

“And what about the prisoners still in the fortress?” Panos barked as he pulled in his belly enough to finally squeeze out of the dress and corset that his superiors insisted remain intact for other Missions. “Are you sure that the dried bread and stale figs I gave them contained enough antidroke?”

“The correct term is ‘antidote’,” Dimitri said. “And by all my calculations---“

“---You are an idiot,” Panos interjected. “And an asshole.”

“A psychological impossibility, but, one that I will aspire to,” Dimitri said. “After I put enough faith in you to deliver those ‘antidroke’s’ to the Greek prisoners in the dungeon, and trust that you convinced them to eat them, and confidence that---“

“---I did my job,” Panos said, as he finally liberated himself from the female attire that he was so convincing in. By necessity, of course. Finally in his own skin again, he put on his klefti attire, which he unburied from the hole that had not been discovered by man, beast or anything in between. “Now it is time for the rest of our army to do theirs.”

“As your command, my Lady,” rang out a voice from amidst the band of 300 defiant Greek rebel behind Panos.

“Whoever said that answers to this!” Panos yelled with clenched fist on drawn sword to the mob of smiling faces sharing in the joke. “Let whoever said that come here and say it to my face!” he growled.

“Impossible,” General Kallerges said, quietly. “We need all the men we spare to take that fort AND hold it.”

“And for all of you to be as quiet as possible,” General Antoniadis (CHECK SPELL) appended as he peered between the bushes that, thus far anyway, hid their position. “Those Turks down there may be sick, but they aren’t blind.”

“Unlike the historians, who will no doubt have to give credit for taking the fort to the bravery of your men, rather than the intelligence of the two men, and woman, who developed the plague which made this victory possible,” Dimitri said, as he looked to the sky, then the horizon, then the earth, picking up a handful of it as if it was his own revered home soil. “But, that’s alright. This soil is the only thing that’s sacred here. And the blood we, no, all of YOU, put into it,” he appended. “History values balls more than brains anyway. The reading of it is made all the more...exciting.”

“And speaking of balls,” another voice rang out from the band of 200 brave and battle-tested souls, “Maybe Lady Panos should write the first stanza of a poem about the Liberation of Gramouva, where---“

“---A ‘lady’ cut your throat and balls!” Panos grunted as he grabbed hold of the man who suggested that he compose a poem. “And any man who ridicules me, or the poems that I write---“

“Is not worthy to be called a man, Lord Panos,” Basili said, emerging as if from nowhere. With pen and paper in hand, offering it with a bow to Panos. “Speak for us now, in words that can only come from your heart, and mind, and Soul,” he continued.

The self-educated klefti who had never seen the inside of a schoolhouse looked to the two well schooled Generals, who nodded a confident ‘yes’ to him taking pen in hand. Panos’ fellow soldiers chanted ‘hail Lord Panos’, and meant it. Seeking to see all of it wasn’t just another joke played by clever men over an sincere one, Panos looked to Dimitri.

“Time for those who live the truth to write it,” Dimitri said. “In your own words, please,” he said with a confident smile. “And your own hand.”

Panos’ words came from his own heart, as well as those of the men who were prepared to shed even more blood with him. He spoke those words as he wrote them.

“There above the captive fortress,
God’s bravest angels stole the devil’s fire.
In the service of Jesus they would use it,
For the children they would ever sire.”

Children who would remember the day,
When their fathers died so they could live,
To bring brotherhood, freedom and justice to this great land,
And to the devils minions, eventually forgive.”

The words moved even the hardest man to tears, and the most fearful ones to courage when they heard it. But when Dimitri read those words on paper, through Panos' hand, something else penetrated into his heart, and soul.

Dimitri dared not say where he recognized the handwriting. But he felt it, every time he recalled the words Voula had written in the farewell letter to him and posted on the wall of Nikos' cabin in the dead of night. In the same penmanship that Panos was putting into paper now.

Dimitri didn't know why he didn't ring the neck of the new Cretan Poet Lauriette who no doubt was the one who wrote the farewell Voula had left him. Maybe it was the intelligence that one should know one's enemy before one attacks them. Or the wisdom to determine who really was your enemy, and betrayer, before you planned revenge against them. Or maybe it was just the lack of courage to fight a man who Dimitri had escalated into becoming a Visionary and a hero. Besides, Dimitri was a doctor whose services would be needed after the fortress was taken, to protect those within the well armed fortress, and those who took it, not knowing how such was made possible.

CHAPTER 22

It was the easiest attack on a fortress ever experienced by the Cretan rebels. Not one Greek died in the assault on the Turkish-held Venitian-built castle. Such could not be said about the prisoners who were liberated from the dungeons. One of the few Greeks who survived stared Dimitri in the face, while the young doctor struggled to rescue him from the clutches of an almost certain death in the officer's dining room which he converted into an isolation ward for the possibly savable.

"The ugly blonde woman who thought she was pretty gave us the rock-hard stale bread said that we had to eat it all, and if we did, it would save us from a plague that was killing our Turkish captors," the grey haired man with a wrinkled face overshadowed with pustules said. "I broke what was left of my teeth on that 'bread', and ate it as if I was taking communion from the village Priest. And I waited two days, as the woman told me, and prayed, because she said it would help," he continued as he coughed up a wad of clotted blood.

"Drink this, it will help," Dimitri promised the old man.

"Like prayer helped the others?" the old man growled back at the young doctor. "I asked God to save the other prisoners from the plague that was about to come, because they deserved to live more than I did. They fought harder. And talked less to the Turkish interrogators after we were captured." Tears ran down the old man's face, initiating a waterfall that settled into the wrinkles in his face, making the pustules around them seem taller. "Lord, tell me that SOME of the brave ones did survive!" he screamed up to the sky.

“They did, and are doing very well,” Dimitri told the old man.

“Because of the medicine the woman gave us?” the old man asked. “Or because they deserved to live? Or because they prayed to a different God than I did?”

Dimitri had no answer, none that was provable anyway. “Here, drink this, please,” he said again regarding the concoction that, according to his medical training in Florence, worked for the kind of plague he had concentrated, or perhaps created in Old Man Nikos’ laboratory. “It will help,” he promised, yet again.

“How many of the brave prisoners lived?” the old man demanded to know.

“Three out of five,” Dimitri answered.

“And how many of those cursed with the absence of courage, Doctor?”

“The same proportion, I mean, number, I mean---”

“---You did your best to kill the Turks and save us,” the Old Man said as he extended his shaking hand onto Dimitri’s sweat and blood-soaked arm. “And I have one request of you. To let me do one noble deed, so I can face my Maker with some dignity.”

“And that noble deed would be, to live,” Dimitri suggested.

“To let others live,” he said, pointing to four liberated male prisoners whose faces still had not grown peachfuzz, and three girls who had not yet sprouted breasts. “With the limited amount of medicine you do have, better that they live than me. Even if you calculate that the medicine that you still have is more effective on me.”

“I’m sorry,” Dimitri said, holding back his own tears. “I’m sorry that all of this happened to you.”

“I’m not!” the old man smiled. “From what I know of all of this, this plague you brought in to the fortress killed all of the officers with fate bellies and big appetites, and they suffered before they died. And the men under them were weakened enough by what you fed them so that they were easy to kill, or capture,” he continued, after which yet another bout of watery blood-stained excrement flowed out of his anus. “I’m thirsty,” he said. “And everytime I drink more water, I vomit it out my mouth and more blood comes out of my ass. Is there anything that can be done about that?”

Dimitri pondered the ‘hydration’ that dilemma once again. He considered that perhaps fluid could be introduced into the body through some way other than the mouth. Maybe a needle into a vein which delivered water to the blood. Something that his professors in Florence said was absurd, chemically dangerous and undoable. But during a war like this one, all of the rules of biology and morality were being redefined. He looked around him

and thought about what could happen if he could devise a way to pump water through tubes into veins.

The most ideal person to set up that noble experiment was no where to be seen, but felt more deeply than ever by Dimitri. Voula was gone. God had delivered a replacement in the form of Panos, but now that Dimitri suspected that he was somehow involved with her 'voluntary' departure to places unknown, he could only trust himself. And he could only count on the laws of nature. One of them now seemed to be that mortal men, or women, were better at designing ways to kill each other than cure each other. And that there was no weapon the Greeks could use against the Turks, and the Egyptians, that would not kill the innocent as well. Maybe no one was innocent, he considered. And maybe this 'Revolution for Liberation' was, in reality, God's way of culling the herd of mortals which populated Crete. For what purpose, Dimitri did not know.

He looked to the old man, whose death rattle now was deafening. And whose red face was turning white. And whose eyes seemed to see something. And whose lips curved up into a smile of accomplishment, and satisfaction.

"Don't go yet!" Dimitri demanded of the old man. "Tell me what you see! Tell me what is beyond all of this!"

He answered with wider smile, and eyes wide open. No breath or words came from his mouth. Dimitri was desperate, grabbing hold of the 'energy' that seemed to rise from his body. "Tell me what this is all about and where it's going!" he whispered to the ghost with rage, fueled by more compassion than he ever felt himself possible of. "Tell me what this is about and what we can do about it!"

"What we can, here, and now," Dimitri heard through his ears, and into the depth of his spine. He turned to the voice delivering that command and credo, as he felt its Hand from the Beyond putting a jolt of lightening up his arm and into every portion of his still-mortal body.

"Panos' most secret hiding place," Father Basilis whispered to Dimitri. "And the safest," he continued, during the few bouts when he didn't speak in tongues. "Where she probably is now. Waiting for you."

Dimitri didn't know why or how Basilis knew about what Panos had done, but it made sense that he did. Panos had rambled on to the demented yet clairvoyant Priest on many occasions. Indeed, Panos was not the only mortal soul who related his troubles and questions about the beyond to Basilis, getting answers back in tongues that no one understood but somehow felt. Generals, privates and most everyone in between in the Greek Army availed themselves of the 'Christian Oracle', often with advise that worked for their prescribed purposes. Dimitri recalled that he seldom availed himself of Basilis' 'advise' as a bridge between the known and unknown. But now, he finally did.

“Where?” Dimitri said, handing the Priest a peice of paper and a quill to write down the particulars. Dimitri then offered the Priest a jar half-filled with precious ink. Basilis declined, dipping the quill into a pool of blood in a pan that had been under a patient who expired just half an hour ago, a Turkish private who fought bravely to protect his hated and dying Seargent from the marauding rebels. After a moment of careful reflection, blessing the air above the bed in yet another language no one around him could recognise, Basilis drew a map with clear geographical references, and colorfully drawn dragons, demons and angels at the crossroads leading to it. He said something that Dimitri’s mind could not comprehend in a language he never heard. But its meaning was all too clear to his soul. “Be quick, discrete and careful,” was the most accurate translation.

CHAPTER 23

This Revolution against the Turks was something that the Cretans had never experienced, far more than the rebellions of the past. But there were some things that remained constant. One was that it was appropriate to give your troops a day of looting, and three days of drinking after a victory. And with the castle in Gramvousa now under the command of the Cretans, the people who originally built it while under the Venetian yolk, it would be a long and happy drunk. Still, Dimitri had to give some reasons to General Antoniadis and Kallerges for him abandoning his post as a doctor, once again. This time it was to visit a rich Danish Duchess, an old flame who he met in Italy, who wanted to invest in the Revolution. To ensure that he was allowed to be dismissed from his medical abilities, Dimitri had said that he was going to consult with Old Man Nikos to develop more directed germs to kill the Turks, and better medicines to protect the Greeks on the way back. None of the generals believed his story, but they let him go, nonetheless, as long as he came back to the fortress with money and some kind of medical miracle.

As for Panos, he was promoted to rank of Captain and was too busy feeling important to notice Dimitri’s absence. By Dimitri’s calculations, Panos would not notice him missing for at least a week, with his extra duties of adopting his strategies of defending a mountain with five klefti into one that would enable fifty ‘valley soldiers’ to keep an exposed fortress in Greek hands, for which he got the respect of his new subordinates. And writing love poems for his comrades of any rank to send home, for which he was paid in wine, coin and promises that he would get proper introductions to their sisters.

“I wonder if he ever still thinks about Voula,” Dimitri said to his horse as he traversed the last of the ten paths outlined by Father Basili in his blood-inked map. “And what Panos really feels about her,” he grumbled as the progressively rocky mountain trail vanished into terrain lacking any route except the one a man who had a keen sense of direction could inflict upon it. “And why he kidnapped her from me!” he fumed as he pushed his horse progressively upward.

Dimitri's mind oscillated between how he would extract revenge on Panos, and how he would express his still-alive love for Voula, losing connection to everything except the tortured domain between his ears. And the exhaustion he was inflicting on his horse. Finally, the limping horse stopped, refusing to take another step until his master, and former friend, took notice of where he was and what he was doing.

"Alright, I'll look at the map," he said to the horse as he gave it a well-deserved drink of water from his sac, and let it graze on the stubbled grass between the rocks imbedded into the dew-covered ground. On ground that looked like nothing that Basilis described. Treeless ground which was supposed to be forested. The first time the terrain was different than how the map described it. Dimitri rechecked the route, and it was true to the map, with regard to distance and direction. Then he verified his location with a compass. All the mathematics said this was where he was supposed to go, and just as he was about to reach the final prescribed direction, everything Basilis put on the map was wrong. Just a small plateau on a mountain that was surrounded by nothing but fog. The air was thin as well, making Dimitri feel the heat of the sun on his back as cold, and the cold wind blowing into his face as hot.

He found himself laughing. A mad laughter. He looked up to the sky, feeling Basilis' presence in the incoming clouds, his face being forged into an image by them. "So, you lead me here to no-where! So I could become a Visionary like you! A gift, you maybe say. But I still love Voula more than God, and would choose to live a lie with her than the Truth with anyone else. And there is the small matter of the child, who you say is the seed of the new Crete. A mixture of my blood and hers. My people and hers. My sins and virtues mixed with..." Dimitri stopped talking, feeling that Basilis up in the clouds had no answers. Or refused to give them. Particularly as the clouds became blacker, and lingered above him. "Go ahead and piss on me," Dimitri said. "It's not like I don't deserve it."

The sky answered with a downpour of rain, soaking Dimitri down to the bone, and giving his horse a well deserved and enjoyed bath. After having their 'say', the clouds gave way to clear sky, blowing away the fog. To the North, lay a hut, amidst a clump of trees. Dimitri walked his horse towards it, helping himself to a view through his spy glass as he descended down a small hill to the mini-plateau nestled by high mountains on all sides. The hut became a cabin, then a house. A real house with flowers around it. A garden to the side which sprouted beans, peas, tomatoes, cabbage and several other legumes that made Dimitri's mouth water. A chimney spewing out a gentle river of smoke that merged with the blue sky as it gave itself up to it. And open windows, pies and cakes on the window sills. The war had not touched a single blade of grass here. Indeed, if there was an oasis spared from the sandstorm of War that had ravaged most every inch of Crete, this was it.

Dimitri's horse was now walking soundly on all legs. Anticipating the moment he would be reunited with Voula and his son, or daughter, or perhaps one of each, he prodded the steed to advance at a trot. But the horse stopped, sniffing something in the air. Then turning around. "Fair enough," Dimitri said to the horse as he dismounted and tethered it

to a tree, giving it enough room to graze on the tall grass beneath it. “We both deserve some easy times,” he continued.

With each step towards the house, Dimitri’s anger towards Panos turned into love for Voula. And re-thinking about why Panos had arranged for Voula and child to being taken here. “A big brother would do no less than insure that his little sister be as far away from the War as possible, particularly when the life of his nephew or niece is involved,” Dimitri thought. “And if Panos is the father of my child, I’ll be the uncle in all of this. The most important thing is that we’re family. I just wish that he told me what was going on, or that Voula did, but then again, I’m no great prize either. And to protect themselves from me, I suppose one or both of them had to lie to me, so that---“

The morality discourse between Dimitri’s ears stopped as soon as his olfactory-challenged nostrils sniffed the reason why his horse decided to not move forward. The first smell was that of blood. Then burnt flesh. The wind blew open the front door, revealing a hand inside. And a clump of hair next to it. A note lay between the chopped off hand and the fistful of black hair soaked with blood. “Ibriham. What is left of your wife and child can be yours again if you turn yourself in.” On the other side of the note was a map, clearly outlining directions to a beach a mile East of Eliatis.

Dimitri fumed with rage, then heard a galloping horse approach from behind. He hid behind the water-trough, then whipped out his pistol, pointing it at the rider before he could raise his weapon. “So, what went on here, Panos?” he asked the rider, throwing him the note, and the hand, and the clump of blood-soaked hair.

“Nothing like this,” Panos said. Horrified as much as he was guilty. But for three more reasons, as the wind blew open the door to the barn, revealing three mutilated and thankfully dead bodies nailed to make-shift crosses. Dimitri didn’t know the names of the souls who once inhabited those bodies, but he recognized their faces.

“My fellow klefti,” Panos said. “The most trusted klefti I have ever known, who I entrusted to look after---“

“---Voula, who stayed away from me because of what lies you told her after you took her away from Nikos’ hut, for the ‘good of the child’, of course,” Dimitri shot back.

“You can crucify me later, as painfully as you need to, before which I will tell you how and why I followed you here,” Panos replied. “But for now, we both have to ride to HELIKIS as quickly and discretely, quickly and carefully as possible.”

With that, Panos set fire to the barn and said a prayer for his departed Comrades. Then mounted his horse. Dimitri followed, knowing he would have to take the lead in whatever was going to happen next.

CHAPTER 24

There were many ironies about the location where the boat was waiting for Dimitri, and now Panos, but it was the shape of the trees on either side of the naturally-made harbor which allowed for a single craft to pull in, un-noticed by anyone on water or land. “An arched door with nine umbrellas to it on either side,” Voula noted as she looked at the branches sway back and forth in the wind from her assigned position on the perch of the fishing boat. “Just like Dimitri described his entry onto this island. On a fishing boat that Dimitri said was operated by people far more powerful and strong than he ever was, or could be. But there was one thing that was on the boat that brought Dimitri here that’s different now,” she continued as the sound of the night’s ‘cricket serenade’ made the warm breezes feel all the more colder.

“A woman who still calls the man who lied to him about his real name ‘Dimitri’?” the old man at the stem of the vessel said in the manner of the wise old grandfather who died just as she was old enough to really hear what he had to say to her. “And a woman who should listen to her smart head rather than her misguided heart,” the raggedy-clad man continued as he looked at his pocketwatch in the light of the full moon above his deeply wrinkled face. “All of this was your idea as much as it was mine.”

“Not THIS part of the plan!” Voula growled back, rattling the chains attaching her to the mainsail with her left hand. Then taking her still very intact right and using all the might in her two arms to loosen it. Succeeding in doing nothing except making even more of her long, uncut black mane fall into her beet red face. “I want to get out of here, and take my son with me!”

“In time,” the old fisherman said as the night air got warmer, forcing him to unbutton his hole-ridden shirt. Under it an Egyptian officer’s uniform under it. A general’s uniform of the highest rank obtainable, recently created by himself. “We all have to be patient, and the best things happen for all of us,” Ali Muhamed said as he looked at the shoreline, noting that all of his most trusted men were in position behind the trees surrounding the small, carpeted clearing where Dimitri was to come and surrender himself.

Voula smelled food on the table. “Dimitri’s favorite food, no doubt,” she said regarding the next course that was being laid upon the table. “A table set for three.”

“It’s an honor for any woman to eat with the men,” Ali said with a gentlemanly bow. “But if you call Ibriham Dimitri one more time!” he growled, pulling out his short sword.

“You’ll scalp me for real, and cut off both of my hands?” Voula smirked. “But, please, you should start with my breasts,” she smiled, pulling one of them out of her blouse. “But it’s proper Turkish protocol to rape your inferior species Greek prey before you mutilate us,” she continued, as he unbuttoned the rest of her blouse, then lifted up her skirt. “So, go ahead. Be my guest. But maybe you’ll find a biological surprise inside my snatch that you didn’t expect.”

“A powerful germ that you manufactured somewhere in the hills that moves up my penis of any Turk who rapes you, and kills him slowly,” Ali said, considering the possibilities, terror in his eyes.

“In every woman in Crete now,” she boasted. “But if you give me back my son, and leave me on the beach, and take yourself and your Turkish friends with you back home, we will send a boatload of the cure for these diseases that our raped women gave you. My hand to God on that!”

“Said as a kefti atheist,” Ali shot back. “And as a liar who just confirmed to me what you rebels are planning as your secret weapon against us,” he continued with a smile as Voula’s face revealed that she had made a miscalculation for which she could never forgive herself. “An idealistic plan of yours that I got without having anyone use the lash on you,” he laughed. “You may be a brave people, you Greeks, but you are not as clever as us.”

“We’re not as clever as you Egyptians, or your ‘brothers in the service of Allah’, the Turks?” Voula shot back with an snide smile. “Brothers who you’ll go to war with as soon as you’re finished annihilating us?”

“Disarming you,” Ali replied, as he laid his hand on Voula’s still-untortured and intact limbs as a father. One that seemed sincere, as well as desperate. “For your own good. So you can be part of our Empire. An enlightened Empire that needs people like you, Voula. Your son. And my son Ibriham. ”

“Who you think will ‘come to his senses’ and come home to you as long as you keep his son or me hostage,” Voula laughed. “Dimitri, Ibriham or whatever he is calling himself these days, puts the Cause before any people. Because he knows the people ARE the cause. And he knows that if you make your choices about who you fight with or against on the basis of family loyalties, you’ll always lose. The really Enlightened Ones never put the welfare of family before the welfare of our Cause.”

Ali reflected on Voula’s remark, hit straight in between the eyes with that accusation. The most powerful man in Egypt and, perhaps after the Greek Skirmish was done with, the Mediteranian, looked behind his eyes and was lost in a realm of would haves and could haves that had gotten out of control, for everyone. After seeming to assess his options, and inevitable penances, he looked at his watch, noting the passage of time, worry about to officially become defeat.

“Ibriham is better off without you, and Dimitri is better off without me,” Voula said with regret, having mastered the chess game, in ways she never wanted to. “And, as we both know, there are no winners in war,” she continued, laying her hand on Ali’s sweat soaked, and shaking, shoulder. “Just those who are cursed to be alive, having lost the ones we were once blessed to love, forever.”

“Or perhaps not,” Ali said as he looked behind Voula, pushing her gentle hand away with a forceful flick of his wrist. “Allah is merciful!” he proclaimed.

“But apparently Jesus isn’t,” Voula said as she turned around and saw Dimitri ride into the clearing, looking at his map, then dismounting from his horse. Within three mouth watering whiffs of the cuisine on the table, he helped himself to a bite of Gibna Domiati cheese, and a mouthful of Konafah, finding both painfully to his liking. Just as they reached his empty stomach, Panos was dragged in from the woods by two heavily armed guards, pushed into the ground, and forced to eat dirt.

“We all may be losers in this game of chess, once it is played out,” Ali said softly to Voula. “But your son will be the winner,” he claimed. “Hand to Allah on that!”

Ali seemed sincere, and ominously right. For now, it was the only thing Voula could hold onto as she looked at Ali greet his son with a gentlemanly handshake, which led to a distanced embrace, from both ends. The desperate father then pointed the attention of his Prodigal son to Voula, through a clearing in the trees.

“I’m alright,” Voula waved, showing both of her hands, and a full head of hair. Dimitri seemed relieved, and more trusting of the deal that was to come. Such made situations her worry even more about her future, her family, her friends and the Cause to which she was still dedicated. It was the worse conflict that she had ever experienced. A conflict not of armies, guns, and knives, but of loyalties.

CHAPTER 25

For three nights, Father Basilis’ body slept soundly on the bed in the very private room assigned within the fortress by both Cretan Generals. The pillows were flush with feathers and the foot-thick mattress was firm enough to keep his back convoluting yet soft enough to give the skin and muscles on top of his aching bones a gentle message throughout the night. Cross ventilation from windows on two sides of the room blew in fresh, cool air from the sea that whisked away any stench of excrement, mold, stale perfume or sexual secretions in what had been the mistress’s quarters, reserved for the highest ranking Turkish officers and the most influential Egyptian advisors only. It was not choice to be assigned to such comfortable and colorful quarters, but Basilis was told that it was so he could sleep more soundly and dream more intensely.

It was those dreams that now haunted Basilis this night. Ever since he had unleashed three decades of repressed anger at the Turk he had skinned alive near Anapolis, his dreams were becoming more real, and predictive of events that either were happening, or were about to. But it was not always a passive process. Voices were coming to him during awake state that came from no bodies which could be touched by a human hand, or seen with the mortal eye. Voices that sometimes spoke in tongues, but which moved him to do so. And to feel more than he could ever understand. Then to somehow be an active composer as well as instrument in the gods’, or God’s, plan. Indeed, he wondered

if he was observing events to happen in his sleep or if he was causing them to manifest themselves in the waking world which was the only realm in which the people were trapped, or within which they were protected. Those people valued what Basilis had to say now, no matter how he said it. And the 'advise' he channeled to those souls did them more good rather than harm. Or so he believed, thus far anyway.

Three hours before dawn, Basilis woke up screaming, not knowing if he had communicated with and worked with God, or the Devil, or maybe both. The voices of both of those Entities sounded alike to him now, as he sought to be the Instrument of Spirit, otherwise known by the scholars as the Beyond God which is the Truth behind the anthropomorphic and always false descriptors and human mortals give to that which is Immortal, beyond human, and beyond human descriptors. But in the absence of being able to connect to the Truth behind the illusion-infected truths, 'benevolence' came to mind as an attribute which the human mind could trust, and aspire to without being diverted into even more illusion. That benevolence was connected to humanity, and that whatever the Will of God was, the benevolence of Its most influential creation was at the Core of it.

As Basilis saw, and felt it, the most influential and powerful of the Spirit's Creation was Voula's son. His being alive. His being taken care of. His being trained in body, mind and Spirit so that he could save the people who were responsible for giving him mortal life, and save the world around him for other influential creations to come. "I did everything I had to for that child!" Basilis screamed up to the sky above the ceiling, drenched in sweat from pale head to shaking toes. The child was being drawn and quartered by people with blindfolds on their eyes and balls of clotted blood in their ears. They pulled ropes attached to the child's limbs as hard as they could in opposite directions, not knowing themselves that if they advanced one more step forward, they would fall down a cliff into a large abyss. A bright light from the child's eyes shot flashes into the limbs, repairing the tendons, skin and bones that were about to break open. But the harder the child directed the healing Light into the limbs, the harder the 'loved ones' exposing with their mouths how much they loved the child pulled them apart.

"I listened to Your signs, and did what had to be done!" Basilis yelled out again, pushing his hoarse voice beyond its limits until it became a desperate and painful whisper. "I used the truthfulness of the angels and the most clever deceptions adaptable from the demons! And yet, he is still in danger! What did I do wrong?" he lamented, as tears poured down his face. "How can I make it right? What must I sacrifice now to see what will serve the Ultimate Benevolence?"

Basilis got not a word, not a whisper, not a single sign from Spirit. Nothing from the Heavenly Father in heaven who had a dysfunctional relationship with his children. And nothing from Satan below, who was, theoretically anyway, part of God's creation and plan as well. But there was one Deity who Basilis still could trust. Passionately-applied Reason and Intuition. A seemingly self-contradictory virtue which always worked in the heat of the moment, that was never associated with any Christian saint, or Olympian god.

But this Virtue required total commitment to be set into motion, a commitment which would also involve sacrifice, particularly. The implementation of such was on the desk. He pulled himself out of bed, feeling the hard ground with his shaking feet. He walked, then stumbled, then fell upon the chair in front of the desk and picked up the trimming scissors on top of it with his right hand. Then with his left, he opened the drawer, retrieving paper which had, thankfully, been spared being converted into cartridges. “You will be my final instrument now, if you are willing to be so,” he said to a feather pen sticking out of an ink well. The wind that blew in from the seaside window, making the turfs of the feather pen play music. Harmonic tones that said ‘yes’ to what Basilis was thinking and feeling, in both major and minor chords.

“So, it begins, and ends,” Basilis said he hummed along with the requiem, cutting open holes the veins of his left hand, spilling the blood into an ink well, and putting pen to paper. “It’s going to take a lot of blood for me to put down what I have to say,” he said to the crucifix portraying Jesus on the cross which had been put in the room to depose it of the demons left behind by the sex-craving Turks and their sometime unwilling ‘Mistresses’. “But as someone who did what I’m about to do, and will make others do, I know you will understand.” It was the first time the ever-vigilant Priest’s soul gave way to an unbridled smile. And, as he wrote the final words on the parchments which became a book, the last.

CHAPTER 26

Rain came down heavy just before dawn, converting the hard sand below Basili’s window into mud that absorbed everything that had been on top of it. Still, the morning sun made the bright pieces of metal shine like bright stars on a clear, moonless night. With no shortage of hands to try to clench those stars out of that one-dimensional sky, by every means possible. And an empty sac above it attached with a blood-soaked nail to the window-ceil.

“Coins from the angels for the poor, dropped down from heaven, for their common good,” General Antoniatis reading Basili’s most elegant clerical calligraphy.

“Twenty-thousand lira, from the Turks,” General Kallerges fumed as he examined thirty coins still left in the burlap sac, making a calculation as to how many had been there already. He looked at the note, signed ‘Father Basilis-Judas,’ then down at the crowd of men, women and children grasping for whatever coins they could get from the knee-deep mud, and grabbing whatever fell or could be taken out of the pockets of their fellow Greeks besides them. “We have tell these people where this money came from. Including these thirty pieces of, at least in part, silver, that maybe he left for us.”

“Be my guest,” Antoniatis said, taking half of the remaining thirty coins into his own pocket. He walked over to the feather bed on which Basilis had slept on so soundly for three nights and so ominously the previous evening. “Tell these people, who all loved, respected and trusted Father Basilis, that he sold out their best doctor and most colorful

klefti to the Turks. Or better yet, ask the Good Father himself,” he continued, pointing to Basili’s lifeless, ex-sanguinated corpse swinging back and forth by a rope hung from the rafters.

Kallegres looked into Basilis’ eyes, more horrified and confused than he had been with any corpse. “We, I, should have eased his pain rather than profit from his madness,” the General who learned to trust Basili’s visions more than his own reason. Visions that always, in the end, were based on real reason, and which got good results when applied in the realm of the seeable, touchable, smellable and testable. But there was another issue that B was more concerned with right now. “Panos, the klefti poet who was assigned to protect him, who we both promoted to Captain. Where was he last night?”

“Writing poetry somewhere, I suppose. I haven’t seen him this morning. No one else has either,” Antoniatis said. “Or maybe he went off into the hills to collect herbs to rub into his face to make his moustache grow in faster,” he chuckled.

“Or maybe he followed Doctor Dimitri, or whatever his real name is, without tell us,” Kallerges replied. “My valley-born and raised mother told me that you can never trust a klefti from the mountains or a European from anywhere. They listen to us, but always obey their own agendas. Which is what they’ll probably do after this War is over, whether we win, or lose.”

“And in the meantime, what do we do with this?” A said, picking up the ten pages written by Basili literally in his own blood, reading through for the fourth time. “A tale of three martyrs. Starting with stating, between geographical metaphors and mythical characters that are beyond my knowledge, or experience, that dead martyrs are more powerful than dead heros. An opinion verified by what Basili said was his last Vision. A Vision of the future in which Panos, Voula, and Dimitri are publically executed by the Turks to discourage Greeks from starting the Revolution again. But instead of making Greeks more indifferent, scared or self-centered, it made all Cretan, be they Christians, Moslems or Jews, rise up against the Turks and their Eygptian allies as they never had before.”

“Basilis’ Visions have always come true,” Kallerges noted, doing another mental count of how many rebels he still had left and the ever-increasing number of Turks that had landed on Crete in the last three months. “But this last Basili Vision had a child in it. What did the child do?”

“Inspired a revolution that succeeded in Crete. And without any help from the Greeks on the mainland, the English, the French, the Russians, or even the Americans,” Antoniatis replied.

“And this ‘Christ child’ inspired this from the cradle, the pulput, the back of a horse, or the cross?” Kallerges inquired.

“Basilis didn’t say,” Antoniatis answered, pursing the manuscript. “But though he didn’t give us the when of the child making the final revolution happen, he did give us a clue to the ‘where’ of it.”

Antoniatis showed Kallerges a map of Crete that Basilis had drawn, with mythological creatures sketched in with artistic skill not matched by semblance of geographical accuracy of the present, But the name of the town besides the cradle was clearly written.

“So, we send a detachment to Eliatis, to retrieve Voula’s child, where maybe we’ll find Voula, Panos and Dimitri,” Antoniatis said.

“Or perhaps a trap for whoever we send, who will tell the Turks everything about how few Greeks we really have here,” Kallerges replied.

“I’ll send my best men!” Antoniatis asserted. “Men who would never talk, and never sell out their fellow Greeks. As trustable as---”

“ ---Basilis was?” Kallerges interjected.

Both men looked to the lifeless body of the Priest, secretly asking his ghost to appear to give them one more Vision, or at least an explanation as to why the man who devoted his entire life to Jesus became a Judas. Jesus’ most needed disciple with regard to the plan that God the Father set in motion for the redemption of humanity. But a plan that took 400 years to be recognized as Divine by the Romans. But a plan that was never recognized as redeeming by the Ottoman Turks, or their Egyptian allies.

CHAPTER 27

Dimitri, Voula and her child Achmed, as his grandfather renamed him, traveled in good health and excellent comfort to Eliatis in the Captain’s cabin of the ship. Panos’ voyage was in the hole of the vessel, in shackles his legs caked with the excrement or other special prisoners, his own blood coating his arms, the rats licking his testicals his shipmate companions. His new lodgings at the fortress of Gramouva once the ship landed was not much different. It was there that he was greeted by a bigger rat, walking on two legs, wearing a cleanly pressed and perfectly tailored Turkish Officer’s uniform.

“So, Doctor Ibriham,” Panos smirked as he inspected the visitor to the holding cell for even more special prisoners. “Does that soldier suit come with Greek ears for epilates, Greek eyes as buttons, and torn out hearts of slain freedom-loving patriots as---“

“---brains before balls,” Dimitri replied with an arched back and stuck up nose, while still being watched by the guards outside the door. “And family before Causes,” he continued, pointing Panos’ attention to Voula on the other side of the bars. Her baby nessed in her arms, laughing and singing with her. Her own body washed, every wound

on it healed or on the way to being so by two attending physician and three nurses. With ample food on the table in front of herself and the child.

“And the Revolution?” Panos asked.

“Is lost, in Crete anyway, and probably the mainland as well,” Dimitri said. “We all knew that from the beginning.”

“But the Turks,” Panos replied, looking at the Turkish guards. “The dirty vermin whose grand empire is falling, taking them all to hell as the whores and mother fucking dogs they really are!” he continued in broken Turkish.

Dimitri held back the guards from extracting their revenge prematurely on Panos. “Brains before balls, survival before honor,” he seemed to say to them, in what was probably kathalevuse high-brow aristocratic Turkish. In any case, Dimitri was able to convince the guards to leave the cell and close the door behind them.

“And if they lock that door instead of just close it?” Panos challenged. “We survive the Turkish Army defeating us in battle, then let them hand over Crete to the Egyptians, who will be our true liberators?”

“A plan that makes sense,” Dimitri conceded as he sat down, offering Panos a multi lumped loaf of nut- fruit bread from inside his coat.

“Except for the fact that whoever liberates us, ultimately enslaves us,” Panos replied, knocking away the bread from Dimitri’s outstretched hand.

“Including ourselves,” Dimitri replied, pulling the bread away from three overfed rodents about to indulge on it. “Which I’m sure you will be able to put more into poetic verse far better than I can put into a novel, treatise, discourse or---”

“There’s something you want to ask from me,” Panos said. “If it’s forgiveness---”

“---something more important, and personal,” Dimitri interjected. He walked around the cell, one hand on his chin, the other at the small of his back. Part professor, part general. All aristocrat. “Whose idea was it to kidnap Voula in the dead of night, during the ‘robbery’ from the bootleggers who stole his liquor and wine?”

“Mine by intention, Father Basili’s by design,” Panos confessed proudly.

“And Voula’s by necessity,” Dimitri conceded. “You had to keep her and the baby away from the war, and me, for which I now thank you. But what lies did you tell her about me, and the War, so that she stayed in the safe haven you built for her?”

“Voula has an active imagination, and is a pessimist,” Panos smiled. “I let her believe the worst thoughts in her head. Whatever she did, or didn’t do, it was for the sake of her son.”

“Who should have been yours,” Dimitri said. “Was he? Is he?” he continued, thinking that he was prepared for the real answer.

Panos smirked back at Dimitri with his most convincing poker face.

“I deserve that, and more,” Dimitri replied. “But you don’t,” he continued, pulling out a key and knife from the loaf of bread, placing them into his hand.

“And once I’m outside this door?” Panos asked. “I’m one against all of your friends out there. Allies...”

“Yes, allies, for the moment,” Dimitri replied. “Who will be taking me, everything from Nikos’ lab, and all of the books from that lab to Cairo on a large, very well guarded ship.”

“Carrying minimally effective medicines, and maximally effective germs,” Panos grunted.

“As am I,” Dimitri replied, pulling up his sleeve, showing Panos no less than ten man-made stabs into his arm, each with a different pustule around it. “According to the calculations we DIDN’T put in the lab books, unless you can read Old Man Nikos’ mirrored ancient Minoan script, it takes me between 24 to forty eight hours to inflict a deadly disease directly to any Turk, or Egyptian, who is the most influential,” he said. “All I have to do is fart, barf, bleed, cough or ejaculate into or onto our most dangerous enemies,” he continued, then went on to describe the type of disease in Latin associated with each of the lumps. Diseases that sounded melodic to the ear, but deadly to whoever was inflicted with that music.

“A good plan,” Panos, conceded. “As long as you stay alive. Or remain undetected. But what about Voula? You may want to have another child with her.”

“Would that I could,” Dimitri said. “But her boat to Cairo, with her son ‘Achmeds’, sails two days after mine does, and sinks, after the captain comes down with plague” he continued, sneaking two small sacs from under his coat to Panos. “More conventional explosives for Voula’s boat,” he said by way of explanation. “Which, after you go past these guards when they’ve shitted their brains and guts out, you should be able to find when you’re out at sea. I’ve already told Voula where the spare lifeboats are on the ship in question, and given her a few plague bombs she can distribute to the crew on vessel.”

Panos didn’t know what to think. So many questions he wanted to ask. But only one came to mind, and heart. “‘Achmed’,” he asked. “What do you want YOUR son’s name to be?”

“Whatever his stepfather wants to name him,” Dimitri smiled back, embroiled in gratitude.

“Dimitri’, I think, Ibriham,” Panos said with an affirmative nod.

With that, the guards opened the door to the cell, followed by a high ranking officer who bowed to Dimitri.

“Everything is set to go,” he said, or seemed to.

“Yes, it is,” Dimitri smiled, as Ibriham. He strode towards the door, faking a cough en route, then faked a fall on the guards, blaming one of them for being clumsy and the other for exposing his bayonette too openly. ‘General Ibriham’ chewed out all three of his inferiors, as Panos smiled with vengeful satisfaction. Then looked outside the bars to Voula, whose eyes were already on him, with a smile that was warm, loving and...finally, free.

CHAPTER 28

History is written not by the winners, but by those who seek to find Purpose in the present by glorifying AND clarifying the past. Both in terms of the political events that happened, and the people who history books would not, or could not, portray.

‘Objective’ history reports that on the mainland, Greeks did finally overthrow the Turks within a few years after of starting the Revolution in 1821. The self-liberated Greeks then fought amongst themselves, nearly causing the Turks to conquer them again. The British, French and Russians assisted the rebels, then became their ‘protectors’, providing them with a German King to ensure their democracy.

As for Crete, where the fighting was most intense, the fortress at Grameuva remained in rebel hands till 1828, but the rest of Crete didn’t. It would take two more revolts and another eighty years of struggle till the Hellenic flag flew over the Island where Greek civilization began.

The Egyptians were never given control of Crete by the conquering Turks, and went to War against the Ottomans in 1832, without any substantial success.

As for my mother, father and Uncle Panos (as he continued to make me call him), I’m not sure if the stories they told me about my birth, and legacy, were real or not. But believing them does more good than harm, and one cannot say that about a lot in this world. I do know that I lived long enough to see my Island finally go back to being ruled by its own people. Maybe this book account of such had something to do with it. And your reading it now will help you liberate your own people, starting with yourself. But

please remember, that freedom is both scary and precious. And is, in its purest form, the opportunity to be bound by the Highest of Responsibilities and Obligations.

Professor Doctor Dimitri Dragaris, 1904.

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