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Author Auslander, Joseph & Wurdem
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THE Islanders

JOSEPH AUSLANDER

and

AUDREY WURDEMAN

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THE ISLANDERS

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For

PETER *and* LILLIAN



Howbeit we must be cast upon a
certain island.

-ACTS 27:26



Chapter One

AT NIGHT the shutters are clapped-to over the windows of the Parthenon Bar and Grill, closing out the night thick-salted with stars, and closing in the restaurant smells, the oil and garlic and fish smells of the kitchen, the sweet-sour garbage smells of the back pantry, the acrid wash-room odors, the smell of the dining-room itself, which is a mixture of all these, and the special smell behind the bar of stale spilled beer and *retsina* and *ouzo*.

Before the shutters are closed, the tide-flat smell of the sponges which ebbs and freshens, day and night, over Turtle Run, flows through the Parthenon and modulates the restaurant odors, but during the night the restaurant odors fecundate in the warm dark to pleasure the scent-nerves of Cat.

During the day the Boss is king in the Parthenon, and many people rush back and forth in the kitchen, in the passageway, up and down between the tables, so that there is little joy for Cat anywhere in the place. During the day Cat spends most of her time sleeping, on top of a carton of toilet paper on a shelf in the dim recesses of the restaurant. The plump rolls of tissue are soft and pleasantly curved for Cat to lie on; their texture is her comfort; the ease with which they yield to her inquisitive claws and ribbon out in long spirals amuses her, and so far the Boss had not forbidden her these luxuries. But at night, the Boss is asleep upstairs, the people are gone, and Cat is queen of the Parthenon.

Cat is alone, but she is never lonely. There is much to interest her when the restaurant is dark and empty. There are delicious tidbits to be found here and there under tables. There are spots of congealed gravy under the oven to be sniffed and licked. There are black beetles and big grey woolly spiders to hunt out and toss from paw to paw. There are mysterious sounds ... the scurry of a mouse, the papery rustle of a cockroach, the drip of a leaky faucet, the gurgle of the pipes as water is drawn upstairs, to keep Cat alert. Often there is the wadded-up shell of cellophane from the Boss's cigar to pounce upon over and over, and such a cellophane ball is a delight indeed, for, although it lacks taste when Cat nibbles it, it remains resilient and crackling for a whole night's play, until she eventually forgets about it or loses it through a crack. Compared to a wad of cellophane, a black beetle or a grey spider is a poor thing at best, broken and lifeless after a few strokes of her paws.

Cat pounces, chases, romps up and down with the tasteless yet strangely satisfying little ball, leaps upon the bar, where the Boss does not allow her during the day and the evening, threads her way among the inverted goblets so delicately that her velvet paws, their needles retracted on the smooth surface of the bar, do not so much as brush their glassy bells. Cat leaps down, sprawls in abandon on the cool floor, dozes and wakes and pounces once again.

It is doubtful if Cat knows she is a cat, or that the Boss is a human, or that this place is a restaurant. Perhaps she knows the Parthenon Bar and Grill as a heavenly cosmos, divinely created for her sustenance and enjoyment. Perhaps to her the Boss is a shadowy giant whose sole purpose in life is to provide her with milk to sup and bones to suck. Yet, if this be cat heaven, why those others, rushing with loud foot-clatterings up and down during the day? Why

not only herself, Cat, and the mice and grey woolly spiders and black beetles, and the Boss to pour milk and drop tidbits and cellophane toys?

Cat is as yet young; she knows no better than this. She has yet to meet others of her kind, and fight and fall in love; these things will come with the panting hot days of summer; perhaps in July, perhaps in August. But it is still springtime in her life, and in the life of the year; scarcely four months have passed since she was a blind, squirming bit of orphaned fluff. Oh, there is so much Cat does not know as yet!

Meanwhile, she makes her rounds of inspection; the rounds made over and over, a dozen times a night, interrupted by romps with a huge flying cockroach whose wings she breaks with a single paw-flick, by claw-sharpening upon chair-legs, by fitful dozings and quick starts.

Under the table where the Boss sits she sniffs and nose-nudges rice grains, sneezes when she snuffs up cigar ash, searches for and finds the inevitable cellophane ball. The next table is stale, flat and unprofitable; here sit the pensioners of the Parthenon, the hangers-on, the misfits whom all but the Boss have turned out to beggardom. These pensioners sign chits as pride-saving gestures at first, but after fifteen dollars has been charged with no attempt at payment the Boss sighs and curses and impales the bundle of stubs on a bill hook of forgiven debts. Currently, there are but two pensioners of the Parthenon; last month there were four, and next, there may be three or five.

Black beetles scurry at the edge of the baseboard of the cubby-hole where the waiter hangs his black coat in the morning when he comes to work and his white coat when he leaves at night. A fuzzy spider, the size of a mouse, lurks behind the juke-box. Under one table there are two

raisins, still moist with rice custard. Under another lies the leg-bone of chicken, fortunately too hard for her kitten-teeth to splinter into her throat and the tender membrane of her intestines. There is no dirt in the Parthenon, only the debris of evening to be swept out daily when the Boss opens up in the morning. Cat remembers the Man and Woman who sat last night at one of the side tables and offered her bits of their supper; then she disdained the broiled liver, but now it would be a tasty morsel. She searches, and catches up the savories on her thorny, fastidious tongue. She chases her tail, and tires, and falls asleep.

She visits the garbage-can in the rear pantry. Even in her most inquisitive and avaricious mood, instinct warns her not to leap for the narrow, precarious edge of the can, lest she slip inside and be trapped, and fouled by slops. Nevertheless, there are delicious scraps to be found on the floor beside it, sweet-tasting papery shells of shrimp, tough skins shucked from raw squid, gobbets of lamb suet. She creeps behind the whirring fan-belt of the refrigerator; she stalks a whispery wraith of sound seeping under the back door; she stretches and rolls upon the cool, urine-rinsed tiles of the rest rooms; she lies in wait on the lath floor of the vegetable cooler, dangling her paw as far as she can down to the tantalizing small lizards that rustle along the sand beneath the building.

Outside, day breaks, but in the Parthenon there will be no light until the Boss flings wide those clapped-to shutters, until his ubiquitous broom sweeps out the scraps Cat scorns and the cellophane balls and broken insects which have been her playthings for the night. Then the Daughter hurries down, dressed to go to the office, and sips hurriedly the scalding thick sweet coffee the Boss has prepared for her; the Big Son and the Little Son clatter noisily

to the table; the Waiter bangs the screen door and tramps across to take down his white coat and hang up his black one in the cubbyhole. Until these things happen, the Parthenon Bar and Grill is the cosmos of Cat, and she is both sole queen and subject of her universe.

Chapter Two

EARLY IN the morning, the bays and inlets of the western coast of Florida are swathed in pale creamy mist, blowing landward from the Gulf. Early morning is the time to tend the garden, while the sun still slants tenderly toward earth, and a man can seed a furrow still moist from night. By noon the sandy earth is pleached and yellow; and in the evening a man finds it good to eat, to rest, to drink and to sing. No, with all the other work to do in the world, there is but one hour that can be set aside for gardening, the hour just after dawn.

Christidos did not think, deliberately, of these things, as he plunged his drill six times evenly around each little mound of reddish, sandy loam, and stooped to place two melon seeds in each hole before patting the drill-scar smooth with his fingers. The whole business of planting melons was in his bones and blood; just as was the business of roasting lambs' heads or frying eggplant; just as once the business of diving for sponges had been. His hands did these tasks automatically, and left his brain free for other work they could not do.

There was work for Christidos' brain this morning, distasteful work, it is true, but work which must be accomplished. Christidos was deeply worried about one of his children.

There had often been little worries before, of course, and some great ones, but nothing to compare with the

mountain of a worry that loomed before him now. Thirteen years ago, as his wife lay dying in his arms, he pledged his soul that ten-year-old John and eight-year-old Zoe and four-year-old Stephen would make their mother proud of them. And so they had—until now, when the youngest was at fault. The fault was a drastic one, for clearly Stephen was a thief.

True, the sum was only three dollars, and he had stolen it from his father. Perhaps he had only borrowed it . . . and meant to pay it back. But where would he get the money to replace it, he who had never so much as run an errand for pay in his life? Perhaps, now that he couldn't pay it back, he was ashamed to confess?

But no, Christidos had given Stephen every opportunity to mention such a borrowing fearlessly. He had even given the boy his birthday money a week early, hoping the missing three dollars would reappear in the cash drawer and no words would have to pass between them concerning the matter. Finally, he had asked, point-blank, about the three dollars, and received only a flip dismissal of the subject, and, when he pushed his inquiry, resentful, sullen silence.

Stephen had always been ten times the trouble of both the older children put together. Christidos knew it was because his mother had spoiled him, because he was the baby of the family, and after her death, Christidos himself had spoiled him even more. John and Zoe were old enough to realize the tragedy of their mother's death; it was kept from Stephen because he was so small. And, not long afterward, there was the fever, and days of torturing pain; Christidos had held the small, hot body in his arms, day after day and night after night. Maybe his wife in heaven had heard his hoarse, whispered prayers, and interceded

for the boy, because the slight limp which afflicted him when he was first well enough to run about again had disappeared with the years.

Always Stephen was in trouble in school, even though he had his older brother and sister to fight his battles for him and to coach his lessons. Now he was seventeen, and day after day he hotly contested his right to go to work with the sponge-fleet. This matter of stopping school and getting out on one of the boats, into a man's life and a man's wages, had been a bloodless war between the flushed, angry boy and the heart-saddened man for all of these years. In spite of Christidos' determination that Stephen should have not merely an education, but a fine education, to fit him for one of the professions, the strongest weapons lay in the hands of the boy, for his father had been an accomplished diver when he was twelve, and could not even read or write his own native Greek until long after he came to America.

"What's the good of all this math and stuff?" Stephen argued. "You made big money, Pop, when you were just a kid! All I want is a chance at the dough!"

At other times he would point out that in America all men are equal, and his father's respect for doctors and lawyers and professors made him sound like a greenhorn. Here, at least in theory, to be a laborer is not to be inferior; the principal of the high school earned less in a whole year than a diver in a single week's haul, and moreover, Latin phrases and algebraic equations had nothing to do with under-water wisdom.

John, who had been a sensible, almost a talented, child, had grown into a steady, self-reliant youth and was on the point of accomplishing the "professional" position of which

his father dreamed. Of course, the army training had helped; while Stephen fidgeted in the classroom, he had been away in Officers' Training, and now that he was out of uniform he had found an excellent job as a commercial airlines pilot. Stephen idolized him and was intensely jealous at the same time; John had had the uniform and the glory and all the fun; while he still carried the shameful, childish books to school and brought them back for the homework he hated.

Christidos knew that soon a break would come; perhaps this speculation of the three dollars was the hair-line crack that would widen into a chasm between father and son.

As he smoothed the reddish earth over the melon seeds, he thought of these things, not definitely and analytically, but in a vague cloud of worry like the cloud of morning midges that sang thinly about his head.

There was nothing to do but wait, and try to talk to the boy again. His sad, gentle face was furrowed; the midge-worries whirled in his mind; he smoothed the last drill-hole over and stood looking into the eye of the rising sun.

Your Greek is a garrulous and gregarious sort of fellow; he thinks best as he talks, and soon it would be time for Christidos to lean his garden tools beside the porch and take his worries and his need for talking indoors. A thin stream of smoke, milky against the blue air, was rising out of the chimney of the Parthenon Bar and Grill; Spiros the cook was already tending the fire, and Christidos knew that the roasting lamb was in the pan, basted with oil and organon; the artichokes and celery were on to boil; tripe and suet had been put to simmer for soup, and Spiros was doubtless cutting the scrap meat into squares for stew.

Spiros was always too busy to get breakfast for the family, and besides, Christidos took joy in preparing food for his children himself.

And even as he puttered, and plucked and pinched his aromatic herbs, he thought:

We put things down in notebooks; we set great store upon writing; always there is a piece of paper and a pencil. But we know that there are many papers on which are written promises to pay that no man wishes to remember. We are puzzled as to what useful purpose all this business of putting marks on paper serves. Wherever people come together there is bound to be some writing. When we go to buy some sugar or coffee we see the shopkeeper busy spitting on an indelible pencil and writing away like mad in a book with long red and green lines; even the doctor as he sits beside a sick one writes on pieces of paper, I have heard it said that the savage is different from us in this matter of keeping records. We seem to believe that paper possesses some mysterious power; that when we write on paper it gives us some strange hold over each other. But the savage, they say, needs no writings. Words that are true sink into his heart; he never forgets them. On the other hand, if we lose our papers we are lost. We have even been told by our good priests that we may not be admitted to Heaven unless there is something about us on the credit side of God's ledger. What a big book that must be! I would hate to handle such a book and keep accounts straight. It would drive me crazy.

He stacked his tools neatly, and walked a few paces back and forth, stooping to gather herbs; cutting the long stalks of dill with his clasp-knife, pinching off tender sprigs of origanon and parsley with which Spiros would savor the

menu of the day. Now at last someone was awake besides himself in Turtle Run; now he was no longer alone with red earth and early sky and the freshening tide-flat wind; now he could go in to fulfill his need for talk to disperse the cloud of midge-worries that sang about his ears.

Chapter Three

SPIROS WAS more than just a hired employee; he was the partner of Christidos. Undoubtedly the two men were distantly related, since they both came from the Island of Symi, and everybody on Symi was related to everybody else. They referred to each other as "my cousin" when speaking to strangers and to each other, but the bond between them was deeper than blood; it was the bond of friendship since birth, and of coming to a vast new land together from a tiny old one. It was the bond of a great spiritual loneliness.

The fly-mottled map of Greece and the Aegean which hangs on the wall of the Parthenon Bar and Grill does not even show the island of Symi, since Symi is so small, and so insignificant to the rest of mankind. Symi is the island of sponges, and of nothing but sponges, and the only people who live there are engaged in the trade of sponges. Save for the houses of these people, and the bright sails of their boats in the harbor, Symi is a desert rock, a microscopic pebble in an enormous ocean, a sand-grain under the fingernail of Poseidon. Christidos and Spiros ventured from this sand grain with the innocence of babes in the wood; in Turtle Run they found other Greeks; others from the Dodecanese, even others from Symi, too small to appear pink and neatly labeled with the cartographer's ink against the washed-in blue that map-makers use to denote ocean, but, since they started out together; perhaps without hope of ever seeing a fellow-

townsman again, they were still closer to each other than to any citizen of Symi who might be their next-door neighbor. Here they were, under Poseidon's finger-nail again, only this sand-grain is named Turtle Run, and is half around the world from the Aegean.

Spiros was a small, brown monkey-man; as a boy he had not been heavy enough or strong enough to clasp the diving-stone above his head and leap down, down through the clear waters of the legend-encrusted Aegean to seek out the black-veiled sponges in their rock-crannies. Neither did he have the length of arm and the development of back and shoulder muscles to lie belly-down on the thwarts, snaring the sea-growth with a twist of a trident, nor was he possessed of the sturdy legs of a dredge-caster or a netter. And so Spiros was always a cook, whereas Christidos became one only after one attack too many of the bends unfitted him for the sponge-beds.

The responsibility of the Parthenon Bar and Grill was divided equally; Spiros opened the kitchen early in the morning, made the roasts and stews and soups and all dishes requiring long cooking; Christidos attended to the coffee, and, for lunch and dinner, to the salads and the broiler. When Christidos was not at the broiler or the salad shelf, he sat at a table at the back, smoking his cigars and minding the cash register. Every hour or so he took a turn through the restaurant, down the right side and up the left, stopping to talk at each occupied table; in this way he visited daily with his friends, and occasionally made new acquaintances. After lunch, Christidos had a few free hours while Spiros, his roasts and stews finished, took over the responsibility for the Parthenon. Christidos returned by dinner time, and Spiros went home to his plump wife and his brood of enormous children.

Every one in Spiros' family, save himself, was large. His father before him had been a giant of a man, and his mother was a hewer of wood and a drawer of water. His six sisters and five brothers towered over him as pine trees tower over moss; his wife was two hundred pounds of muscle cushioned with fat as hard as suet; the children she bore her small husband made the midwife beam and gasp at their prodigious size.

Spiros was really not more intelligent than the rest of his family; it was only because he was so small that he seemed so. For the physically inferior must make the best and most ingenious use of their brains, to put them on an equal footing with the big creatures of earth, and so a small man sharpens his wits on the bitter whetstone of his size until he can outstrip his hulking brothers whose minds can afford to be lazy because their mere reflexes are sufficient to care for their needs.

Problems beset Spiros, also, this spring morning, and he was glad to see Christidos lay aside his tools and come in with the handful of herbs, because he wanted to solve these problems, and the only way he knew was the Greek way, that is, to talk them out. Of course, Christidos was familiar with them, just as he was familiar with Christidos' worries about Stephen, but talk helped. Mulling them over, morning after morning when the restaurant was quiet, laid a patina on them, as an oyster overlays the irritant sharp particle with nacre, and creates the splendid sickness of a pearl to ease the alien intrusion. The problems which beset Spiros were like and yet unlike those of Christidos; most of them concerned his son, but there the resemblance ceased.

Like Christidos, Spiros worshipped the god of education; to have a son who is a professional man was the

dream, the rainbow's end, the ultimate ecstasy. Spiros' eldest, Philip, was already in medical school. How many thousands of pounds of lamb Spiros had boiled and baked and stewed, how many countless chickens he had plucked and dressed, how many barrels of tripe he had converted into soup no one ever bothered to estimate, least of all himself, but the sum total of it was the education of his children, and principally that of Philip, who would some day have a shining white office, and a uniformed nurse to let ordinary folk in to see the great Doctor Spiros.

When Christidos' second child, Zoe, was born, it was the most natural thing in the world for the two fathers to assume that she would someday marry Philip. After her mother's death, Mrs. Spiros was a second mother to the Christidos children, and a formal betrothal and marriage was taken for granted to such an extent that there seemed no need for discussion of it. "When Philip and Zoe are married" was as likely a preface to a remark as "when the sponge fleet is blessed" or "when pay-day comes." It was neatly prophetic; it was a consummation devoutly to be wished, and the wish was unquestionably sure of fulfillment. Philip and Zoe made a handsome couple, and, happy omen for an arranged betrothal, they were genuinely fond of each other.

And now Philip, home for the spring vacation, calmly informed Spiros last evening that he and Zoe had suddenly realized that their families were assuming an old world attitude toward matters which, to the young people, were far too personal and individual for parental decision. Moreover, Philip, taking his life into his own hands, had fallen in love—or at least, thought he had—with a girl who worked in the medical library where he studied night after night. A girl librarian, someone already in the professional

world which Spiros held in awe, might be regarded as a great catch for the son of a cook, but on the other hand, she was three years older than the boy, which caused Spiros to wonder whether or not she had led his son on, by wiles of which he knew nothing; she was not even a Greek girl, but one of this strange race of Americans, with whom, in the thoroughly Hellenic settlement of Turtle Run, he had little contact, and, worst of all, it would be well-nigh impossible to explain Philip's unfilial decision to Christidos, closer to Spiros than a brother. His inquisitive mind turned it over and over; the honor that a highly educated city girl loved his boy, the useful place that such a woman could take in a young doctor's life, the shame that she was not of Greek blood, and that her family was unknown to Spiros, and that there might be animosity on both sides, the fear that she was one of the fast, painted creatures whose pictures he saw sometimes in American newspapers which the children brought home, and the high regard and affection he and all his family had for Zoe and Christidos.

"But that's the very trouble," Philip argued patiently, his tall form towering over his father's, his brow broad and white where Spiros' was furrowed and brown, his long hands ruffling through his black hyacinthine curls, his wide-spaced eyes which were of that peculiar, intense, discerning blue which comes from a thousand years of gazing seaward, now puzzled and estranged by his father's obstinacy. "Zoe and I have been brought up as brother and sister. It ... why, it just wouldn't seem right to marry her!"

"But you love Zoe?" Spiros' small monkey-face was twisted with worry.

"Sure I love her! I love her like I love all the kids in our

family . . . Maria and Evridiki and the little ones . . . but can I help it if she seems as much my own flesh and blood as Maria and Evridiki? When we were babies we were bathed in the same tub, and put to sleep under the same blankets; can I lead her to bed again, now we are man and woman? This would be an incestuous sleep, destroying the love I feel for her as my little sister . . ."

Philip had begun in English; now he lapsed into Greek with the mounting intensity of his eagerness to make his position clear.

"It is unthinkable . . . must you try to ruin both our lives for an old notion of yours? Zoe wants this marriage no more than I; there is something fine and strong between us which physical love would make as barren as the top of this table. Besides, Frances and I . . ."

"By logic, then, this thing you feel for your Frances is *not* strong and fine," injected Spiros bitterly.

"It is different," Philip weighed his words. "From the first it was a flame, like the sacred fires of the old oracles . . . and like those fires, it burns enduringly. . . ."

"But it burns . . . it burns . . ." Spiros shook his head. "How much better, my son, to take for bride the woman chosen by your own people, the pure cool spring from which no lips have drunk, the child carefully reared to be a Greek wife and mother? What do we know, after all, of these foreign American women?"

"I was born in this country; I am as American as Frances Slater . . . and, for that matter, so is Zoe," insisted Philip stubbornly.

During all this, the plump wife of Spiros stood with her back to the table where the two men sat over their neglected beer. Her big hands, at the ends of arms as heavily muscled as a man's, plunged in and out of the

bread dough, making a sucking, plopping noise as she kneaded. Her opinion in the matter was not asked; neither did she offer one. "Twelve-loaves-every-two-days," the plopping noise seemed to say, "twelve-loaves-every-two-days, forever-and-ever-amen." She baked for the Christidos family as well as for her own, ever since Anna Christidos had sighed and gone to sleep, these thirteen years past.

Once or twice Spiros gazed at her broad back speculatively. Theirs had been a marriage arranged, as a matter of course, by his parents and hers, in an atmosphere of mutual suspicion and insular animosity, so long ago on the sand-grain that was Symi. He wondered what were her thoughts in this, but it never occurred to him to ask. The notion came to him that he really knew very little of what his wife was thinking, or even if she was thinking at all; she lay down dutifully at night, and rose as dutifully with the dawn; marriage-bed and child-bed seemed all the same to her, and, indeed, as he remembered, she'd made more fuss about that first night than she had with any of the babies¹ She was never gloomy or out-of-sorts, but, on the other hand, she seldom laughed, but a small secret smile played over her lips, waking or sleeping; she seemed some massive Hera, jealous of her fecund mysteries. No, there was little use of asking her opinion of an arranged marriage; she would doubtless only answer that it was all the same, once the clothing is off and the lights out. Meanwhile, "Twelve-loaves-every-two-days, twelve-loaves-every-two-days," the dough chortled, over and over.

Well, that was all last night, and here came Christidos, looking worried as the very devil, when he himself was so full of troubles he didn't know where to start!

"About my Philip and your Zoe," he plunged to the very center of his woes, to get it over with as soon as possible.

"The boy is assuredly stupid, with these new city notions . . . but don't think too harshly of him, my cousin . . ."

"Oh . . . that . . ." Christidos drew his attention from far and distant visions, the simmering dream of Stephen as a lawyer, a professor, even an engineer, the black, viscous nightmare of the boy as an ignorant sponger. "Zoe mentioned some nonsense to me. Never fear, old friend; it is but a little worry which will soon blow over, while this matter of my Stephen . . ." His gentle, sad face dropped wearily.

Their voices were suddenly hushed as John and Zoe clattered down the stairs, calling behind them to Stephen to hurry up if he wanted a lift to school before John dropped Zoe off at her office and then went on to the St. Petersburg airport.

"We shall talk of these things later," murmured Christidos, pouring the steaming sweet rich coffee, setting out one of the fresh doughnut-shaped loaves Spiros had brought over that morning, scooping up a bowlful of creamy *yaourti*.

But it was some time before they could talk with any privacy, for Cimon the waiter was already banging the screen door, rattling open the shutters which Christidos had been too preoccupied to fling wide, taking down the white coat he wore during the day and hanging up the black one he would resume before he went home.

Cimon dragged his feet in an exaggerated manner as he stepped into the kitchen. "May the day be kinder to me than the night was!" He gave a mock groan. "May all our kind friends and customers demand no burden heavier than a glass of water for me to carry, and may every tip be at least three coins to rattle one upon the other!"

Christidos poured a saucer of milk for the cat and placed

it half under the humming motor of the refrigerator, where it would be out of the way of their feet. "Come puss, come puss," he called softly, and, as the sleek little black feline dipped her white whiskers to the dish, they heard the screen door bang again. A customer had arrived; the Parthenon Bar and Grill was officially open for the day.

Chapter Four

THE MAN who entered the Parthenon Bar and Grill was not really a customer at all, but one of the two current pensioners, and perhaps the most permanent pensioner it had ever been the misfortune of Christidos and Spiros to acquire. The other was the General, a tall silent man from Sparta whose air of wisdom sugar-coated the bitter pill of beggardom to the extent that Christidos not only did not mind feeding him on the cuff, and a very ragged cuff at that, but actually enjoyed his presence, as a matter of lending distinction to the Parthenon. To tell the truth, the General was really a rather stupid man, and kept silent only because he had sense enough to know he had nothing to say, which, in itself, is a mark of good taste, if not of wisdom.

But the pensioner who entered caused Christidos' face to fall every time he came in. This man was born plain George Pappas, in one of the suburbs of Athens so far out from the city that only by a wild stretch of both imagination and geography could he be regarded as Athenian. However, in his second year in college, (for the considerable fortune made by his middle-class father, a dealer in hides, was lavished upon young George by his idolatrous mother) he disdained the vulgarity of all that was Pappas and the leather business. Consequently, he legalized his pseudonym, under which he wrote bad metrical tragedies and romances, and from that day forth was known as George Gordon Byron, save along the bourgeois street

where he was born, and that street he avoided punctiliously, save when he was in need of money. Then he paid a quick, affectionate visit to his mother, and disappeared back to the more fashionable reaches of Athens, where, for all his friends knew, he was sired by Zeus himself, rather than by a fat little worried merchant, who used heavy oriental scent in his linen in a vain attempt to distort, if not conceal, the smell of leather and saddle-soap.

It was some years before George Pappas dared sign himself "Lord Byron," but the step was inevitable. He was in his forty-fifth year, and becoming somewhat impatient for his parents to die, since he was the sole heir, when the disturbing rumors of Fascist wars seeped through the Balkans into Greece, and eventually reached the ears of the pseudo-poet, always sensitive as a seismograph to any rumblings of unrest which might spell discomfort to him. Where he went or what became of him during the ensuing years is as of little importance as the man himself; sufficient be it that he departed damp with the tears of his mother and smarting under the eloquent castigation of his father, who broke the silence of many years to remark that his loins must have been cursed the night George was conceived. Mr. Pappas proceeded to read him out of the family, out of the church, and out of Greece to a life of exile and an unmarked grave, and his observations on patriotism, manliness, poets in general and his worthless son in particular shook tiles on the roof three houses down the street. However, the words were softened by the not inconsiderable roll of bills his mother pushed into his pocket the while she wept. The money melted almost as fast as her tears dried on his coat.

As he walked along the street Lord Byron customarily stamped his feet, sang loudly, chanted, and declaimed his

own poems or fragments of the classics, which he privately regarded as far inferior. However, immediately he entered the Parthenon Bar and Grill he became a silent man, because he knew that his mere presence had already strained the patience of Christidos to the breaking point.

Even the bang of the screen-door was apologetic as he entered, his skull-like head carried a little in advance of his body, the oddly cut brown suit which he wore summer and winter neatly pressed, with spring-mattress marks indelibly printed down one side of the trousers. He habitually wore a seersucker shirt, which he washed himself and which required no ironing, of a dull beige shade, since white needed washing too often. In his buttonhole there was a small Greek flag, a small American flag, and a large pink carnation backed with a spray of asparagus fern. In one hand he carried a briefcase and in the other a little paper sack. He straightened his black chiffon bow-tie, set down his briefcase, bulging with books and papers, beside his accustomed table, seated himself and read the menu from start to finish through the pince-nez he wore on a long black ribbon. No one, not even Cimon the waiter, paid the slightest attention to him.

Lord Byron cleared his throat apologetically. Cimon drifted over to the pensioner's table and cocked his head toward the small brown paper bag. Lord Byron smiled, the eccentric, emaciated smile of a mad Pharaoh conferring a favor upon his subjects.

"The usual," he said graciously, and Cimon gingerly picked up the little sack containing two cracked eggs and an orange with a bit of a soft spot at one end, which Lord Byron had acquired through the generosity of Vlastos, the corner grocer, and went out to the kitchen.

"He's here," remarked Cimon unnecessarily, jerking his

head toward the dining room as he broke the eggs into a frying pan.

Christidos and Spiros sighed in chorus. John and Stephen went on eating; Zoe was already finished, and was touching up her lipstick preparatory to leaving the house.

"It's your own fault, Papa," she said reasonably, flicking at some imaginary mote on her long straight eyelashes which fringed eyes as large and limpid as a deer's. "What do you let him in for? If you'd stop bothering with him, he'd soon go away!"

"How can I stop?" cried Christidos, not bothering to lower his voice, since it was well known that Lord Byron was impervious to criticism. "He's a Greek, even if he is a disgrace to our people; shall I let him go and beg from the Americans and disgrace us further?"

Cimon flipped the eggs onto a plate and cut the orange in half, trimming away the soft spot. Christidos averted his eyes as bread and butter went to join the eggs, and Cimon poured a cup of coffee.

"Is the cream and sugar necessary?" he remarked to no one in particular. "Three times a day for one year, that faker comes in here with his cracked eggs and his spoiled fruit, and eats up my bread and my butter, and always a bowl of soup must be added at noon and a knuckle-bone and some vegetables for dinner!" He groaned. "Just because, one year ago, when I know no better, this stranger orders a cup of coffee, and, when he has no money to pay, I feel sorry for him!"

He watched as Cimon took the plate and coffee out and set it before Lord Byron. The little black cat wiped her white whiskers against his leg and purred. He picked her up and draped her over the crook of his arm, where she

clung, purring like a small engine as he stroked her sooty sides, the snowy triangle of her breast.

"At least, this little one gives me gratitude," he said sadly. "But that . . . that poet who pretends he's crazy so that he can live like a loafer! If my own brother came in at the same hour, morning, noon and night, three times a day, and asked me for a glass of water, sooner or later I'd throw him out! But what can I do with this poor ape?"

Cimon grinned slyly. "He's made a science of the business of living without money," he commented. "Vlastos gives him six cracked eggs a day . . . of course, he would have to throw them out anyhow and the spoiled friiit too, so it makes no difference if he keeps the garbage can full—or the poet. My own cousin, the florist, supplies the daily carnation which makes a fop out of a fake; the barber shaves and trims him for nothing; he smokes a brand of cigarettes known as O.P.'s . . ."

"O.P.'s?" queried Christidos.

"Other People's . . . he finds yesterday's news in a trash can, or filches your own, as you very well know . . . they no longer give him credit for beers at the Olympia . . ."

"I stopped his patronage of my bar long ago," murmured Christidos.

". . . And so, now he 'borrows' quarters from me when he wants to wet his whistle!" cried Cimon. "I can't help admiring the man; it's worth the twenty-five cents to hear his promise, as flowery as his buttonhole, to pay me back next week!"

"You see!" Zoe stood up, brushing crumbs from her skirt. She was as tall as her father, a strong, solid girl who missed looking like a peasant only because she was im-

mediately reminiscent of a marble Nike come to life. "You and Uncle Spiros and Cimon all encourage him; only last night I saw him rise to greet Mr. Basil Economou . . ."

"Economou gave him a dollar, too; he pressed it into his hand as he left . . ." Cimon grinned his sly grin. "Lord Byron stoops to beg from a diplomat as gracefully as he persuades me that my tips are honored to supply him with beer . . ."

Christidos clapped his hand to his head. "What a humiliation!" he cried. "To think that Mr. Basil Economou comes to Turtle Run for a rest from his heavy duties in the embassy in Washington, and hallows the Parthenon Bar and Grill by eating his dinner here, only to be annoyed by that ridiculous little thief! It's not enough that he steals my bread and my soup and my knuckle-bones, three times a day for one year!" He stood up suddenly. "I'm going now, to throw him out myself!"

He took a step forward and then came back and sat down again. "No, I can't do it," he sighed. "What if he should go to the American Relief and complain that his own kind will no longer care for him?"

"That's what the American Relief is for." Stephen wiped his mouth on his hand and smiled that sweet smile, half child, half adult, which was so much like his mother's that Christidos felt a wrench at his heart and a stinging at his eyelids. "How about a buck for me, Pop? I seem to be broke, as usual."

Christidos opened his eyes very wide. "And what did you do with . . ." he began and then stopped, for this was not the time to mention the three dollars, not before John and Zoe, not with that panhandler sitting out in front. He picked a dollar out of his wallet slowly and extended it, his head turned away from Stephen for fear of seeing that

well remembered smile flicker out as soon as he fingered the money.

"Come on, kids, I'm late now!" Stephen dashed for the door; Zoe kissed her father and John dropped an arm affectionately across his shoulders.

"Back early tonight, Pop; I'm on the Tampa-Jacksonville hop today!"

"Be good!" Zoe crinkled her nose at Christidos. "Uncle Spiros, see that he takes a good rest today ... I heard him creaking around practically all night!"

Spiros looked after them as they hurried out. "A fine brood," he commented. "You've done a good job, my cousin, bringing up those three."

Christidos shook his head sadly. "All except Stephen," he mourned. "Did you notice, he didn't stop to say good-bye, once I gave him the dollar? Never, once, do the others forget, never does he remember, even when the others nudge him!" He sighed. "Pour yourself some coffee, Spiros, and sit here with me, and let us share each other's problems: my Stephen, your Philip, my Zoe, your Evridiki. We have much in common, old friend; I see questions in your eyes as you see them in mine. First, let us speak of yours . . ."

Spiros poured the sweet thick mixture of boiled milk, sugar and fine ground coffee. "Your Zoe and my Philip . . ." he began.

Out in the restaurant Lord Byron finished his coffee, accepted a cigarette from Cimon, adjusted his black chiffon bow-tie, and selected a toothpick from the little glass holder in the center of the table.

Cimon leaned to strike a light for him. "For a year I been looking at that tie," he commented in English, for Lord Byron, who had assumed an Oxford accent during

his wanderings, affected no longer to understand the purest Athenian, let alone the vulgar colloquial Greek spoken by a waiter from the Dodecanese. "Every time I see it, I think I seen it somewhere before, and I dunno where. Maybe it's on an undertaker, maybe it was in a burlyscrow show I seen in Tampa . . ."

Lord Byron fixed him with the warm, humid gaze of a drug-eyed moth. "I think not, my man," he smiled in a superior manner. "Even though at the moment I am out of funds, since I await a check from my producers for my latest play, nevertheless I still own a few fine things. This tie cost thirty francs in Paris; it was made for me from the mourning veil worn in *Elektra* by the greatest tragedienne of the French stage, Mme. . . . but then, you wouldn't know her name."

"I wouldn't, at that," grinned Cimon. "But I do know you wouldn't get no tie like that around these parts."

"I'll borrow the newspaper now," Lord Byron said through his toothpick, "and bring it back at noon. Mine host Christidos never reads the news in the morning, and so someone might as well have the use of it."

"He certainly can't read it when you make off with it every day, and most likely forget to come back with it," muttered Cimon, but he fetched the paper anyhow, and Lord Byron picked up his bulging briefcase and strode out, stamping his feet and chanting an outlandish song as soon as the door fell to behind him.

Lord Byron felt good today. As a matter of fact, in spite of his emaciated appearance, he always felt well, and he had a prodigious appetite. In addition to the three meals a day that he cadged at the Parthenon, he dropped in at several houses while the men of the family were away at work, because he knew that a fanciful phrase and the kiss of a

hand wrought wonders with producing coffee and *baklava* and even, now and then, a glass of *ouzo* or sweet port. It mattered little if the hand were work-roughened and smelled of fish; in fact, he deliberately sought out the possessors of such as being more grateful than finer ladies for the word and the kiss, and therefore more generous with their food and drink. And then, in the afternoon, he always visited the church; even though Turtle Run was a small community, there was sure to be a wedding or a funeral or a christening every day or so, and he was adept at attaching himself inconspicuously to the party, minding a baby for a mother, producing a handkerchief to staunch the eyes of a weeping widow or a mother conferring her daughter upon a bridegroom. They could hardly keep him from the celebration afterward; today there was a large wedding, and he would find plenty of beer and sweet wine and honey cakes. He strode jauntily and purposefully toward the first stop on his rounds, a fisherman's shanty, ramshackle and redolent of dead sea-life, but presided over by a woman whose fresh-baked bread was the snowiest and crustiest in Turtle Run.

Your Greek is no more superstitious than any other man, nor is he better able to discern the hand of God in a flower, a leaf, an agate pebble, the black veil of a sponge, or the eccentricities of an indigent poet, and so it is doubtful if any citizens of Turtle Run who saw Lord Byron stepping along the white coral dust road regarded him as the messenger of Divinity. Sometimes he tripped daintily, sometimes he stamped his feet and roared out a chorus of his tuneless song; sometimes he stopped to watch a white cabbage butterfly hovering over a garbage-can; he raced a yellow cur dog to a corner; he picked up a bit of tinfoil and smoothed it flat and folded it and put it in his pocket.

He stopped and leaned against a lamppost and put on his pince-nez solemnly, to peruse a page of one of the books selected at random from his briefcase; he squinted at the sun, and made a telescope of his hand to see it more clearly; he heard angels caroling in the palmetto scrub and fled in terror lest they observe his sinfulness; he saw dust dervishes in the roadway and bowed his head in reverence as they passed. Mad fool, mad ape of man, crazy enough to see visions and hear voices, yet wise enough to turn madness to account and make a profession of it! No, you do not yet know him to be either spirit or demon; he is only a small man in a dusty Norfolk jacket; he might be shipwrecked prince or stranded peddler, but to the ambassadors of God these appearances are not unknown, and any incognito is possible.

Chapter Five

BUSINESS at the Parthenon Bar and Grill was always slow when the sponge fleet was out. Ninety per cent of the men and boys of Turtle Run are engaged, to some measure, in the business of sponging, and during the active season, from March around to September, Turtle Run would seem to be inhabited, on week days, only by women and by men too old and infirm to follow the vagaries of ocean currents. In addition to these, a few essential shopkeepers ply their trade; the policeman goes his rounds and the mailman plods past, and, these past three years, a few veterans of the Albanian front drag their shattered bodies down from the hospital on the hill to partake of food and talk with Christidos and Spiros.

Week-ends, the coral-dust street is awash with the spongers, back in their homes to sleep, but seeking pleasure in the bars and eating-places and at the dance-hall. There is no red-light problem in Turtle Run: these men are all married, or sooner or later will marry, with the sisters and daughters of spongers like themselves; what they seek in the bars and eating-places is drink and talk with their own kind, and the women they dance with Saturday night are the women of their own families, or their neighbors'.

But some time between midnight Sunday night and dawn of Monday morning, the boats slip out of the harbor, away from the crawls full of soaking, bleaching sponges, and head for the sponging beds, anywhere from St.

Mark's to the Anclote Keys. Most of the fleet is back by Friday afternoon, or Saturday at the latest, with every hand busy at putting to dry the sponges which have soaked for a week, and stringing the new catch into the crawls. Some crews, more adventurous, and with more seaworthy ships, stay out six weeks or more at a time, setting up their own crawls wherever they happen to find good lee-shore anchorage, and not coming home until every inch of space on the boat is crammed with clean, dry sponges.

The sponging boat always carries an odd-numbered crew, nine, fifteen, seventeen, twenty-one, because every man save one, even the captain, pairs off with another man in the actual business of fishMg. That odd man is the cook, who has to be a good sailor as well as a chef, for the charge of the boat falls to him when the dinghys are out, and he trails in their wake to pick them up at mealtime or to load their cargoes of wet, slippery still-living sponges.

Although various ships pursue various methods of obtaining the sponges, depending upon the outfitting of the boat, the previous experience of the crew, the weather and the condition of the ocean floor, all the methods, save that of the modern and mechanical diving helmet, are as old as Homer, and all come to the same desired result of gathering as much as possible of the best quality of these mysterious and complex sea-growths we call the sponge. Whether two men pair off to dredge indiscriminately with the *kankava*, dragging their great net with its heavy iron bar along a smooth sea-bottom, to scoop up everything, fish, turtles, unwary octopi, sea-fans and coral that falls into the net along with the sponges; whether the sculler sets the dinghy gliding silkily as a fish, while the hooker lies belly-down on the thwarts, his trident-like *kamaki* poised to strike, peering through his sponging-glass to have

a view of the shallow under-water world; or whether a naked diver leaps headlong, his diving-stone tilted to angle him down to a remembered crevice rich in the precious sheep's-wool, while his partner plays out his guide rope and retrieves the trapezoid stone which is the diver's rudder and weight: it is all the same so long as the deck is swamped with the soft, black-veiled bodies of the day's catch.

By the great red eye of sundown, divers and rope-men, hookers and scullers, dredgers and trawlers tread out the daily haul with their bare feet, until the life-juices of the sponges spurt, thick and milky, from the osculi, and the clinging black veils which shroud them slip off like grape-skins when the grapes are boiled.

Careful, now, with the long steel needle, threading through the pits of the osculi so that the sponge will not be torn! If the sponges are small, there may be as many as fifty on a string; if large, six or eight will suffice, and over the sides of the boat they go, like great primitive necklaces strung out for the wife of Cyclops, to wash in the clean salt water all night, absolving their impurities in the communion of the sea. Out again in the morning, to be beaten free of sand and small stones, and the shreds of gelatinous black, as tenacious as mortal sin, which lurks inside the sponge canals! Heaped on the deck to dry, while the crew goes out in the dinghys for another catch.

Thus the death of sponges, and the life of those who hunt them, go on, year in, year out, these past three thousand years or more. Thus life and death will go on, with doubtless very little variation, for another three thousand, unless mankind chooses to blast himself and all things, living or dead—sponges and sequoias, cathedrals, priests, princes and grand marshals, palaces and fishermen's

shacks, the Elgin Marbles and the Parthenon Bar and Grill—into molecular dust.

These sponge-fishers drink heavily when ashore, but sparingly on shipboard, for drink makes for quarrels, and their lives depend upon good relationships at sea. Their black-bowled, stubby pipes are always lit, more from habit than from any desire to kill the stench of the sponges, which they scarcely notice, since any other breath would be unnatural to them. Their razor-sharp knives are terrible weapons in a rough-and-tumble fight; but the Greeks are argumentative rather than pugnacious people, and prefer to hurl words instead of fists. The long lonesome nights in the Gulf, under the stars, so isolated that a single wakeful lookout seldom glimpses the riding-lights of a sister-ship, seem to work no hardship with them. This is, withal, a candid life; the stench of the sponges is a natural and salty stench, none of your man-made sickly stinks, but the honest smell of death-in-life; here is no mud and muck and fetid backwash, but a host of living animals plucked from the firm rock, the stiff calcareous branches of the coral, from spots of bar where currents keep the silt from settling, from saucer-shaped sandy depressions fringed with emerald ribbons of eel grass, from sunken mangrove roots, even from the rosy-purple brittle wonders of sea-feathers and sea-fans. The rotting of a rat in a city cellar, the dying snuffles of a fat, asthmatic, blind old dog, the pitiful human attempts to keep alive some agonized creature, whether it be man or animal, are infinitely unclean compared to the sea-death of the sponges, the vast whitened shoulder-blades of a whale, the polished parrot-beak which is all that remains of an octopus, the stripped ladder of a fish's spine, the countless carapaces of crabs, the blue-eyed mussel shells, the pink fluted conchs, the

pearly clams, the snowy bones of the cuttle-fish, the spiny grey-purple fragility that was once an urchin. Nowhere on land is death so omnipresent as in the sea; nowhere is life so numerous, so easily come by or so casually and cleanly lost. All prophecy and parable exists in the detritus of the ocean-floor; doubloons are mixed with dead men's dreams, and even the very sand itself consists of sparkling, powdered skeletons.

Chapter Six

AS IS EXPECTED in such places, all, or almost all, of the customers of the Parthenon Bar and Grill are men. Occasionally, of an evening, a whole family will come in, father, mother, the little ones like steps on a ladder, with perhaps an old grandmother or an aunt to round out the table. Sometimes a young married couple comes in, with a view to giving the bride a day free from cooking, while she yet can take the time.

Not many come in the morning for Christidos' thick creamy coffee, for bowls of cold *yaourt*i and slabs of the snowy, sesame-sprinkled doughnut-shaped loaves. In the morning Christidos makes up his accounts and writes out the menu for the day, receives the butcher, the baker, the vegetable man, and accepts or rejects their wares. In the morning Spiros attends to his roasts and stews, slices the glossy plum-colored eggplants, separates the florets of a heap of cauliflower heads, washes the dandelion greens and escarole. In the morning Cimon leans against the bar, smoking one cigarette after another and complaining about his feet, though he rarely takes this opportunity to sit down and rest them.

The General comes in for his coffee; he has a sense of obligation to Christidos, and so eats frugally until dinner-time, when he makes up for the day's abstinence. He shakes his head mournfully when he finds that Lord Byron has already been and gone, taking the newspaper with him; the General, as a man of great affairs, even though

these affairs be in the past, feels compelled to keep up with international happenings.

Two or three men belonging to a sponge-boat that is temporarily laid up for repairs come in and demand an enormous breakfast; they have already had an early meal at home, but these men have hardy appetites, and require ham and eggs and fried potatoes and fried *kalamaraki* in mid-morning. Young Mrs. Pallimas stops by for a quart of *yaourti* and half a dozen portions of *baklava*; it is easier to buy these things than to make them at home, and the *yaourti* at the Parthenon is thicker and creamier than what she can purchase at the corner grocery. A car full of tourists driving north stops, seeing "Bar and Grill" in red neon letters; Christidos informs them that in his restaurant the bar does not open before noon. Cimon serves them American coffee without even taking the trouble to ask which they prefer, since it is obvious that they have never heard of any sort of coffee except American, and would certainly not find the Greek version palatable. Spiros, naturally doubtful of all save Symiotes, and doubly so since his son has told him of the girl in Baltimore, looks out at them suspiciously. Cimon hears them making fun of his accent and snubs them; Christidos lights his second cigar of the day and continues writing his menus. The tourists clatter out, unmindful of the meal they might have been served, had they but known how to ask for it.

At noon the regulars drift in, by ones, by twos, by threes; many of these are business men from the surrounding shops who cannot take time to go to their homes for the midday meal. They are all friends of Christidos and Spiros and Cimon, and each others' friends and friendly rivals as well, for there is no animosity among them. A similar group gathers at the Olympia; these two clusters of

men, so similar and yet so opposed, represent the two factions in Turtle Run. Those who are the self-designated "true Greeks," that is to say, men from the peninsula-mainland of Greece herself, and from the Dodecanese, eat at the Parthenon; while the Olympia is patronized by the "Turkish Greeks" from Corfu, from Asia Minor, from Egypt

It is said that in a town of a thousand Greeks, there are fifteen hundred different political cliques, because every man forms his own individual party, and at least half of them belong to two. But in the matter of "true Greeks" versus "Turkish Greeks" there can be no *chinoiserie*; you are as definitely and eternally the one or the other as though you wore an indelible caste-mark upon your forehead. For this reason there are two churches in Turtle Run, both with identical services and opposite ideologies; there are two Democratic Clubs, two Lodges with their accompanying Ladies' Auxiliaries, and two cemeteries to keep their bones forever undefiled, one from another.

At noon, too, came some of the Greek wounded, sent for treatment in American clinics by the government in Athens. There were a number of such in Turtle Run, cases resting between unbelievable plastic surgeries, convalescent amputees, brilliant psychotics whose minds were worth saving through rehabilitation. Down the hill from the restful but boring hospital-hotel they came, at noon, in the evening, the lame leading the blind, the armless being helped to food by the faceless. Sometimes a dozen of these sacrifices to man's wilful inhumanity to man clubbed together in the Parthenon; sometimes there were but two or three, but always Alexis Dragoumis was among them.

These convalescent veterans are the human wreckage hurled down from the high rocks of Mount Pindos, washed

up along the pink and saffron strands of the Piraeus, flung back like broken toys on the Albanian front. As month follows month they come, some eagerly, some dispassionately, to the American clinics; and others of their kind return to Greece with new, more-or-less useful metal-and-plastic arms or legs, with marvellously matched artificial eyes, with the curiously bland expression of faces rebuilt by flesh molded from flank and breast and upper arm.

Alexis Dragoumis was one of the sightless ones. He was a major in the Engineering Corps; he had ventured out in advance of his men to inspect the site for a bridge which must be rebuilt over Italian demolition, somewhere in Epirus, when a landmine had exploded where no landmine was supposed to have been. Strangely enough, although he was directly in the blast, there was not a scratch upon that limp white body, stripped of every scrap of clothing save his belt and boots, when his men picked him up. His face, however, was a crimson mask, and, as he recovered consciousness, he became aware of a blinding light that seemed, impossibly enough, to flame inside his skull, behind his eyes. The flare narrowed, flickered, reddened and went out; for perhaps an hour his head was full of velvety purple darkness starred with pale and fiery bobbing opalescent lights; the shocked optic nerves adjusted themselves after this period of reflex, and the purple darkness became desperate and neutral night. The delicate membranes which enclose the essential juices of the eyeball, the aqueous humor and the vitreous humor, had burst with the concussion; after realization, Major Dragoumis had dared to hope, through the long unhappy retreat after Nazi and Fascist forces joined to drive the Greeks southward, after his capture and weary imprisonment, after his release by the victorious Allies, and his journey to Amer-

ica; he had dared to hope, to seek out specialists, to ask, to inquire, to urge his case. Somewhere in the world there might be a surgeon who could restore his sight; the optic nerves, the retina, the iris and pupil, all the structures were intact save for those two crystalline sacs of precious liquid in each eye. There had been experiments, transplantations, of which he had heard; he had some money, salvaged from his father's tobacco holdings in Egypt, and he was determined that he would recover his sight. Moreover, if a miracle could be performed on him, it could be done for hundreds, even thousands of his countrymen, even less well equipped than he to spend their lives in darkness.

For Alexis Dragoumis was one who could resign himself, if the quest was fruitless, although he had no intention of abandoning the quest until he had explored its ultimate fringes. He had resources of the mind into which he could retire; he was not one to go mad with despair and pain and fright, nor would he sink into despondent apathy. He had an almost fanatic faith in himself to endure evils, and in science to conquer them. He was not a religious, or even a philosophic, man; if the worst came to the worst, and he learned, ultimately, that his case was hopeless, and his money dissipated by his search, he still had his revolver, and a bullet through the roof of his mouth would not make his blindness more total.

Moreover, if the miracle should occur, he had much to live for. There was Lisa, lovely Lisa, his bride of less than a year when he went to the Epirus; Lisa, whose violet eyes and thick, pale silky braids were a cynosure in Athens, city of beautiful and sophisticated women. Before he left, he had written a letter to Lisa, to be opened in case news of disaster came from the north to the queenly city; in it he had given her detailed plans for escape, either to neu-

tral Turkey, or, better still, to Egypt, and eventually to England. Whether or not these plans would help, he had no way of knowing; at the time, it seemed possible that Turkey would join the Axis, that Rommel would overrun Alexandria and Cairo in a Panzer tide, that the British Isles would be only a waste of broken stone. Escape to the north was cut off; the southern routes were doubtful at best. It seemed that there was nowhere in the world for the Greeks to flee to; they were trapped on their small peninsula and their smaller islands, ringed round with fire and water. It was all very well for Alexis Dragoumis to explain to his men that, since this was the case, they must only fight the more fiercely; his mind and heart were with Lisa; as defeat piled upon defeat, he prayed for her escape. After his blindness and long imprisonment he made frantic inquiries; there was no word of her anywhere. Either she had been killed, or she had concealed herself so carefully that not even his most trusted friends had word of her; it was as though the earth had gaped wide and swallowed her up.

And so there were now two quests; the quest for his eyesight, and the quest for Lisa. In Major Dragoumis' mind, the first preceded the second; there was scarcely a moment he did not dwell upon her with terrible longing; he believed, passionately, that she lived; the only clue to her disappearance that he possessed was a slender one to the effect that, when the Germans came to loot his home, both she and the large cash reserve he kept in his deposit boxes were gone. If she had converted the cash reserve quickly, before the inflation, into Turkish or English notes, she was handsomely provided for in any corner of the earth. He felt no qualms that he had never received word from her, all these years since they were separated; even

if she had known how to find him, it was doubtful if any message could have reached him. During the retreat, he had assumed the identity of a common foot-soldier; the wisdom of this was proved at his capture, since the victors expected to extract damning information only from the officers. Thus he was able to preserve certain secrets which the Germans might or might not have been able to force from him, secrets of warfare in the hill country, snipers' strategy which served his country while he lay immobile in prison. It was possible that Lisa believed him dead; if any lists of the defeated Greeks had been published, that shattered body he had ordered dressed, so long ago, in a Major's uniform had surely been recorded as Alexis Dragoumis. Now, he did not mean that she should see him sightless and dependent upon others, like a crippled dog; if he returned to her, it would be as a whole man, the man she had married, with whom she liked dancing, for whom she dressed expensively, the man who was host at her delightful, intimate little dinner parties, the man, he believed, whom she loved as he loved her. As things were, she, wherever she was, could have a better life without being burdened by a blind man. Lisa, even as a young girl, had possessed certain qualities of imperturbable aloofness, of the ability to take care of herself, of careful independence, which convinced him that she somehow had made a place for herself in a new life. When the time came, that life would be joined to his.

Meanwhile, there were the rumors of surgical miracles; already, he had endured five operations, all with the single negative result. There would be a sixth, and a seventh, and a dozen more, if necessary. He had come to Turtle Run because of the great new specialist in Tampa; here he could gain strength in the sun, and hear his native tongue

slurred by the sponge fishers; here he could eat native peasant foods which Lisa would have scorned, but which tasted unaccountably good to him; here it was not too expensive; he could conserve his dwindling funds for the operations to come.

He had never been able to bring himself to that tactic of the blind, running one's hand over an unknown face to know what a new acquaintance looks like. Nevertheless, he had made friends at the Parthenon Bar and Grill; he judged Christidos, from his voice, as a sad, gentle, kindly man; Spiros was more lively, and more irascible; the daughter, Zoe, was gay and fun-loving and tender and sympathetic by turns; Cimon, the waiter, always had a dry jest in his teeth and didn't make too much fuss about assisting Major Dragoumis with his food. The attendants at the hospital-hotel upset him at mealtime; he felt as though they watched every mouthful of food he took, guiding the fork or spoon to his lips with some sort of invisible will-power. At the Parthenon, nobody cut up his meat or supervised his coffee; Cimon merely set things before him in the accustomed place, and Alexis got on much better that way. Just lately he had learned to light his own cigarettes without fumbling, and he secretly regarded this as an accomplishment; perhaps it was childish to feel set up over such a little thing, but he hated having ordinary routine matters attended to for him, and each minor triumph over the inanimate made his blindness easier to bear.

In appearance, Alexis Dragoumis was startling. His wounded, glowing face had a kind of perverse splendor. If ever the phrase, "a Greek coin run over by a Roman chariot," had validity, it was here. This was a face that had looked into the fires of hell, and had not escaped searing; an adze-shaped scar ran diagonally across the left cheek

to his mouth; the dark luminous eyes had lost none of their intelligence, but had bits of flame in their depths, as though banked and inward-smouldering flames consumed him. One or the other eye, whichever was currently under treatment, was covered by a bandage with a black patch over it. He was constantly conscious of this patch, the symbol of the blind, and fingered it fretfully when nothing else engaged his attention.

He was a tall man, flat-shouldered and whittled to the perfect mold of his uniform, an aristocratic Athenian to the tips of his long, mobile fingers. The lame man who accompanied him to the Parthenon had little in common with him save the comradeship of mutual dependence; he was an islander from Niceros, a squat, bandy-legged sea-captain turned guerrilla fighter whose native wit was as sharp as the bayonet which had slashed, but not quite severed, his spine. Pete Cockinos was more bandy-legged than ever now; he could walk after a fashion, sideways, like a crab, if he had a strong arm to lean on. Dragoumis supplied that arm in return for guidance. With the months, their interdependence had deepened; Cockinos could neither read nor write, and Dragoumis found that he could steady both hand and nerves by tracing the Greek characters he could no longer see, large upon sheets of scratch-paper with a heavy lead pencil. And so Cockinos learned to read, first the battle words which obsessed Dragoumis,—wound, blind, death, eyes, blood, landmine,—and next simple words,—mother, wife, home, bread, wine, love. He was a quick pupil; after a few lessons he could read whole sentences; not, as in a primer, "See the dog run," but in Dragoumis' exaggerated characters, "The damned Italians have blasted out my eyes."

There was no word of class distinction passed between

these two; occasionally they ate at the same table, but as a rule, once Dragoumis was seated, Cockinos sought out a group of spongers, sea-going men like himself, some from his own island, with whom he could jest in the dialect of the Dodecanese, who had common ancestors and a common background with him. He constantly glanced across the room at Dragoumis, however, to see if the other man required his services of guidance, and in a curious way he claimed proprietorship over the Athenian, as a seeing-eye dog claims ownership of his master.

It was not so easy for Dragoumis to find eating-comrades; of all the customers of the Parthenon Bar and Grill, only Basil Economou, the visiting diplomat, and the pseudo-poet, Lord Byron, were Athenians, and the poet could be called Athenian only by courtesy. A blind man is helpless to protect himself against interlopers, but Lord Byron soon learned that his presence was unwelcome at that particular table; it was not so much what Dragoumis said as what he did not say, and Christidos himself warned the poet not to annoy those better than he. If Economou dropped in during the evening, he and Dragoumis shared a table; otherwise the Major was quite alone. Christidos and Spiros both stopped for a few words as they made their rounds of the restaurant; sometimes the little black cat with the white vest leaped into his lap and extended herself, purring, across his knees. Once or twice, hearing Zoe's voice near him, he had engaged her in talk, and asked her to sit with him while he finished his coffee; he had felt no need of women's companionship, these past years since his affliction, but her voice was velvety and comforting; she took more care with her pronunciation than did the others, and spoke Greek a little formally, as though she had gotten her native tongue through book-

learning, and her hands, which he remembered through one or two casual contacts as she set his coffee before him or moved his glass more conveniently to his circumscribed reach, were warm, firm and vigorous.

As Major Alexis Dragoumis sat at his accustomed table in the Parthenon Bar and Grill, he considered that dinner was a more pleasurable hour than lunch. At dinner, he could look forward to talk with Economou, the sort of talk to which he was accustomed, about books and the theatre and world affairs. Economou did not wince from mentioning the calamity of blindness, nor did he minimize it; he often commented upon such and such a technicolor moving picture or art exhibit or football game, and Dragoumis found this non-committal attitude strangely comforting. Moreover, Economou could not read the newspaper without editorializing aloud, and though Dragoumis disliked being read to, and depended upon the radio for both news and amusement, he hungered for every scrap of information about the situation in Greece, and Economou's wandering comments kept him more or less up to date.

Also, there was the chance that Zoe would stop to talk for a moment, and he had come to listen for her clear voice, for the reassuring click of her heels against the floor. He had come to wonder whether or not she were pretty, but somehow he felt constrained in asking Economou, and it was not the sort of question one would put to a rough, though good-hearted, fellow like Pete Cockinos.

Chapter Seven

LAST night, when Philip broke off their engagement by telling her about the Baltimore girl, Frances Slater, Zoe's first reaction had been that of annoyance. How dared he, this boy with whom she had been brought up, with whose mind hers had always been in accord, so disrupt her life? From the time they were babies, it had always been Zoe and Philip, Philip and Zoe; every plan they made, for school, for work, for parties, dances, movies, even a stop at the drugstore for a coke or an ice-cream soda, had been for both of them. She felt angry and resentful, as though she were a ten-year-old left out of an anticipated picnic or a swimming-party.

She felt this resentment, being a woman, whose safe little existence had been wantonly disturbed, as a careless pebble disturbs a quiet pond; then, too, she was very naturally annoyed that anyone, and especially old Phil, who had always been her personal property, should find someone else more attractive than she. She hadn't been too agreeable about it; with the frankness of life-long familiarity she told him that he was being none too bright about the whole thing, having gotten too big for his britches now that he was away at college. She was forthright and explicit; she told him he was too young to know what he wanted, that he was dazzled by the fashionable women in a big city, and that she supposed his precious Frances had caught him by all sorts of mincing tricks. Then, having told him what she thought of him, in much the same spirit

she would have if he'd been stupid enough to run a fish hook in his thumb or upset a rowboat with her in it, she had returned to the matter-of-fact comradely manner she usually felt toward him, only to find him hesitant, awkward, and embarrassed. He finally said he had not slept for the past two nights, and he left early.

She woke up once, in the night, furious with herself, realizing that she had probably made him think she wanted him on any terms, that she was begging to have him back, when all she had been actually doing was scolding him about making a fool of himself. If it had been John, she would have talked the same way. After tossing restlessly about for a while, her natural healthy sleep flowed over her again.

Today she was still annoyed, but she was aware that she really ought to be heart-broken, and she wasn't at all. She, Zoe Christidos, tall, sturdy, four-square with the world, was no more affected than she'd been that time in Tampa, when Philip had run through a red light and argued with an officer and they'd both ridden to the station house under police escort and been kept there until her frantic father had bailed them out. She'd been annoyed with him then, because he hadn't needed to go through the light, and he'd been obstinate enough to argue. She felt the same irritation now; if the big, bullheaded lug insisted on getting himself involved, nothing could stop him. Only this time she wasn't going to be around to pick up the pieces. He'd make a mess of it for a while, and then come yelping back to her, but he'd have to work pretty hard to get to cry on her shoulder. If he could make plans, so could she, and she had plenty of them in mind.

As a matter of fact, there was even a certain sense of relief; greener pastures were now open for investigation.

Her father had never approved of her going out with other men; even when she was a little girl, she had been earmarked for Philip, and had incurred reproachful paternal disapproval if she so much as walked home from school with one of the other boys. Now she was unexpectedly free; she felt light-hearted and curious and unaccountably cheerful.

One man that she knew wouldn't be on her list was her boss, Mr. Michael Diamantopoulos. Not that she couldn't get him, if she had a mind to; she had been fending him off, more or less, for months, ever since she came to work in his insurance office. Doubtless her father would approve of him, too, because, though he was a widower, with children as old as she, he was a rich man, and a professional one, and she had been nearly as plagued as John and Stephen with Christidos' obsession concerning the professions.

Just then Mr. Diamantopoulos, whose oily sheep's eyes cast at Zoe did not interfere with his practicality, stepped out of his private office to find out why he didn't hear the typewriter tapping regularly. He had dictated a number of important letters that morning, to appear above the flourish of "M. Diamond" that was his signature, and so far, although it was nearly time to go home, he hadn't heard enough activity at Zoe's desk to finish one short paragraph.

Mr. Diamond, born Diamantopoulos, was an efficient Greek, which meant that he was non-characteristic of his race, for, whatever virtues have been spawned in the Aegean, efficiency is not outstanding among them. If a Greek makes an appointment for the afternoon, he may keep it any time from after lunch to before dinner. When Mr. Diamond made an appointment, it was for an odd and

exact time, such as three seven, or four eighteen, and he was alarmingly prompt about keeping it, and expecting others to do likewise. When they did not, his bald head glistened with sweat, as much from annoyance as from rushing to be on time himself; the bushy black hairs in his nostrils quivered like excited antennae, and he rolled a handkerchief between his hands to rid them of the nervous dampness they continually suffered. If he became disturbed, and it was easy for Mr. Diamond to become disturbed over very little, he had a habit of cracking the joints of his sausage-like fingers, very loud, so that sometimes, on a street-car or in the movies, people turned around to see what was making that noise.

In the office he cracked his knuckles a great deal, and sometimes Zoe felt that if he did it once more, she would scream, but, of course, she never did scream, because, just as she reached the point of utter exasperation, he stopped as suddenly as he had started, and she would spend the next hour listening for the unpleasant little popping sound and wondering what had set him off in the first place.

Mr. Diamond was as aggressively American as Lord Byron was aggressively a scrounger. He belonged to Rotary, and went up to Tampa every Tuesday for the weekly luncheon; he contributed to a number of well-publicized charities without having much of any idea how his money was put to work. "Bread cast upon the waters," he called it, and he was full of such platitudes; he was always early to bed and early to rise, to which he modestly attributed the inevitable result of health, wealth and wisdom; he never counted his chickens before they were hatched, he shied away from rolling stones, both pebbles and boulders, and, even in the presence of Zoe, he was so busy looking that he never got around to more than a tentative leap.

Mr. Diamond was an Elk, an Eagle, a Moose and a Woodman of the World; moreover, he joined and even attended now and then, the Methodist Church in Tampa, because most of his American friends were Methodists and because he was attracted to the neatness and dispatch of the services, so very different from the rambling, though colorful, ceremonies of the Greek Orthodox. Besides, being a believer in method for method's sake, he supposed that some virtue attached itself to the very name.

When Mr. Diamantopoulos came to America from the bustling seaport of Salonika, a good many years before, the first thing he did was to shorten his name to "M. Diamond" in order to be in step with the times and thoroughly democratic. This anglicization only succeeded in confusing his totally Greek clientele, who, once they found out he was one of themselves, never referred to him as anything but "Diamantopoulos" from that day forward.

Mr. Diamond's protuberant black eyes rolled continually; when he got excited they glistened like fat wet marbles. He secretly considered them "expressive" and, to emphasize them, he indulged in certain complicated manipulations of his almost non-existent eyebrows which had convinced his wife, during her entire lifetime, that her poor Michael suffered, uncomplainingly, from migraine headaches. As a result, he had become even more spoiled than was his nature, since she babied him and catered to even his imaginary wishes with pathetic zeal.

It would have been a considerable surprise to Mr. Diamond if someone had told him that nobody in Turtle Run liked him very much, not even Christidos, in whose restaurant he ate every noon and evening since his wife died, and whose Zoe he found desirable, just as a plump and tender pullet would seem desirable if he saw it plucked

and trussed and ready for roasting. He considered Zoe quite a likely candidate to become the second Mrs. Diamond. So far, he had done nothing in the way of suggesting such a plan to her, on the assumption that whenever he was ready to make advances, undoubtedly she would greet them with delight.

And so, when he leaned over Zoe, this particular afternoon when she was already on edge over Philip, and laid his fat moist hand on her shoulder and she felt his sweating palm through her thin blouse, the fact that she jumped up quickly and moved away was no hint to Mr. Diamond that she disliked his touching her. He had laid his hand on her shoulder before, and her deft avoidance of further intimacies seemed only proper and maidenly modesty, and a recognition of the innate danger of him as man and lover. Today he was aroused; he determined to pursue matters further, and a minute or two later when Zoe flew out the door, leaving him with a slapped face and a kicked shin in the best old-fashioned tradition, Mr. Diamond was annoyed and also pretty well pleased with himself. No girl would fight like that over a kiss or two unless she considered him well-nigh irresistible. She'd have to be taught a thing or two, once he'd caught and tamed her. Even though she had left the office "never to return," according to her own dramatic exit lines, a word to old Christidos and she'd be back at her desk in the morning, all the more docile and repentant for this incident. These Dodecanese! snorted Mr. Michael Diamond, American, mopping his slapped cheeks. These Dodecanese! He thought of the blonde girl in the Tampa bar who liked to trade kiss for kiss and who drank nothing but brandy and soda, of the dark-eyed Cuban wenches in criptown, the spicks from Tampico and Port au Prince and Rio, who came North for

easy money and gave their favors as easily. But of course, for a wife, one wanted a modest woman, a woman such as Mr. Diamond could make out of Zoe, once he'd trained her. He trusted she would say nothing at home about her torn blouse; after all, it was entirely her own fault, wrenching away like that. But even if she did, his standing in the community, his wealth, his good reputation, and his declaration of honorable intentions would more than off-set anything she could say to her father. A little misunderstanding . . . yes, that was it. She'd come around by tomorrow.

Mr. Diamond swatted a stinging black ant that had escaped the "Hoodoo Tape" wound around the legs of his desk and was scurrying across the polished top. Tomorrow Zoe would wrap fresh tape on all the office furniture; that was the first thing he'd tell her to do. And flowers; he liked fresh flowers on his desk. He'd tell Christidos, tonight, to have the girl pick something fresh and fragrant and bring it in tomorrow morning.

Chapter Eight

LORD BYRON, nee George Pappas, never would have set foot into the Olympia Bar and Grill, where he had often been most grossly insulted, if he had not observed Stephen Christidos setting foot into it first. Stephen's father had no particular objection to the boy's having a glass of beer now and then, but he did object to the glass being obtained in a rival bar, and he had an unfortunate habit of pointing out that in spite of the fact that John had been away at war and associated with all sorts of Americans, notorious as heavy drinkers, he still preferred milk. Stephen therefore patronized the Olympia as regularly as his pocket money permitted.

The chief differences between the Olympia and the Parthenon were that the Olympia had a juke-box glowing with parti-colored lights and featuring American records, a pin-ball machine containing a miniature baseball game and an embarrassing buzzer when the customers tilted it, and American dishes such as ham and eggs or cheese sandwiches could be had for the asking, as well as American drinks—cocktails, fizzes and rickeys. The tourist who stopped off at the Olympia for a cool draught was served potent concoctions which were made more or less at random out of the bartender's fancy, and bore little resemblance to the Martinis and Manhattans made anywhere in the world beyond the city limits of Turtle Run. Greeks seldom, if ever, sampled these mixtures; beer, *ouzo*, and brandy were their tippie, in a rising scale depending on the

state of their pocketbooks. The younger people of the town found the dingy temptations of the Olympia far more attractive than the Parthenon; the proprietors were city Greeks from Tampa, and took little interest in their goings-on, while Christidos remembered the babyhood of every young person in town. There is nothing more depressing to the lively spirits of a "sport" in pointed shoes and flashy shirt with the tail out than to be reminded by the man who draws his beer that that same man dusted his britches more than once when he was three or so. Obviously, Stephen preferred the Olympia.

And so, as the boy went in, Lord Byron followed hard after. He was thirsty and he honestly liked the boy. Our pseudo-poet was sufficiently touched with madness as to lose one characteristic—perhaps the chief characteristic—of the rest of our Greeks. He did not worry. To Lord Byron, life was as simple and uncomplicated as it is to a song sparrow. The bird eats where he finds crumbs; he dips his bill in a convenient puddle and finds surfeit for his thirst; he bathes in a self-made small dusty cup at the side of the road, and he hops from branch to branch. The song sparrow is not particular about his branches, but if they, and crumbs, and rain water, are not present, he must fly as far as his little strength will allow; else he will surely perish in the barren wastes. But song sparrows seldom need to seek new environments; they are peculiarly adaptable to what little lies at hand. Short of traps and cats and poison grain spread by those who dislike pre-dawn cacophony under the eaves, they make out well enough. And so Lord Byron followed Stephen, knowing that the boy would not have turned in at the Olympia with less than the price of a couple of beers in his pocket, perhaps more, to feed the colored lights of the juke-box and the little

metal figures who played a jerkily perpetual baseball game under the glass lid of the machine.

Stephen had found the flat-faced and obsidian-eyed older man curiously easy to talk to. For a beer, Lord Byron listened, and interjected nods and quiet comments, some of them unworldly, some of them oddly pertinent. If Stephen was strained and sulky, Lord Byron talked of far-away places he had visited, whether in reality or imagination; of the veiled women of the Orient and the half-glimpsed glimmer of ruddy Indian jewels; if the boy was talkative and rebellious, Lord Byron claimed the earth in the name of the young; and if, as on infrequent occasions, he was repentant, he talked of the old ways of their people and of the ancient days when lived young Glafkos, the legendary hero of the spongers, whose hands and eyes were shaped by the sea, who was so handsome that the gods were jealous, and who dove, one day, from the cliffs of Symi and never came up. Some say he still lives and dreams at the sea's bottom, clasped in the arms of an ocean goddess who was old before Zeus made heaven and earth. Lord Byron knew perfectly well that Stephen was too handsome for most people to take him seriously, too smart to learn anything in school, too ambitious to stick to any one plan, and too lazy to work. He knew that the boy wanted to become a captain and a diver, the hero of the piece, the toreador of the bull-ring, but that he never would work on a boat as a deckhand and sponge-scraper—the required apprenticeship—as long as he could beg, borrow or steal a couple of dollars from his father. He had a curious kind of love for this youth who was as allergic to work as himself and in whom burned, on a larger scale, the same rebellious fires that once burned in him when he was seventeen, before anyone but his mother had read his

darling verses, and hence before anybody had laughed at them. True, the fires were of different dimensions, just as Stephen's shoulders were already far broader than the poet's, but the resentment of fatherly authority was couched in the same key. Young George Pappas had been icily polite and satirical, and had used affected language and longer words than his leather-merchant parent could understand; Stephen grumbled and sulked and slapped his hand down hard on the bar after a couple of beers. But it was the same resentment against not being allowed to puff the ego; in one case, the descendant of Homer and Pindar who would outstrip his ancestors; in the other, the young sea-god kept prisoner in a class-room. Neither George Pappas nor his later metamorph, Lord Byron, had ever felt much of any physical attraction to women. In Athens, the ladies of the lunatic literary fringe had ignored him; as a small boy, little girls frightened him, since they were so much more curious and at the same time more shrill than boys, and now the work-reddened hands he kissed for cakes and ale disgusted him with their faint odor of fish and grease overlaid with soap. There had been incidents in the past when he had been attracted to an older woman . . . someone he never met; a flash of a mature shoulder, the turn of a head reminiscent of his mother, a woman combing her hair in a second story window and grieving as she plucked out a few grey strands. Also there had been ambivalent moments when he could have fallen prostrate at the feet of a huge wrestler whom he went nightly to watch while he was in Cairo; when he composed odes to a Marathon runner in the Olympic games; when he wept equally before a statue of Phoebus Apollo or the sunny beauty of a sponger's son, aged eleven and diving palely naked into the frothy green bayou. If Lord Byron

had been less concerned with his dreams and with the sparrow-search for substance, he might have put out his hand to detain these demi-loves, but the impulse was never strong enough to divert him into action. Stephen was gloriously young and strong; Lord Byron identified him with the Glafkos of legend, and planned a lengthy ode in his honor. Moreover, Stephen was a Glafkos who treated him as only a mildly eccentric equal, and who was usually good for a beer in the dim recesses of the Olympia, though he ignored the older man in the Parthenon as a matter of security. Theirs was a curious friendship, based on frustration and cemented together by the jingle of a silver coin on the edge of the bar. Which, to tell the truth, is more foundation than many associations build upon.

And so, Lord Byron listened and very nearly worshipped as the boy slapped his hand on the bar and ordered one beer after another; today was a wondrous day, since, though the pseudo-poet quaffed three full measures, his glass was again full in front of him. Delicate as a cat, he licked a bit of froth from the corner of his lip and murmured when Stephen paused. It was the same old angry complaint; the classroom when he should be taking a man's place in a man's world; being treated like a kid; his father wanted to know every coming and going, not only his but those of his brother and sister; John, like an old mud-turtle, never noticed what was wrong in the house, but of course, John was the favorite; he had every privilege and preference. John could do no wrong; how did anybody know he couldn't, since he'd never tried? And Zoe, his sister . . . another dumb Greek girl who knuckled down to Pop and looked kind of scared half the time. The kind of a girl he was supposed to marry when the time came. The kind of a girl he would never give a second

glance; the Old Country, isolated island girl, the green-horn who knew nothing but what her parents told her, and that was very little.

And Lord Byron nurtures the image of Glafkos the young sea-hero, almost the young sea-god, golden as sunlight, who dreams in the depths until he comes back to earth, lean-hipped and rippling; the richest and rashest diver of them all. Who knows but he is Stephen, still unawakened?

"So?" said Christidos, some two hours later, as Stephen tramped up the back steps and stubbed the top one, as he sometimes did of late. "So? Where were you?"

"Oh, around." Stephen turned his flushed face away so that his father would not smell the beer on his breath. "Down at the pier . . . and . . . around. You know."

"I guess I do, and only too well." Christidos shook his head; his long, sad face was even sadder than usual. But his voice was gentle. "Son, didn't you remember that you promised to help out today? With Cimon gone to a christening, I'm all alone in the restaurant today until Spiros comes back. It's too much for one man, to watch the pots on the stove and the ovens, that the good food should not be ruined, to wait on tables and tend bar when afternoon customers come in, to handle the cash . . . and you know very well the afternoon is the only time I have to make up my accounts. I needed you today, and it's hard to admit, even to myself, or perhaps I should say that's the hardest of all, that my own son broke his promise and failed me."

"Gee, Pop . . ." Stephen smothered back a dim memory of some words that morning about his coming straight home from school at three o'clock and helping out. Not that it made much difference . . . Christidos was always telling him things to do, and half of them went by him

like dust in the road when the wind kicked it into small quiet dervishes. "Why didn'tcha tell a guy? I'd have been here, if I really thought you meant it."

"I generally mean what I say , . ."

"Not that it'd make any difference if I came to help out or not," muttered the boy. "Who's going to come into this dump in the afternoon?"

"What's that you said?"

"I said," the boy's voice raised, emboldened by a combination of beer and guilty resentment, "I said nobody is going to come into this dead dump in the afternoon and sit around listening to their hair grow. What ever happens in here? They have two beers and you start breathing down their necks, so scared they might get a little happy in the joint. Nothing to do, no music but those dumb Greek plat-
ters, no games. You gotta be pretty old to sit over one cup of coffee all day. They've got plenty of daytime trade down at the Olympia . . ."

"It was kind of you to count the customers for me while you were there . . ."

"Who, me?" When Stephen wanted to, he could look as innocent as a flower or a cloud . . . or Christidos' little black cat with the white vest, draped, purring as usual, in the crook of his arm.

"You, of course. You think I don't know where you go. Call it father's love, call it spying; say I have eyes in the back of my head, as you used to say when you were so high . . ." Christidos held his hand a foot or so from the floor. "But please don't insult me by playing innocent and assuming that I'm stupid. I don't mind if you have a drink once in a while . . . you're close to a man grown, and I suppose you have something of man's appetites. But why must you

go to that riffraff to do your drinking? For one thing, it doesn't look nice for my son to be seen over there."

"And for another thing you want your son under your nose every minute. It's no wonder John waves that milk he drinks around like a banner!"

"John is welcome and able to step up to my bar and I'll pour him and his friends whatever they require," Christidos said stiffly. "I'll not argue with a half-fledged cockerel like yourself. John is twenty-three; he's been to war and come back a man, and he holds down a man's job. His flying keeps him in St. Petersburg; but he comes to see his old father whenever he can. These things you know... Besides, I can trust him . . ."

"Trust him! And I suppose you can't trust me, just because I happened to be born a few years later!"

"Not only for that reason. You've given me cause not to trust too much. John I can depend on, as though he were half of my own self, and with more schooling and wisdom than I dreamed there was in the world when I was his age."

"And Zoe? I suppose you trust her, too. Is that why you watch her like a broody hen whenever she's in the house, and fuss worse than any woman if she's out of sight?"

"Zoe is a girl. A girl without a mother. I've done the best I could." Christidos spread his hands. "I don't know why you should question your father, you there with the angry face, or why I should bother to explain. Zoe has as good manners as any girl in town . . . better than many of them. She's a good daughter to me. She knows what's right, she knows how careful a young girl has to be. Soon she'll marry . . ."

"Well, she won't marry Philip. You see, I know a thing

or two, myself," He moved closer to his father, thrust his face down toward the older man's. "You think Zoe will always be like a dove in your hand? We're not greenhorns like you and Spiros; we're born here in this country! We're Americans; we know our rights. We're not getting married to people the old folks pick out for us!"

"Does being Americans mean that you should be disobedient to your father?"

Stephen swaggered. "Maybe it's all right for John and his milk and soda pop. Maybe even for Zoe . . . she acts, sometimes, like she needs somebody to think for her. But not for me! You understand, not for me! Not everybody thinks I'm a kid to be ordered around. I've got a few friends . . ."

"Whom you meet in the Olympia, no doubt." Christidos still spoke in that stiff, even voice, perhaps a shade more quietly than at first. "In the last few minutes I've heard words I believed impossible from the mouth of one of my children. Who, pray, are these friends who think you're so wonderful? Some giggling, painted girls at the high school? Maybe you'd better bring your friends home for a change . . . though I doubt that even the proprietors of the Olympia would stoop to having little girls for customers."

"All right, so it's one friend. And you know him well enough." Stephen was almost shouting. "He's in here every day, and whatever you think about him, you're wrong. He's a man of education, a travelled gentleman of the world . . ."

"Mr. Basil Economou," Christidos murmured in relief. "But would he be one to enter that place of flashing lights and pin-balls and slot machines?"

"Economou . . . that old wind-bag! Greece, Greece,

and his old-fashioned politics! Who cares what old Economou thinks?"

Christidos was used to Stephen's wild talk about anybody or anything he considered old-fashioned or old-world or touched with the "capitalism" that he'd tried to discuss with his father, only to find out that the older man didn't have the faintest idea what it was, and cared less. "Then who? If it's not Economou? And I can't think of anyone else who's a travelled and educated gentleman?"

"Well, if you must know, it's the poet, Lord Byron. He, at least, understands me. He knows what it is to have ideals and dreams, to want to do big things and to be kept back. Oh, I know what you think of him, you who can just about make out the newspaper! You're so hot about me going to school, but when I am friends with an educated man, a man of understanding . . ."

"A bum." Christidos sat down heavily; the little cat leaped out of his arms and dashed for the shelf at the back and the safety of the toilet paper carton. "My son . . . he can find no better company to keep than that worthless scrounger! Three times a day for one year he eats the bread and the good fat knucklebones, and drinks my soup and my coffee; now he sucks out what little brain the boy ever had in his head." Suddenly he stood up and struck Stephen hard across the face; the print of his hand stood out white against the boy's flushed face. "A bum . . . who drinks the dregs out of the wine-glasses at a wedding. At least, hell not come in here any more! I'll kick him off the steps so hard he'll land in the muck out beyond the docks! I'll pull his head off as if it were a chicken's!"

"If you don't let him come as he always does, if you lay hand or tongue on him, I swear to you, Father, I go when he does." The boy, half his face fiery, half striped

white from the blow, advanced slowly toward Christidos, who seemed to shrink and wither into an old man even as he squared himself. "You think I'm a kid. I'll take you on right now and beat the daylights out of you, and that's the last you'll ever see of me!"

"You'd strike me, your father?"

"And don't think I won't enjoy it!"

"All right, then," Christidos lifted both hands and very deliberately slapped the boy again, left and right, over and over before Stephen could get his hands up. They were not particularly hard slaps, but they dazed and half-blinded Stephen, and his head wobbled; his eyes were momentarily unfocussed. "Think you'll strike me, your father? I don't fight babies! This is the way we shake addleheads to wake them up!"

Just then there was a scuffle and a shuffling bump at the screen door. Christidos very deliberately turned his back on the reeling boy and walked to the front of the Parthenon. Cimon, his head lolling, his feet dragging, finally managed to open the door. Christidos took one look, seized the waiter's arm, and half-carried him out through the kitchen and up the stairs to a cot in the spare room. When he came back a few minutes later Stephen was washing his face at the sink, his shirt hanging down just as he'd slipped his arms out of it and let it dangle to the floor, and his young body strangely appealing, his chest still smooth and hairless, his back narrow at the waist and ridged upward into his ribs. Christidos put a hand on the shoulder, white as a girl's, which he had snuggled so often against his own.

"At least, no one saw us fighting, no one heard," he murmured. "Cimon is blind drunk again . . . a bum, but at least, a bum with a job. You know how seldom I've laid

a hand on any of you. Can't it be like always between us again?"

"I don't know," said the boy dully, out of the depths of the towel. Christidos wondered if he was crying, and hoped he was, because there is much that tears can cure. "I don't know."

"Go on, now," Christidos said softly. "Cimon will sleep it off, and Spiros will come in soon. Go to the picture show." He hunted in his pocket, yes, there was a fifty cent piece . . . no, he'd give the boy a dollar, a couple of dollars. "Maybe when you come home you'll stop at the drugstore and bring some ice cream. John will be home, and Zoe . . . bring plenty."

Stephen pulled up his shirt and gave his father a strange look, but he took the proffered money. "I dunno," he mumbled. "I dunno . . . I might help out an hour or two, down on the excursion boat."

The midges that swarmed in Christidos' mind seemed to buzz louder and faster; his thoughts whirled with them; he could hardly force the words out of his mouth. Help out on the excursion boat . . . for nothing . . . just for the chance to talk to the tourists, to swell around with a diver's knife in his hand, to swagger and lie and cheat, if the chance came. "Just go, go quickly," Christidos said in his quietest voice. "And if you see that . . . that friend of yours, ask him not to come in, just for tonight. Take him for a meal at the Olympia if you like; I'll give you the money for it. But if he comes here before tomorrow, I can't be responsible . . . And henceforth you are finished with school; since it is hateful to your spirit, it shall torment you no more."

The door creaked; it was Spiros, back from his afternoon's sleep, brown and ugly as a monkey, but his blood

cousin and the sanest thing in the frightening cosmos around him. Little Spiros, worried that the roasts had been untended; that the *mousaka* has been let burn dry; that the pots of soup, fragrant with dill and thick with the chopped liver and spleen and kidneys of the lamb whose bones and marrow bubbled therein had been unstirred. Christidos, thought his partner, was a good man, but he tended to be a wool-gatherer. In all these years, Spiros never had felt quite secure in leaving Christidos in charge when there was cooking on the stove. All was well; he bustled in the kitchen, making coffee for himself and his partner, and only when the sticky little balls of Turkish paste were dropped in and the boiling water added and the two little blue porcelain cups stood steaming and ready did he look at the other man.

"What's the matter, old friend? You look . . . suddenly . . . as though you'd touched hands with Death!"

"Maybe I have," said Christidos, wearily, as he sat down at his accustomed table, and the two men began to sip the sweet thick Turkish brew.

Chapter Nine

WHEN SPIROS came home from the Parthenon in the evening, his massive wife had the kitchen steaming with the labors of her day. No matter how hot the weather, the ovens were hotter; she was a big woman with a big family to cook and boil and bake for, and though she herself ate little at the table, her continual nibblings and tastings during the preparation of the food allowed her to eat enough for two, which she did most of the time, as she had been pregnant almost consistently from her sixteenth year to her thirty-ninth. The fact that Philip, her first-born, had only four younger brothers and sisters living did not discourage her; she had now arrived at about the sixth month of a fresh pregnancy; a condition hardly noticeable, since she was so huge. Always she bore big babies; sometimes they died in their first year of life; sometimes they came stillborn from her capacious womb. Always the midwife exclaimed over their size and their beauty, even when they never drew breath. And in twenty-three years of childbearing she had taken to her bed for only one day at each lying-in, and she had a healthy brood of five to show for her slight inconvenience. Bearing children was as easy for her as baking bread or wringing the neck of a chicken; it was something to be accomplished in the course of a day, or a year, so that life could proceed smoothly. Even the plucking and poignant sadness of the little hands of the stillborn did not restrain

her; she grieved for a while and then there was new life under her heart again. They were laid, one after the other, in the cemetery at the edge of town, each with his domed white headstone, but the stones did not lie heavy enough to make her forbid her small husband her bed on those occasional nights when a woman knows by intuition that she will conceive. In the midst of life we are in death; as Sophia Spiros stirred the steaming kettle of egg and lemon soup she thought of her dead babies; and, on late evenings, when she wound her head and shoulders with a black scarf and went on foot to light the votive lamps at each little headstone, she thought of killing the young kid and roasting it for the morrow. But mostly, she thought of the living, and cooked for them and cleaned the house and sewed their clothing, because it was in her nature to do so. And at night she settled down with her crochet hook and the eternal balls of colored cotton yarn. Every chair 'in the house had a dozen sets of antimacassars and arm-rests; there was a cupboard full of lace tablecloths and a chest or two of bedspreads from her cunning, brisk, large fingers, and still Sophia Spiros crocheted as though she must hurry, hurry, to finish this final piece before Fate snipped the threads. Spiros got a little tired of her endless needlework, and yet he was as proud as she that among the women of Turtle Run her productions were the most copious and the most varied . . . and that, in a town of constantly crocheting women.

Spiros never had much appetite for his meals, either at home or in the Parthenon; he said that smelling the food all day took his taste away. And so he ate Sophia's cooking only out of politeness; she was a good wife and mother and he wanted her to know that he appreciated her, but

actually the meat could have been soft wood and the *baklava* sweet cardboard for all he cared. He had a fondness, shared by many of his island brethren, for *tsipouro*, which is a triple-strength fermented brandy not recommended for those faint of heart or stomach. Christidos refused to stock it in his bar, saying that it was the prime cause of fights and chair-smashings, and besides that, it stripped a man's tongue of all flavor, and spoiled his digestion. In fact, he blamed his partner's poor appreciation of good Greek food on his addiction to this fiery liquor. But Sophia, by a strange process of upside-down reasoning, was convinced that because her husband had a small capacity for food, and according to her, was small of stature as a consequence, it just went to show that his brain was unusually commodious. Possibly she was on the defensive when she first laid eyes on the little man her parents had chosen for her to marry; she was afraid of being teased by the other girls and mocked by the older people. And so, over the years, she had talked herself around to believing that a small body somehow proves mental and moral and spiritual superiority. Possibly, as large women often are, she was incapable of physical excitement toward any but little men. If her man had matched her in size, perhaps her womb would not have opened so often.

And so she ate little at supper, because she had already eaten her fill, and Spiros ate little because the smell of cooking was always in his nose, and the four children still at home ate like wolves, and Sophia mourned that Philip, away at college, probably gnawed lean meat and dry crusts, in spite of the fact that every week she sent him huge garlicky-smelling baskets, since it never occurred to

her that they might be embarrassing in the dormitory of an American university.

And after the meal, when the dishes were done and Evridiki was finishing her home-work or practicing at the golden-oak piano in the front parlor, Spiros and his big wife sat at the kitchen table, he with his glass of *tsipouro* at hand and the bottle not far away, his cigarettes and his neatly folded newspaper, and she with her ample lap spilling over with the complicated bedspread she was presently engaged upon. After a while Spiros would cock his spectacles on his nose and pick up the Greek paper, printed in New York a week or more before, and read aloud to his wife. It made no difference that the news was stale; it was as fresh as any word of the world outside Turtle Run that they ever received. There was a radio in the house, but Spiros had no patience with it; it had been begged for by the children and seemed harmless enough to him, but somehow trifling. Sophia enjoyed the music but turned the little button on the front of the machine to "Off" when any voice started talking. She did not understand English and besides, the idea of a live but bodiless voice in the room with her made her nervous. The music did not bother her because, even at home on Symi, they had had a phonograph. It never occurred to either her or her husband that there were news commentators who brought the world up-to-date as of the minute before last; any man talking must be part of one of those stories the children listened to, some with much gunfire and other distracting noises.

Spiros read the week-old paper aloud, choosing only certain parts, not particularly because he thought they would interest his wife, but because they were the only

items he cared for himself. International events he skipped entirely. The doings of either Athens or Washington were in other hands. Births and deaths and christenings, and, above all, murders and scandals and carryings-on . . . those were his meat, and the more highly savored, the better.

"Here's a woman in a place called Ak-ron, O-hy-o . . . married forty years she was, and runs away with a boarder. Who would have thought it, married forty years . . ."

Sophia accompanied her husband's reading with a little running comment that never changed. "Tsk . . . tsk . . ."

"And here's another; it's a man, this time, deserts his family of six little ones, to starve, I suppose. It says their mother died when the last was born. Such evil in the world!"

"Tsk ... tsk ... tsk .. ."

"Here's a young couple, engaged to be married, they were, and the boy brings her home from the moving picture show one Sunday afternoon and shoots her dead on her father's doorstep. A good Greek name, too . . . but that's what comes of the American ways they learn in the city."

"What city? Where the boy shot her dead on the doorstep?"

"Chee-ka-go."

"Tsk ... tsk ... tsk .. ."

"No girl, no nice girl, would go to the moving picture show in the big sinful city without her family. If her family had been with her, this would not have happened."

"No . . . read me some more, old man."

"Here's two sisters, both widows, both in love with the

same man. One killed the other; the man is in the hospital, but only a little wounded. It's all this love business, old woman; when we were young we never heard of love except after marriage."

"That's right, old man. Love comes after marriage; before, it is a bad thing. Young people should not be in love when they marry; it shows poor up-bringing. And widows, too . . . have they no shame nowadays?"

"Here . . . here . . ." Spiros fairly bounced on his chair. "Here's a bad one; a boy strikes his old grandmother with a piece of stovewood because she wouldn't give him pocketmoney! That's just what it says, here in the paper. Can it be true, even in Brook-el-yn, New York? That the young no longer have respect for the old? This America!"

"Terrible . . . terrible. But at least he struck a woman, at least it wasn't his grandfather . . ."

"Yes, yes. But even so . . ."

"Did she die?" asked Sophia Spiros eagerly.

Spiros squinted at the paper. "It doesn't say. Maybe we'll know in next week's paper."

"Tsk . . . tsK . . . maybe we will. Read on, old man."

"Here it says a girl was lost in some woods somewhere in . . . in . . . never mind, it's a long name and of no consequence. Only she wasn't a Greek girl, that's a mercy. But they found her body . . ." He got up and peeked through the door into the parlor to make sure Evridiki was deep in her studies. "Get to bed, young one, and no nonsense about it!" Sitting down again, he lowered his voice and spoke behind his hand. "Body . . . unclothed, and it seems a bad thing was done to her. What is the world coming to, anyhow?"

"Tsk . . . tsK . . . Who did the thing?"

"They think . . . maybe . . . a man with a soldier's

overcoat. A returned wounded soldier. It happened near a hospital for veterans. It says he has been in there for three-four years; maybe he was crazy from the wounds."

"A poor crazed man; what does one expect? At least a Greek girl would have sense enough not to go walking alone in the woods; man's nature is man's nature."

"She wasn't walking, she was lost."

"Well, she must have gone walking alone, to get lost anywhere."

"The paper says somebody saw her get out of a car near there."

"If her family had been in the car, they wouldn't have let her get out alone."

"American ways. The old ways are better. At least, nothing like that happens here."

"Read some more, old man."

"Yes, here's the worst of all, and I almost passed over it. A son and his father, fighting in a public brawl . . . a beer tavern. They had to call the police. A good Greek name, too, and both of them in the jail . . ."

"A son fighting his father! How wicked the world has grown!"

"And that's not all." Spiros took a big swallow of *tsipouro*. "He was drunk in the tavern, the son, defying his father's authority . . ."

"Tsk . . . tsk . . . tsk . . ."

"And he hit his father with a bottle, and a chair, and finally with his fists . . ."

"What happened next?"

"I told you, they're in jail. Well know next week; such an outrage is sure to be in the paper."

"At least, such a thing could never happen here."

"No, old woman. Among us, especially among us from

Symi, such a thing could not happen, even in America. It's these mainland Greeks."

"Nothing exciting ever happens here," Sophia said with a little sigh.

"No, thank God, nothing exciting. Come, old woman . . . I'm sleepy. There's nothing more in the paper, and it's time to go to bed."

Chapter Ten

FOR five days, the table against the window, the one where blind Alexis Dragoumis customarily sat, lay neat and white and empty. The silver was placed; the napkin tented over the tip of the knife; the water glass was polished and turned down, just as Cimon prepared every table every day against the coming of the customers. But the Major absented himself, and no one sat in his place; it never occurred to any of the regulars to sit there. That bright table by the window belonged to the Major and Mr. Economou, a little less to Mr. Economou, of course, because he would come only occasionally, in the evening, while the Major was there twice a day, on the stroke of the clock; you could set your watch by him. The empty table, the glass turned down, were as lonesome as a house shuttered up for a season, as lonely and lonesome as a beached ship drawn sandward and trestled for repair. Or a boat half-built and abandoned; her ribs sun-weathered, a forgotten tool, salt-rusted, across her thwarts, a frayed rope dragging at the bow. Curious that in the short space of a few days a table, set with knives and forks and glasses like every other table in the Parthenon, identical in every way, not a fraction of measurement nor a shade of coloring different, could become such a symbol of emptiness. And Zoe glanced often at the lonely table, and wondered. With her conscious mind she was concerned as to whether he was sick; she would have heard if he had gone away, or if he submitted to another operation, because everyone in

Turtle Run knew the most of what happened to everyone else, even what went on in the hospital on the hill. Deep in her subconscious there was a sick longing, a terrible sense of desolation; a bride deserted at the altar could not have felt more shamed and miserable.

After the afternoon when her blouse was torn, Zoe had never returned to the insurance office. Mr. Diamond had stopped in to see her father and demand to know what had become of his secretary . . . best damn little typist he'd ever had, he declared, sliding his large wet-marble eyes about as though she were hiding under one of the tables. Christidos, who had never liked Mr. Diamond much anyhow, and who enjoyed having his girl at home even though he felt proud that she was a capable, trustworthy young woman, able to hold down a good job, told Mr. Diamond stiffly that he needed Zoe himself, and could not spare her for outside work. Dimly, he guessed that something had happened to make Zoe quit her work. In spite of his anxiety to bring up his brood in a "modern" and American way, he never had quite approved of Zoe's taking a job, even with so eminent a citizen of Turtle Run as Mr. Diamond. There was no discussion, Zoe told her father that she wanted to quit; she had proved that she could take a good office job, and she could get another any time she wanted or needed to. Christidos told Mr. Diamond that he wanted his daughter at home, and so that was all there was to it. Nobody was the loser. Now, when the insurance broker stepped into the Parthenon for a quick beer or seated himself at a table for one of his interminable meals, punctuated by much toothpick-chewing and many small regurgitory noises, nobody was embarrassed. Zoe, feeling his eyes on her, at the neck of her dress, the placket of her skirt, almost tangibly slipping up the

cool side of her leg past her neatly rolled stocking-top, kept to the other side of the room and paid no attention. In her estimation, he was a nasty-minded old man, but he was also one of her father's best customers. Besides, though he spent plenty of money on his belly, and Cimon loved him dearly because of his generous tips, he didn't come in too often, any more.

Perhaps Zoe would not have missed the blind officer so much if she had not been at home, constantly in and out of the kitchen and up and down the stairs to their living quarters, and the reminder of the empty, sun-shot table by the window was ever nagging at the tail of her eye. But Pete Cockinos, the bandy-legged, spine-shattered little crab-man from Niceros, somehow made his way down the hill every day, slowly and painfully, stopping to steady himself with his hands, sometimes against a fence-post or a lamp-post or the side of a building, sometimes almost on all fours on the curbstones, because a Greek must talk to his kind, or perish, and though there were plenty of various kinds of Greeks at the hospital, there was none from the island of Niceros save himself. And Pete wracked his twisted bones that he might sit over a cup of coffee with a fellow islander among the sponge people.

And so, the fourth day that Dragoumis was absent from his accustomed place, Zoe acknowledged the little sea-rover's bobbing greeting with a question: where was the Major? Was he ill, or had he perhaps tired of the Parthenon's food, that they saw him no longer?

"Nothing like that, lady, though as to his being ill, I dunno," Cockinos said in his countrified dialect. "It can't be he's tired of the food here particularly, because he don't eat what they bring him on a tray in hospital, either. Maybe he's tired of eating entirely, or, more likely, tired

of living. He don't sleep, either; just sits by the window day and night; it's like some kind of craziness come over him these past days."

"Oh," was all Zoe said, but a dreadful fear shook her that perhaps, after all, the sorrows of this man to whom she had hardly spoken, of whose tragedy she knew only the barest physical facts, had finally shaken the delicate machinery of his mind and the free spirit that she felt to dwell therein had fled.

"Yes, lady, and doctors are in and out, all times of the day and night, but so far they dunno what's up with the Major. He just sits like he was a wooden doll and lets them poke at him and write down words in their little books. I bet I could read those words, I could, if I could get to see 'em; you know, the Major has been teaching me to read."

"Oh," said Zoe again. "Tell him . . . tell him we miss him and we hope he'll feel better soon . . ."

"I'll tell him, quick enough, if he'll let me in to see him," Cockinos said. "He don't act like he wants to talk to nobody; he don't act like he even hears when folks speak to him. Except Mr. Economou, he hears him all right, because I'm hanging round in the hall all the time, waiting to see if the Major wants me to do some errand or something for him. You know, lady, there's nothing I wouldn't do if he told me to. So I hear him and Mr. Economou talking, talking, hour on end, and after Mr. Economou goes, d'ye know what I hear?"

"No, what?"

"I hear the Major crying. Like a baby, he was. And that's the first time he's cried since it happened, his eyes, I mean, and that time it wasn't as much crying as cursing. I guess maybe it's the only time he's cried since he was a kid; I ought to know, I was with him all through Epirus,

winning and losing; I was the one as picked him up and toted him in when his eyes was blasted, and I was in the prison camp with him, year in, year out, and since, and now here. I even go down to the operating room and stand by when they do the cutting on him . . . that's the way he wants it. He asks for me to. But not now. Seems like now he don't want nobody."

"Do they . . . do they say it's his mind that's gone?"

"They don't say nothing, at least to me. But it must be some kind of craziness, not to eat, not to sleep; what's left for us poor chaps but bed and belly, if you'll excuse my saying it?"

Zoe smiled and thanked him, but her throat felt tight and dry, and her eyes were as scratchy as though the fine powdered white sand of the road up the hill to the hospital had blown into them. And by that evening, when Economou happened by, she could think of nothing except the tall, bleak-faced man whose blind eyes were flecked with strange lakes and islands of internal fires. It was not easy for her to make a direct inquiry about Major Dragoumis; a thousand generations of well-behaved Greek girls who held their tongues in the presence of men and who never laid eyes on their husbands until the wedding day held her back; equally, a thousand generations whose hearts were torn by news of their loved ones war-wounded, sea-drowned, wave-and-wind bleached and unshriven, drove her on. Ordinarily, her greeting to Mr. Economou was a becoming bow; occasionally she took his order. The grey, tired little diplomat required and expected nothing more. But tonight she lingered at his table; with sudden discernment he looked up and smiled at her.

"He'll be here tomorrow, at least I hope so. He's been through a bad time," Economou said, waving at the empty

plate across from him. "He's going to need all the friends he has, and somehow I think you must be one of them, because he asked me about you once or twice, and he doesn't notice many people. He's a lonely soul, lonelier than ever now . . ."

"I heard that the Major had been ill," Zoe said primly, but Economou, whose profession had practiced his ear to the turn of a syllable, caught the undertone of anxiety.

"Major Dragoumis is no more like the others on the hill than . . . than I'm like those good fellows over there," he said, making a little gesture toward the table where Pete Cockinos and his cronies alternately chuckled and grumbled over a deck of greasy cards, as their luck touched or deserted them. "Not being among his own kind, not having someone close to him . . . that's hard for a man. But it's harder than it is for most in the case of Major Dragoumis; having shut himself away from the world these last few years."

"Has he no people?" asked Zoe, to whom the thought of being away from home and family was perhaps saddest of all.

"Few, if any; his parents are gone. His wife . . . he was married, you know, for less than a year, before the invasion . . . well, he searched for her, but a man doesn't want a woman to know he's maimed; he just hoped for news of her, but he could hardly go back in his condition."

"If she loved him, she'd want him, no matter what . . . she'd even want his dead body to mourn over."

"But a blind man, that's different. At least, he thought so, and has right along. We searched in Egypt, and in Turkey . . . she had a fortune at hand, and he never really doubted that she got away. He was reported missing, you know, and some women can't mourn long; can't

wait to be sure. Now we know . . . she married. An Italian, a munitions manufacturer; who knows but his factory made the very landmine that blasted her husband's eyes . . ."

Zoe shuddered and made a small sound in her throat.

"I don't know why I'm telling you all this, except that he has no one to turn to. I said he'd be in tomorrow; I've gotten him to rest a bit; tonight he was asleep when I left. And he's promised to try to take up life where it left off a few days ago . . . life in the darkness, but still, it's better than none."

"I suppose, now, he won't want his wife to know he lives . . ." Zoe murmured. "She will go on, believing him dead . . ."

"That was the worst of it," said Mr. Economou. "That's what broke him. She not only knows, she's known for the last year and a half, exactly where he is and everything. Apparently her informants are cleverer than ours, because we found her only a week past. She wouldn't care to have her rich Italian bed-fellow, or her fine friends, know that Alexis still lives . . . and he has no intention of telling her. Frankly, I think he's foolish. I don't know why I'm saying all this, except he spoke of you once or twice, today; he said you were kind to him."

Zoe's mind raced back, wondering what kindly thing she had done . . . stopped at the table once or twice . . . remarked on how the sun streamed in that day . . . once their hands touched accidentally and his clung for a moment . . .

"He asked afyout the cat, too," said Economou dryly. "So, stop and chat 'a bit with him, when he comes in, and tell your good father to do so also. And let Puss climb in his lap, if she wishes. It's a world of empty winds, a world of

sounds and scents and touch; caress, handclasp, or the stroking of the cat's back; at least, that's something friendly. It's a pity he won't go into Tampa or St. Petersburg with some of the others, but then, he's not made that way. He can't forget the lovely world before he lost his eyes; his wife, in particular, was very beautiful."

West of Turtle Run lies the harbor, running westward almost from the doorsteps of the shops that face the waterfront, separated only by the shell road that began as sand and became shell; the shell was surfaced over in boom times by asphalt; the asphalt was patched with concrete and the concrete patched with asphalt and tar; times sickened, even as the sponges sickened on the ocean floor from some strange disease that left them frail ghosts of themselves, tearing like lettuce at the touch of the sponger's hook. Not all sponge beds were so affected, but the shadow of poverty touched the town; the traders and operators went about with long faces and the vast, acrid-smelling sheds, usually packed to bursting with the yellow-brown dry chitinous skeletons of a million sponges, stood half empty. The Sponge Exchange was open only one day a week; among the spongers themselves, ever free-handed with money and ever in debt for the next trip's borrowed earnings, there was dismal poverty. But the Islanders had always been poor; they suckled on the narrow, marrowless bone; good times meant liquor for the men and a new rug in the house or a black silk Sunday dress for the women, and beyond that the coins were gambled away before they became warm in the hand. And so now, across the road that had been sand, and shell, and asphalt, and concrete, and shell and sand again, lay the ships in harbor, small high-prowed, slender craft, distinguishable from their ship-ancestors of three thousand years before only

by the fact that there were motors in some of them. Otherwise the colored sails, the great painted eyes at the prows, even the names were the same: Athene, Hera, Persephone. No woman could ever step aboard a ship of the sponge fleet; the boats themselves were women, and jealous of their cat-footed cursing, ineffectual little lovers who builded them and manned them; who deserted them for land and who returned because they could not do otherwise, since ships and seas had shaped their lives these centuries past. That was what lay west from Turtle Run.

East lay the interior of Florida, a region of scrub palmetto and orange and grapefruit groves, of neat small American towns with neat small white houses; a region where the citizens of Turtle Run seldom ventured. They had come to their village by boat, most of them, and when they died they would lie in the cemetery of Turtle Run, with a headstone at their head and a photograph under glass of themselves, a photograph so retouched as to bear little resemblance, laid into the headstone. Some of the wealthier ones might be sent back to Greece in their coffins, salted like herrings, to lie in state among their Old World cousins and be interred on the sand-grain that is Symi, or Halki, or Niceros, or Andros; whatever travelling any of them ever had done, or ever would do, would be done by ship. What lay inland, where the American towns began, was of little interest to the people of Turtle Run; if a dealer or operator went to New York on business, as one or two of them did once a year, it was quite apart from the life and interest of the rest of the people; it was as if the train that spewed out tourists at the beginning of the fishing season and sucked them up again when the season was over, sucked up and spewed out these few like a big, noisy vacuum cleaner sucks up

and spews out coins and hairpins; nothing was changed; nothing different, and the average citizen of Turtle Run never noticed they had been away. That was what lay east of Turtle Run; a land of no importance, one way or another. Their eyes were fixed on the sea.

North of Turtle Run lay the hill, and the hospital upon it, the small community of broken men. Once a sanatorium and rest-home for assorted wealthy refugees from the Palm Beach nightclubs and Miami bars, sent to the West Coast by embarrassed relatives, the hospital had been taken over for the shattered men from the mountain battlefields of Greece; the blind, the halt, the faceless and tongueless; the broken flesh that modern science hoped to patch into a semblance of humanity. These were not the hopeless cases, though there were some that it was a mere waste of time and money to send thousands of miles across the ocean. These were the ones for whom there was some small chance, provided they were willing to be guinea pigs for the doctors; provided new drugs and new surgical methods could be tried on them. To Zoe, north of Turtle Run sat Alexis Dragoumis, blind tormented shell of something very like a god, bathed in fire and blood and sweat, as a statue is formed of molten gold poured into hollow clay in the shape of a man, or an angel. Dragoumis, seated and staring windowward, though sightless, with the familiar and the unfathomable contending in his face, as Pete Cockinos had described him, a silent figure whose soul had very nearly slipped its bonds ... to Zoe, that was what lay north of Turtle Run.

And to the south, there was another hill, beyond the shallow bayou, beyond the marsh where the pink tar flowers bloomed, small florets that, pressed to the ears, will stick like earrings. There was a hill fragrant with sweet

grass and palmetto bloom, clumped with blue lupin and andromeda, where the bees revelled in resonant orgy every afternoon. On this hill the cherokee bean thrust its stunning scarlet spikes; the wild allamanda ran over field and fence like a cloth of gold, and the pink mallows fringed the ditches. In the pine woods at the crest the red wood lily trembled; below lay the wandering stream to the bayou, aimless as a slattern with flowers in her hair. On the hill the wind blew always, as it blew along the waterfront; one block inland there was hardly enough air stirring to rustle the long dry tentacles of the palms, and the women praised God for the lack of it, since wind and woe are synonymous to the island people. The widow-maker wind is never welcome; everyone in Turtle Run feels ill when the wind blows, especially the women, to whom it means a swamped and capsized and rock-racked ship, even though the men of their family are curio-shop keepers or garage mechanics or sponge clippers who have never set foot on a deck in their lives. And so this is what lies south of Turtle Run; the hill and the wind, but to Zoe, who walked toward the hills when in need of help, sometimes physically, to the flower-filled fields southward, sometimes only in her mind and her prayers, lying under the roof and hearing the wind go over, to the south lay peace and healing beyond all words.

And so on the fifth day, Zoe walked out on the sand and shell road toward the hospital at noontime, and when she saw Pete Cockinos and the tall, stricken figure of the Major making their painful way down to the Parthenon, she went up to them and Pete took his hand from the Major's arm in silent agreement and she put her hand there, feeling the hard warm muscle tense under the thin jacket, and Pete Cockinos went crablike down the road,

stooping on all fours to help himself at the uneven curbs, and the two of them, Zoe and the blind man, walked as in a mirror or a dream toward that southern field of wind and wind-blown flowers.

There was no guilt, no anxiety; not even desire was left. They lay in the long sun-smelling grass; their bodies smelled of sun and bark and pine-needles, for after a while they had crept from the tree-safe refuge of the tight grove into a little hollow where no shadow ever came. She made a lupin wreath for his head, and, his fingers, oddly dexterous with no eyes to guide them, fashioned intricate delicate bracelets and necklaces of sweet-grass for her wrists and throat. They said little; they dreamed and slept; she kissed, over and over, not his lips, but the firm mouth-muscle that controls the secret smile of those who laugh but seldom, all about the edges of the lip, careful not to touch the smooth rosy flesh itself lest the spell break, but caressing the face delicately, avoiding the direct contact upon the mouth. She breathed in the fragrance of his armpits, smelling of dead leaves and dying flowers and musk and salt; she wondered at the woman-smoothness of his shoulders, the small fleeting dimples that ran diagonally across his back, the crisp growth of hair over the chest, the silky golden growth under the arms. No man's body had been known to her before; she dared not pry too far; as yet she could neither touch nor look at him or at herself, she who had never even examined her own body naked before a mirror. And, after a long while, he raised himself on one elbow and leaned over her, peering as though the sightless eyes could make out face and form, the color and the play of dappled light.

"I wanted to ask . . . I almost have asked before . . . are you beautiful?"

"No," said Zoe. And then, turning her head, "Oh, I don't know. I don't think so."

"Good," he said, and after a long pause, "Are you sorry, Zoe? Have I done you harm?"

"No ... no ..."

"I've thought it out, half-dreaming here. There's no going back, only forward. Things can be arranged . . ." And, half to himself, he said, "Surely not every woman must despise a man for loving her."

Back through the tar flowers and the wild phlox, pink and white along the ditches, back along the edge of the bayou, where sleek water-birds dove, back up the shell road, and still Zoe felt no tremor of worry or fear. It was not going to be difficult to face her father; she had never kept a secret from him before, but she thought that what had passed between her and Alexis Dragoumis was no shameful hidden thing, but the beginning of a glory not yet ready to be brought to light, a quick kindling spark to be nourished between cupped hands until the fire was safely burning.

Chapter Eleven

WHEN the Dodecanese came to Turtle Run some forty or fifty years ago to ply their age-old trade of sponging, the men came first, living by the tens or the dozens in boarding houses. These boarding houses were the unwieldy big clapboard homes that small-town Americans built in boom times around the turn of the century, and then sold gladly enough when the Greeks moved in and they moved away. For the most part the early spongers were womanless; having struck out to make a fortune in the New World, they left their wives and sweethearts in the Old. But enough women came to run the boarding houses; wives or mothers of coffee-house keepers; adventurous widows looking for better luck in a new land; city Greeks who came down from Charlotte or Birmingham, hearing that the pockets of the spongers were lined with gold.

In these boarding houses the men slept in rows on bare cots, their hats or stocking caps pulled down hard over their ears, their vests buttoned over their shirts; their money in their shoes or sewed into their waistbands. The paper money of America was valueless to such men; only when the packers and operators sent these printed tokens to Greece and translated them into gold coins which were shipped back to Turtle Run by the bagful did the men know the feel of their money, but first the hands of the store-keepers and outfitters dipped into those bags; guarantees were repaid at the rate of four or five hundred per

cent. And who but the rich could read the figures in the account books? The men counted on their fingers and by smudged marks made on the walls over their beds, one, two, three, four, and the fifth mark drawn diagonally to set it off in a bundle of fives, but who save the rich, who could read both Greek and the figures on the American paper money, understood shares and percentages and rates of discount and the fluctuating prices at the Sponge Exchange?

No, the men in the boarding houses fingered the soft slick surfaces of the few gold coins sewed in the waistbands of their trousers and calculated how much they would need before they could send for their women. Sometimes a captain who made a series of such successful sponging ventures, who returned to port over and over so often with his decks looped with the great doughnut-shaped festoons of dry sponge skeletons strung together, in *ligourias*, as they are called, with his holds crammed with half-cleaned sponges streaming with their milky life-juices, and with those still unscraped, untrodden, covered with the black veil of repentance worn by the living sponge . . . sometimes such a man, a little cleverer than most, stepped up to the counter and demanded, and received, his full measure of gold.

And that captain, and some of his crew, if he felt generous, or if it so happened that he was not only captain but diver, and perforce must keep in the good graces of his men, particularly of the line-tenders who held his life twitching at the ends of air-hose and life-line . . . yes, he and perhaps his crew could take passage back to the Twelve Islands, each to his own sand-grain, in a store-bought suit of harsh cheap wool tight in the crotch and armholes, such as the storekeepers in Tampa and other

American cities reserve for selling to greenhorns. Yes, he could go back, with a dollar watch whose figures he could not read, at the end of a chain of yellow metal already tarnished green; with two fancy fountain pens in his vest pocket, neither of which would work—even if he knew how to write. But the two pens, with their fretwork cases of that same mysterious golden and precious metal which always seemed to turn green when a greenhorn owned it a while, went to prove that he was a big shot in the United States of America.

Nor does he creep timidly to his sand-grain, feeling that he has been cheated in the purchase of his shoddy splendor. He is a proud man; he has his hair cut by the ship's barber and oiled with scented oil from a bottle purchased in the barber shop, reeking of rose or jasmine or gardenia. For a greenhorn going back to swell it in his native village, even this hair-oil is green, viscid and oddly opalescent under the barber's fingers. The hopeless pity of the greenhorn is that he seldom knows he is green; he actually seeks out the shameful color. It is hardly his fault that they sell him watch-chains and fountain pens on which the scroll-work will tarnish with verdigris; but must he sport a sleazy green silk shirt and emerald sleeveholders? Dago, spick, wop, hunky, sheeny, squarehead, greaser, mick . . . green is the color of the greenhorn immigrant. Red would be too bold in a strange land; blue is no novelty to the average peasant from the older lands; brown is too drab, and few are the men whose souls hanker for yellow. And so, in his slow process of seeking and finding and learning the thing we loosely term "democracy," there is a period when the color green sticks to the man we just as loosely call a greenhorn as though the stain of it would never let him go.

And to the greenhorn from Turtle Run, back at his

sand-grain to swell it in the town of his birth, and get himself a wife whose father believes that his new son is a great man in a great new land, something else clings forever; the smell of the dying sponge. Nobody notices this smell, because it is the predominant odor of his particular sand-grain; it is an odor they all hold in common, along with garlic, both raw and cooked, and the smell of sweat, and the smell of olive oil, which, when you come down to it, smells like the earth sweating. Even the olive oil smells green, green and faintly rancid, like everything else about the greenhorn. But the dying sponge smells acid and acrid and curiously sweet; like all decay, and most particularly the decay of sea-life, it smells like death and spoiled vinegar. It is a dark smell, black as the mourning veil worn by the living sponge; the garment of repentance, so they say, worn because the sponge was chosen to hold a sour sop to the parched lips of the dying Christ. The smell of the dying sponge pervades Turtle Run; it floats in from the ships at anchor on the waterfront; their decks, however scoured, reek of the trampled milk of the sponges. It is thick in the packing sheds; under the sun-beaten roofs of the sheds it is so tangible that you can almost reach out and gather an armful of it to you, like gathering an armful of hay in a hayloft. In the packing sheds the smell of the sponges was a yellow-brown smell, crowding the nostrils like cotton-wool. On the ships it was both black and milky; in the homes and in the curio shops, in the drug-store and the garage and the dry-goods store, the fish-market and the restaurants, it was paler, mixed and mingled with the smells peculiar to those places, but still special unto itself; the smell of the dying sponge, shedding its garment of repentance worn these two thousand years, and untold thousands before, because of its brief immortal moment.

Forty years ago, perhaps no places in Turtle Run smelled more pungently of the dying sponge than the boarding houses, where at night the men lay unwashed, in rows, on their bare cots, breathing in and out, in the sleeping dark, the essence of the sponge that clung to their lungs. When the fleet was out, some effort was made to clean the boarding houses, because your Greek woman cannot abide dirt; she put up white curtains; she scoured the rooms and the upper and lower halls and the stairs with suds made of yellow naphtha soap; she dabbed at the brown-yellow walls of the dining room and the parlor; she turned out the kitchen, shelf by shelf, and even found time to rearrange and re-pot the porch plants, grown from slips in old tin containers, aspidistra, fuchsia, from which she picks the cottony-cushion scale, geranium, sultana, sansivaria, elephant's ear. These porch plants, and her cat, are her chief joy; her husband, if she has one, fares poorer than the men who sleep in rows in the uppSr rooms, their money in their shoes or sewn in the waistband of their pants, for fear of being robbed. When the fleet is out, she even has time to clean the floors, even about the great clawed foot of the dining-room table, a table on a central pillar with four huge paws clawing at the floor. But never does she manage to clean out the smell of filmed grease and cabbage and black tobacco and salt pork, not if the fleet were to stay out six months instead of their usual three. Over those smells, and the elemental smell of sponge, she manages to lay a fleeting and thoroughly disagreeable smell of yellow naphtha, which will disperse as soon as the spongers return to fortify the basic odors.

And when the men come back from the fleet, at meal-time they gather around the great ball-clawed table, and the ship's boy, who is the house-boy on land, is sent with

the tin pails to the saloon, one pail for each man; sometimes if there are ten men or more the boy makes three or four trips, his arms sagged under the two-quart pails. Before the food is taken up, in a common bowl, a great heap of meat and cabbage stew, and a great plate of bread to sandwich the meat in, finger-fashion, each man's beer pail must be beside his chair, and as fast as it is emptied, the boy must run to the saloon to brim it again. Perhaps this beer-carrying is the heaviest duty of the ship's boy, who on land is the house-boy, and who in reality is the captain's boy; other than this he has little to do save tend the captain's clothes and trim his beard and sleep footwards of his bed on nights at sea when the wind blows eerily up from some old, cold, drowned land, as only a Gulf wind can blow when it is not breathlessly warm. And if the captain should give his boy a slap or a kiss in the warm dark, or slip him a piece of moist, sweaty-fingered gold over and above his shiao, no one took notice, not even the captain's wife, for it only went to show that the boy was a good obedient boy, and such was the way of captains and their slaveys since man first set anxious foot upon the sea.

But today in Turtle Run there are few boarding houses, and though many spongers still cannot read or write, not in English nor in Greek, they know what goes on in the world. For, after they eat their supper they drift to the coffee houses, and there someone who has learned his letters, often enough the coffee-house keeper himself, reads to them from a week-old Greek newspaper printed in New York City, and they do not mind the fact that the news is stale, any more than Spiros minds that the escaping murderers about whom he reads to his fat wife Sophia are already caught and half-way to hanging. They sip the thick sweet Turkish coffee from small blue cups, and unless the

coffee is beaded with winking bubbles of brown froth, it is like beer without foam. Today the spongers hear the news, and some of them, particularly the young ones born in this country, read it for themselves, and all of them, whether they know their letters or not, know their numbers, and keep account of their shares and their just dues; accounts that are inaccurate only in each man's own favor. The days of the greenhorn repaid for a thousand dollars' worth of labor in ten dollars of gold are over in Turtle Run; a man learns what he has coming to him, in due time. And, too, the spongers know of a thing called "the strike," in which, in American cities, workingmen get paid time and a half and overtime for doing nothing at all. And so, today, there can be strikes in Turtle Run, especially in times when the sponges are sick with a purple-red rust that makes them tear like cheap felt, like cheesecloth, like the wavery purple underwater weeds under the spongers' hooks. With education, and the power of the strike, and the laboriously read newspapers, and the growing knowledge of the use of American paper money, there are still the poor, and the near poor, and the near rich, in Turtle Run, but never the very rich who need not search the sky and sea for signs of favorable winds.

The graveyard tells the story. To begin with, the men were buried without name, only a small oval stone as big as the sole of a shoe, with a number on it, and somewhere in the church there was a book with a record of the men whose names belonged to those numbers, a record which only the priest could read. Today those graves are sunken and the stones slant in the ground; they are fifty years old; no one remembers, nowadays, to light lanterns in the twilight beside them. They are curiously short and narrow; the men were buried in their clothes and a winding sheet;

if, as often happened, the divers were killed undersea, by shark or octopus or an inquisitive sea-turtle nibbling on the lines, or a jealous hand cutting them top-side the ship, the men were never taken out of their suits, even though second-hand gear or Navy rejects such as the Turtle Run spongers used represented an investment of several hundred dollars. It was impossible to remove a crushed diver from his gear; the pressure of even ten or fifteen fathoms jammed the pulp of his body up into his helmet. Better not to open the metal case . . . better not to see with one's physical eyes the horror that can befall a man, lest men never venture off the safe sand-grain of land again. But in good times these pitiable corpses, and the corpses of shopkeepers and restaurant and coffee-shop owners, and even of women and children, and packers and operators are well, are laid to rest in fine stone sarcophagi, with the figure of a weeping angel above, and the small oval picture of the sleeper forever preserved under glass set in the stone. By these graves the little vigil lanterns burn almost nightly, and the mothers and widows creep out at every sundown across the sweet-in-death-smelling fields to the cemetery to tend them. You can mark the economic cardiograph of Turtle Run by the gravestones: the small grey shoe-shaped neglected stones; the elaborate weeping angels and lettered marble shafts, and in bad times, the smaller, modest stones flanked by homemade vigil cups, by brass lanterns from a man's ship that could be better spared than the cash to buy him a proper commemorative light.

This year the headstones will be small and plain in the cemetery that lies at the edge of Turtle Run. It is a bad year for sponges; the fleet is at anchor for long, dreary months on end; men say that the sponges are as sick as the

soul of the world. Far out in the Gulf, at a depth of twenty fathoms or so, who knows but the sea-growths are tough and healthy, who knows but they are of monstrous weight, ten, twenty, even fifty pounds, such as the older divers say covered all the ocean floor when the Greeks first came to Turtle Run? But the young men, the generation fit for diving, shake their heads. Maybe their fathers and uncles would risk their lives, risk being crippled and dwarfed by attack after attack of the bends to go down in the deep waters, tunnelling a shaft of light through the cold velvet treacherous black, seeking the ever-retreating sponge. But the young men will not undertake such dangerous dives; five fathoms, even six . . . but preferably less. The captains are careless about observing the ten-mile limit; they fill their holds with small sponges from the easy shallows; the legal size is nothing under six inches, but most often the sponges are only five inches across. The catch is worth little, and so the boats idle at anchor and the men smoulder on the edge of a strike. The paternalistic system of a ship's captain who borrows money from the operators, who wages his haul against the cost of outfitting his voyage, and then sells shares in the mortgage to his crew can keep the spongers poor even in good times, because they never can catch up with what they owe. And the operators are dependent on the packers, because unless the boats are outfitted and sent on their way there will be no industry to keep the packing sheds humming. And the packers, of course, depend, like any other organized business, on the banks in the big cities . . . Tampa, St. Petersburg, New York City. And so, if the ships lie at anchor, it is to the interest of the packers and operators, and, through them, the far-off abstract anonymous Banks of the Big American Cities, to keep food in the iron and copper cooking pots in

the houses of the spongers; to keep tobacco in their pipes and a little credit at the bars and coffee-houses, lest the men pack up their belongings in their tin and rawhide trunks, and take their women and children with them, dogs and kids, both two-legged and four-legged, and cats and chickens and black-shawled old women with their endless black knitting, all heaped indiscriminately in a twenty-year-old jalopy, lest the men and their possessions head inland for the citrus fields, to become a new kind of garlic-smelling okie, and to leave the town of Turtle Run as stripped and dead as the skeleton of a sponge. No, today the spongers do not live in boarding houses; their women are here now, and their children were born in America, but there is something transitory about their very houses, as though they could be shut up tomorrow and the occupants drifted away without a word.

This, then, was the world which seemed heroic and desirable to young Stephen, to whom one tale of a ten-thousand dollar diver's share for a single voyage far outweighed the hundred daily incidents of poverty. This was the world that roused classic memories of Glafkos the sea-hero in the addled mind of the pseudo-poet; the world that made every woman in Turtle Run shudder and turn headachy when the widow-maker wind blew over the town; the world in which Christidos longed to bring up his motherless children as modern, New Country people with proper respect for Old Country ways (a combination well-nigh impossible to achieve); the world in which Spiros and his fat Sophia merely endeavored to bring up their brood without attention to details; a world in which Mr. Diamond the insurance dealer slid his black wet-marble eyes over the shoulders of the young girls, and Mr. Economou dreamed away his retirement from the dull drafty halls of di-

plomacy; a world Alexis Dragoumis saw perhaps more clearly than the others, since he had no eyes to get in the way and so his impressions were not blurred by detail; a world that breathed slowly, but to a purpose, like the very sponges on which it lived.

Chapter Twelve

IN THAT case, we must take certain precautions," said the General to himself, because he was so rarely used to speaking aloud that he carried on a habitual running silent conversation to keep himself company.

The General was a cautious man; eternally taking precautions. His military title was entirely hereditary and by courtesy, since his father had been a renowned strategist in the Balkan Wars of 1912, who had fallen in the famous charge across the fields of Thessaly. Apparently the dusty governmental files in Athens operated automatically, or else national pride could not allow the son of a favorite son to starve, because the minute paternal pension continued on year by year, and was as welcome to the General at fifty as it had been to the unhappy widow and her half-grown son back when it started. The General could not remember his father very well; a stiff, laconic, morose man who was seldom at home, and, when he was, who demanded a standard of obedience impossible outside the regimented army routine. Fear of that unyielding, shadowy father made the General cautious. The minute pension paid for a tiny room at the rear of a coffee-house; it paid for the cans of scouring powder the General bought to keep his room shining clean and free from roaches and other livestock, since there was something of the martinet in him, too; it paid for his spotless shirts with their ragged collars and cuffs, frayed over and over no matter how many times he trimmed them neatly; once in a great while

it paid for a suit or a pair of shoes which he bought in a second-hand store in St. Petersburg, choosing the material of the half-shabby stock as carefully as though he were ordering fine tailoring. But, unfortunately, the pension check left nothing over for food, and so the General had become adept at eating at other people's expense. Possibly some inheritance of wit from his strategist father enabled him to do this, because otherwise he was a rather stupid man, just wise enough to talk only to himself because he knew no one else would be interested in what he had to say.

Unfortunately, too, the pension check did not enable him to have dental care. The General suffered inordinately from toothache; some of his teeth had already rotted out, leaving unsightly gaps, and the rest were snagged and blackened, which was another reason why he seldom spoke. Elsewhere immaculate in his appearance, it was unthinkable that a Spartan gentleman and the son of a hero should reveal a foul and unseemly mouth. As much as he suffered the pain of toothache, even more he suffered, quite horribly, that his plight would be discovered. He saw no hope in sight of getting rid of either evil, and, besides the mental and physical pain, he put up with a thoroughly unpleasant taste in his mouth, and was convinced that his breath was fetid, which it most certainly was, if the predominant odor of sea-spate and tide-flats and salt-marsh and garlic and dying sponges had not drowned it out.

And now, even though Spiros and his comfortable Sophia believed that nothing ever happened in Turtle Run, and most sincerely hoped that nothing ever would, to upset their secure and regular existence of bread and bed and birth (they being of course totally unaware of the

great hollow restless vaults, the psyches of Christidos and Zoe, of John and Stephen and their own son Philip, of the poet and the blind major and all the others, through whom life sea-surged and sea-sucked, tearing and turning, as the tangible youth-devouring sea surges and sucks at the black veil of the doomed sponge); yes, even though Spiros and Sophia believed that nothing happened in their trim, sand-grain town, two things occurred to the General which caused no little stir among the citizens of Turtle Run.

In the first place, a totally forgotten uncle died, having neglected to revise his will in forty years, and left his nebulous and equally forgotten nephew (a thin boy in knee-britches and black wool stockings, thought the old man a-dying . . . doubtless the lad may use it to get his schooling) an incredible number of drachmas, which, by the time the rates of exchange and various taxations got through with it amounted to the sum of two hundred and fifty green American dollars. The General hesitated long and lingeringly over three alternatives; he could order, at last, a couple of tailor-made suits, not the very best, such as Mr. Economou had made for himself in New York City, but certainly something that Turtle Run had never seen except on the shoulders of the small tired diplomat; he could pay Christidos for several hundred meals at the Parthenon Bar and Grill, give Cimon a gentleman's tip, and still have something left over; or he could have his teeth drawn and a fine new set of porcelains installed, and perhaps have a bit left for an installment on his most pressing obligations, and a new pair of English leather shoes, really new this time, for the flesh of his feet had crawled and flinched all these years at the thought of the stranger's feet that had worn the shoes before him.

He decided on the third course, as being the one in

which he got the most out of his windfall. Perhaps the heavenly deep-diving, free-swimming sensation of going under the dentist's anaesthetic was the nearest the General had ever been to ecstasy in his life.

Sometimes people wondered why the General never married. He easily could have made an excellent match; his long, not unhandsome face would have been attractive if it had worn a less forbidding expression; physically, he was a fine figure of a man, and a Spartan aristocrat in the military tradition could have selected almost any woman of his choice, even one with a considerable dot. But the truth of the matter was that while the General yearned with all his somewhat wizened soul for the approval and applause of his fellow human beings, he really did not like them very much. He particularly did not like them well enough to be committed for life to seeing one of them morning, noon and night; and if he married, that one might conceivably be increased to several. The General's overall dislike of companionship was the reason why he never married and why he had no friends, not even a stray dog to keep him company. One might say, it was especially the reason why he had no dog, as many lonely men have, because when he looked into a dog's eyes he saw something so compassionate, so disturbingly the essence of the human, that he fled in panic and dreamed unhappy dreams for a week. No, the General held speech only with himself, and his sole companion was his image in the well-polished mirror in his room . . . a mirror he kept shining with soap powder where most men would have let the fly-specks gather months on end. The General's mirror shone like a diamond in the precarious and feeble light from a swaying overhead bulb, even though the General was down on his luck, even though he had his back to the

wall for so long that the handwriting had rubbed off on him.

Disliking to go to a Greek dentist in Turtle Run, who was, in a sense, one of his own people, even though he considered the Spartans a separate and, to be sure, superior race, he went to Tampa to have his teeth removed and stayed over there a few days until the plates were ready. Being unaccustomed to physical comfort, he took refuge in a fifth-rate hotel, inhabited and managed by Cubans who worked part-time in the tobacco factories, not the expert-fingered cigar-makers but the shiftless fellows who swept up the floors just often enough to keep themselves in cheap wine. Therefore the time passed miserably for this man who hated dirt and disorder; the greasy mattress, the grimed walls revolted him, but he had no place else to go, and so lay there miserably until his mouth healed. After all, the ineffable glory of having unspotted and unbroken teeth at long last was worth the sacrifice. That was the first important thing that happened to the General.

The second thing was that rumbles of discontent among the spongers had reached various interested ears beyond the confines of Turtle Run, and a labor agitator was sent down to look over the situation and see if there was any point or profit in spending time and trouble on the place. At least the interested ears had perspicuity enough to send a Greek, a large damp pink man who talked well and fast in a high eunuch-voice, but it never occurred to them that there is more than one variety of the human species in the territory generally termed Greece. The Greek they had sent had been an unsuccessful manufacturer of ladies' handbags, imitation-leather-type, before they got hold of him; he had been born in Constantinople, emigrated to

New York, and spent so much time in Columbus Circle heckling the soapbox speakers that, when his business folded, they decided to make him one of them. Or, rather, the organization enfolded him, like a protective amoeba; he was a small but useful extension of the multiform protozoic tentacles. They would never have sent him to an important post, such as the coal mines or the power plants or the great coastal harbors; two or three thousand of his own people seemed a proper assignment for him. They reckoned that a Greek was a Greek, no matter what country or province or town he came from. The Dodecanese people reckoned differently. And so, while the bald pink labor agitator enjoyed a brief vogue in Turtle Run until the men found out who he was and where he came from, and while he mopped his moist face many times with his big flowered handkerchief in the steamy exertions of speech-making in a Florida summer, it was not long before the packers and operators and spongers suddenly became united in running him out of town. He ran, sucking reminiscently at fragments of the succulent shrimp and pompano and stone crab and chicken and young kid that he had feasted on before the town closed ranks against him, and as far as Turtle Run was concerned, it dusted its hands of the whole affair. But not so the General. Longingly he lingered over whispers of the chickens whose necks had been wrung in the visitor's honor; sadly he sighed over spilt coffee and sodden *baklava*.

He had never given thought to a profession of his own; indeed, being a hero's son is a profession in itself; and enough for him. People were honored to have him sit at their table; at least, people like Christidos, who held honor and aristocracy in reverence, and it would have been degrading for him to break caste and work with either his

head or his hands. Nevertheless, die General was a little weary of the crumbs that fell from Caesar's plate. If the government had been a little less grateful, he would have had to get a job, probably as some clerical cog amid the diplomatic wheels; if it had been a little more grateful, he could have afforded a decent tailor. And it upset him that this Constantinoplean upstart, this hand-bag manufacturer who spoke Greek even worse than he spoke English, should feast on the fat of die land, if only temporarily.

And then the idea came to him, like, as he said to himself, lightning striking over the rocky ledges of Mount Pindos. The damp pink labor agitator had failed because he was unfamiliar, alien and therefore suspect to the citizens of Turtle Run; also, since he came from Constantinople, there was a suspiciously Turkish flavor about him. But there was nothing wrong with the essential business of being a labor agitator. After all, it seemed to be pretty much a matter of politics, and, as wiser men than the General have pointed out, your Greek is a political animal. Let there be two or three gathered together in congregation, and you have at least four political parties. Also, the business of being a labor agitator seemed to be an honorable job, at least in that it was unpaid, except for meals. A man would not be scorned for assuming it. Of course, the General had no idea that the damp pink man received a pleasant salary check, and bonuses for his more successful efforts. There was the matter of speeches; a problem solved, now that he had his teeth. The General was a timid man, and a stupid one, but neither so timid nor so stupid as not to be aware that, although there was nobody in Turtle Run, or, in fact, in the entire world, whom he really liked, there was also nobody who disliked him.

And so the idea that his people needed a leader, and

that somehow he was chosen, began to form in the slow mind of a timid and silent man. It was something like making bricks without straw or building a city on shifting sand. The idea made the General somehow uncomfortable, and he began a cautious daydream in which he could stand before the multitude and make speeches and sway the hearts of men; in which he drew unhappy factions together and welded them for the common good; in which he emerged as hero and savior of the particular sand-grain which is Turtle Run.

"In that case, we must take certain precautions," said the General to himself, for, in spite of the fact that he was no longer ashamed of showing yellow and snagged teeth, he still had not gathered up sufficient courage to speak to anybody. He rose from his current daydream of power and glory, sat up on the edge of his bed, carefully retied his loosened shoelaces and selected a shirt the collar of which was really very little frayed; judiciously trimmed, it looked almost new. What the precautions were for the General was not quite sure, but he had a vague notion that a man who was about to step into public life must be more than ever watchful of his appearance, just as, when the time came to speak, he must choose his words more carefully than other men.

And so, still thinking of the responsibility and the obligation a savior owed his people, he proceeded at his customary dignified pace to the Parthenon Bar and Grill; he made one gracious inclination of his head serve as greeting to Christidos and the daughter who seemed always to be about lately, though he had never noticed her much before, and he allowed Cimon to conduct him to his usual place with that pleasant courtesy that a great man affords his servants. Perhaps his knuckle of boiled lamb was bonier

than a similar dish served to a paying customer, but the General never noticed the difference. He who never had dreamed before was becoming possessed of a vision, and, since the vision was bigger than the man, the chrysalis-skin of his spirit was beginning to grow too snug; across the back the immature wings humped uncomfortably in their confines; the mysterious process we call histolysis, the metamorphosis from worm to wing, was under way.

Chapter Thirteen

THE BARROOM was small; a narrow room, dank with smoke and spilled beer. It was on a side-street, almost an alley, where the poor-white fringe of Tampa turns a dingy corner and plunges into the Spanish section known as Ybor city, colorful and garrulous as a raucous old parrot with brilliant but draggled feathers. There were a hundred such small dank barrooms in the section; sometimes tourists bent on slumming ventured from the safe pseudo-Spanish facades of the nightclubs to peep into them and to beat a hasty retreat, finding nothing but grimy inactivity. The air was bad, the liquor was worse, and the poverty-stricken off-scourings of the city who leaned at the bar or slouched over the small tables were worst of all. But, like similar districts in every city in the world, big or little, a side-street populated by off-scourings is an excellent place for a man to get lost in, supposing he wants to lose himself and do a good job of it.

As a rule, John picked his spots for getting lost much farther away from Turtle Run. Jacksonville, St. Augustine, Miami: when the compulsion came over him, when his temples ached and his veins throbbed so that he could not sleep, and the safe little picture-postcard town of his childhood seemed a prison; and, aloft in the plane, when the blue dome of sky through which he plunged was a prison, too, only more fearful, since the bars were set at infinity; when the sour taste of fright choked him and far below he saw flashes of light and heard the shelling, and the flak

boiled thick over the nose of his plane, and he hurtled, burning, out of the sky in a long sick spiral ... in short, when John had had dreams ... it was time for him to lose himself. The compulsion lasted only a day or two, and then he could go on as before, safe and secure and steady, the best pilot on the line, the guy who didn't have a nerve in his body, John, the son who never caused his father a moment's worry, who never talked wild or fooled around with the girls; good old John who drank milk and tried to hold his kid brother to the line, who saved his money and would marry a nice Greek girl cut to the same pattern as his sister Zoe and raise a flock of kids; steady John who still knelt nightly to say his prayers and who, when he was little, had never needed to be reminded to clean himself and dress for church on Sundays and holidays.

As a boy, before he went to war, John had never been tempted to trespass into forbidden fields, as the other lads did, as he knew his brother Stephen did now. In the air force, he had been known as a guy who could take it or leave it alone, and the fact that he would rather stay in and read or write letters, or go to a show instead of getting out on the town with the rest of the bunch never seemed to interfere with his being well-liked; they figured he was the quiet type and kinda serious, probably engaged, and he didn't want to mix in on the extra stuff. A Greek kid, and he wore some funny Catholic-looking medal around his neck, and read a lot of books on stuff like engineering, but aside from that he was regular, and the rare times he did go around with the rest he drank his share down like a little gentleman; he was okay in a scrap; you never saw him sucking around Command and he kept his trap shut. So they liked him and let him alone.

But after he got out, after he saw and heard and smelled

and tasted the scorched red brawling blasphemy of war, he began to remember. He remembered things they'd said in barracks, educated boys, they'd been to high school, some of them to college, they had sisters who were nice girls; they had hesitant girl friends, but still they spoke, maybe from experience, maybe from boasting . . . Boy-talk, like you hear boy-talk all over the world when man-bodies with adolescent minds get together and scrawl words on back fences or moustaches on the monstrous-sized ad-girls in the subways. Boy-talk, like what comes out under nervous pressure and mass production, each competing against the other for the top word when, alone, each decent, coming home in ice-cream corduroys and scuffle-shoes in his own home town, he'd think of nothing more risky than a kiss in front of the fan-light over the front-porch door.

So the boy-talk, the man-living, stored up in some corner of John's mind. When in war, he was at the maelstrom center of peace; when at peace, he suddenly, and at intervals, was immersed and submerged, his head held under with the rush of war. And at these times he got lost . . . in places where the citizens of Turtle Run would never find him. John usually got lost in St. Augustine or Jacksonville, but the pressure had come upon him, and there was no time for the delicacy that took him across the state.

He had come into the bar when it was quite empty. Not caring much for liquor, disliking the actual taste, the process of transferring the liquid from glass to stomach, he actually drank little. Two drinks, or twenty; he was drunk before he started. Having read a few books on popular psychology, such as are doled out in G.I. courses, he knew what was the matter with him. The decent up-

bringing, given a traumatic shock, tends to make the subject roll in slime. This is the stuff that makes martyrs; this is the hairy, goat-fathered fabric of self-abasement whose rough caress delights the sons of ministers; this is the harsh monks-cloth that scratches the devil out of zealots and affords them ample opportunity to enjoy a vicarious, if painful, identification with sainthood this side damnation. This is the stained and scabrous raiment of repentance, the tunic of redemption, the garment of deliverance. This is the shirt whose flaming kiss now devoured John Chfistidos as once it consumed cliff-shouldered Herakles.

The girl on the barstool next to him, close to him was quiet; he saw little of her except for a swatch of brown hair and the shoulder and back of a print dress; large blue flowers splashed on black and white; he guessed that they were morning glories or some such bloom. Curiously enough, though he knew that he could easily talk to the girl . . . or woman . . . he did not think of her age . . . at any rate, the female creature next to him . . . he observed nothing about her except the flowered dress and the nondescript loop of hair, and a small tender place at the back of her neck which somehow seemed exempt from the general dinginess of the surroundings. Soft, soft, so such could be to his touch; come close, my darling, in the nights, for fear creeps close to a man on little clawed feet; fear has a small red mouth to bite and tiny claws, and such tight-knit curls can keep a man out of it, if he fingers them.

John Christidos, who turned into "*Johnny Mitchell*" when he got lost in the drab places, motioned to the girl on the stool dressed out in morning glories and a drab swatch of hair . . .

They were in her room, a small quiet room tricked out with sleazy cretonne at the windows. It faced south, hot with every wind; perhaps her greatest ambition was to rent north, where the wind was cool. Frilled pillows, drab underneath the ticking, smelling of caraway-smelling bed-bugs, red ants in the sugar she kept for an occasional cup of sugar-loaded tea, sagging mattress bogged with sloped bodies, worn square of carpet from which she had tried, once or twice, to remove the stains . . . and the bright cheap cretonne, the rayon-skirted impossibly long-legged doll draped limply among the pillows, the souvenir candy-dish which represented her pathetic little house-keeping. The room was neither drabber nor brighter than its kind; as she was typical of hers. It held the terrible hopelessness of mediocrity, a mediocrity like her own. Prettier and cleverer girls were set up in apartments with a colored maid to answer the door; prettier and cleverer girls moved North, to the metropolitan cities, and some of them even had their little moment of a curious kind of fame. Uglier and older women lived in a grey mist of insecurity, a mist that had not yet enveloped her, since she was still reasonably new at the game. If you saw her on some street-corner, hurrying home with a paper bag from the neighborhood delicatessen, you might take her for a young wife, perhaps grown a little careless in her appearance, a little matronly, but retaining something of the child.

"Look," said John Christidos, or "Johnny Mitchell," as he was known when he got lost, "I don't want that now." He stirred his hand toward the couch. The drink in his hand had been held so long that the ice had melted; a sirupy deposit formed on the lip of the glass. "Do you . . . that is, can you talk a while?"

"I can talk," the girl said, easing herself back against the pillows. "I can talk ... if there's anything to talk about. Gee, what a funny one you are."

"Yeah . . ." John looked around the hot shabby little room, the room he had not left for two days and two nights now. The past forty-eight hours were a blur; he drank, he slept heavily; there was a confused memory of her white thighs, of her body hugged close to him or shoved harshly away in the warm unpleasant dark. Once she had fixed some scrambled eggs but he found it impossible to eat. Once she had gone out and he woke from a smothering dream, alone and frightened until he heard the click of her heels along the corridor and the snap of the latch. Eagerly he reached for the bottles she brought back with her.

"A funny one. I dunno why I put up with you," said the girl, as wearily as though the present hour was eternity itself. "You said you wanted a good time; you get me to rustle up liquor and give over my bed to you, and God knows I don't have it to myself often enough to know how it feels to stretch my legs. Then you act mean as a bagful of weasels. I don't take being shoved around, not to mention this so-called party of yours is into me for eight bucks. I must be getting soft in the head, picking up a guy I feel sorry for."

"Eight bucks ... I owe you more than that," John said dully, fumbling toward his pocket.

"Oh, you still got your roll. I don't fool with a guy's pants pocket, even when he's out like a light. And you can pay as you leave, only just don't forget. I don't like guys with poor memories." She turned her head suddenly into the rumpled cretonne and began to sob.

"Aw, look , . ,," John tipped her chin toward him. "You're a good kid. Nobody'd walk out and leave you holding the bag." The girl's face, mottled by crying, was suddenly appealing. She cried like a child, with her eyes squinched shut and her mouth drawn down, and John felt somehow quite fond of her, although a moment before he had disliked her as thoroughly as he always disliked whatever girl he was with when the nightmare compulsion of fear began to wear off. After one of these bouts he hated himself; the maggoty things that crawled through his mind before and during the fit that possessed him. He hated his body, and, in particular, the few inches of surging flesh that must be appeased; there was always a period of self-punishment during which he would have castrated himself if it were not for the dread of blood on the shining knife and the sharp pain. He hated his soiled clothing, the shirt that was sweaty and stained; the sour flat smell; the socks stiff and grimed from padding about without his shoes. And yet, what man could pack a change of linen before he left the clean, safe, organized world for a side-street bar, for a shabby furnished room and the shabby kind of girl who was an inevitable part of the furnishings? A dog can roll in his own vomit, but he need not enjoy it; John despised himself, but he only disliked the girl and the room with a mild sort of dislike, knowing that the shabbiness was somehow made more sordid by his presence. And this time he felt sorry for her and fond of her, the way he often felt sorry for old people and lost dogs and buildings with broken windows.

"I dunno why I'm telling you this," said the girl, raising her head suddenly. "Except ... for a spell there last night, I figured you were awful sick, because you seemed

kinda out of your head. And you kept talking about your sister, and how strict you were brought up, and what a nice home you have. And how a floozy couldn't have any part of such a home, couldn't ever have had any. So maybe I better tell you, I can remember when I lived in a nice home, and had nice things, and didn't have to put up with dirt and heat and guys whose feet smell worse than their breath."

"So your world came apart at the seams, too," John said thoughtfully.

"Yeah. It sure did. Because a guy forgot. That's why I hate guys with poor memories ... he forgot, all right. You get one special man in your life, one special and different from everybody else in the world, and he has to have a bad memory. He forgot to come home." The girl's voice raised to a hard shrill pitch, almost a scream. "Do you wanta know why he forgot? Do you? It's because he ain't got any memory at all any more, he's dead, drowned dead as a herring; five years ago it was he lost his memory, when the submarine hit the mine. They told his mother, and his mother told me, there wasn't more than an oil-slick come to the top of the water. Old bitch that she was, sitting there with her husband and three more kids around her, telling me how he died there under the sea. She had enough left; I didn't have anything in the world but him. I used to think I heard his step out in the hall; I'd wake up dreaming a wet hand passed over my face. But he don't come any more, not even with the seaweed dragging on him, not even with the oil-slick in his eyes and his fingers all burst and broken, trying to claw his way out of the hatch . . ."

"Hush," said John, and again, "Hush. Be quiet."

"Listen," said the girl. "What's it like, up there? Up over the clouds? I never been in a plane. I never been off dry land, and yet he forgot his way home, down there under the water. He used to tell me what under-water was like. What's it like up in the sky?"

"You can reach out and rub stars into your eyes," John said slowly. "And the moon sits on your shoulder like a bird. It's like love, like love ought to be. Like you think it is before you do it, and you know it isn't after. Aw, what do you want to know for, anyhow?"

"I want to know; I've got to know."

"It's busting right off the earth, up into the bright blue air. Like being in a new dimension, from scratch. You write your own ticket. Up there, you feel like God must have felt that great Sunday morning when He looked on the world fresh from His hand and saw it was all brand-new and shining."

The girl twisted on the couch, moaning a little. "Go on talking . . . take me with you . . ."

"It sort of chokes you, it's so beautiful, and you hate to get back to pavements and bars and cabbage smells and the nightmare that maybe you'll never go up again. You hate to come back to the flatness of things . . . flat as this drink . . ." John gulped thirstily from the glass still in his hand. It was warm and sticky about the rim; he made a wry face. "It's cold up there, nothing but the wind and space, like breathing deep on an ice-cold night with peppermint in your mouth. Down here there's a traffic signal flashing in your eyes everywhere you look; up there, no traffic lights; it's green all the way. No roads under repair, no detours. It's like being let out of prison, like getting out of some lousy jail . . . nothing can stop you, once

you've gone just^{*} so far . . . it's a million miles a minute, baby; you burn yourself out . . ."

"And if you crash?"

"Sure you'll crash, someday, if you go up often enough, but at least you've had it . . ."

She wrenched suddenly at his shirt, stripping it back and nuzzling her head into his hard shoulder. "Take me, take me now . . ." She pulled him down, partly over her; her mouth was hot and searching; the drab swatch of hair fell over her eyes so that she seemed like some gasping and fetid animal.

John lurched to his feet. He pulled his shirt together, reached in his pocket and pushed a handful of bills toward her without counting them.

"You said you don't like a guy who forgets," he muttered. "The trouble is . . . I remember too much. God, how I wish I could forget, sometimes . . ."

Outside, he felt clean and refreshed once more; there was nothing the matter with him now that a bath and a change of clothes couldn't cure. And some food; suddenly he was ravenously hungry. He turned into a diner and wolfed down a plate of food, scarcely noticing what it was. From now on he must be more careful; Tampa, even the Ybor City section, was too close to home. And now there was the whole disgraceful process of turning from "Johnny Mitchell" into John Christidos again; the barber who must shave his stubble-field face, knowing that he was knocking off the dead-end of a binge; the salesman who would look at him curiously while he bought a new shirt; the people in the bus-station who would notice his bleared eyes and the furtive way he kept to the far side of the room as though he were afraid someone might recognize him.

Though, of course, by then it would make no difference. John Christidos was himself again; he was going home; in a day or so he would be swinging the big ships out on schedule, and it might be ten days, or ten weeks, or ten months, before the hooked paw of the compulsive nightmare would snag him once more.

Chapter Fourteen

IN THE off-shore shallows along the West Coast of Florida, as in the small coves edging those sand-grain Islands men call the Dodecanese, there is a certain sea-snail called the tulip shell. Turreted and turbaned like a conch, the mahogany-dappled hunters move almost timidly over the surface film of marl, leaving broad distinctive trails crisscrossing like tank tracks on a battlefield seen from the air. These tulip shells, or tulip snails, or tulip conchs, are bashful and slow of movement; even in the act of devouring their gastropod cousins they seem shy and tentative, and the terrible meshed rows of their teeth with which they cut through the hard shells of the molluscs they feed upon are chipped and broken. After them come the fiddler crabs, by the myriad, each one a miniature nightmare horror barely an inch or so across; the perfect scavengers, who by sheer numbers could strip a whale down to a polished skeleton. But first the tulip, beautifully banded and mottled with little fiery moons, must do their deathly office; teeth cut, ichor-acid drips through the inner nacre, and the snout of the snail lengthens down into the living pulp, sucks, yawns, recedes in satisfaction before the little many-legged terrors can descend. The time of the fiddler crab will come; he will swarm over the tulip, death-stricken by the larger and stronger whelk whose weight alone can hold the tulip helpless until it is eaten at leisure and the whelk moves on to let the scavengers clean one more pearly catafalque.

Although the citizens of Turtle Run had little interest in fancy sea-shells, save those who were in the curio-business and who sold shells to tourists, doubtless if they had bothered to observe anything of the life and habits of the banded tulip shell, they might easily have found a parallel between that particular form of sea-life and one of their own current parasites, the pseudo-poet Lord Byron. Certainly Christidos would have been delighted if someone had pointed out the similarity. His rolls, his butter, his good rich soup and the nice knuckle-bones of the boiled lamb were all sucked up by the man, not to mention that now Lord Byron had somehow fastened himself upon Stephen, and, to Christidos' superstitious thinking, was gobbling up the boy's very soul like a water-witch or an incubus.

It must be acknowledged that Lord Byron's methods were very like those of the tulip snail, of which, by the way, he had never heard. He had a curious method of finding a man's weak spot, or a woman's, and then of fastening on that weakness and boring in until he reached something to his own advantage. The something might be very little, the privilege of being first to read the newspaper at the Parthenon Bar and Grill, for instance; but he had discovered the exact moment when it was most propitious to reach for it, there on the counter, crisp and virginal to hand and eye. Yes, if you had watched, you could almost see the pseudo-poet trepanning a man's skull and plucking out what pleased him most, a flower for his button-hole, or the inflated ego of a gleaming golden lad, or the last cigarette in the crushed package in Cimon's hip pocket. "Why do you keep them there?" he would inquire as the waiter graciously touched match to tip. "You only spoil them every time you sit down, and with your aching feet

that's all too often. Get another pack from the case, like a good fellow, and keep it in your shirt pocket as I've told you, so you won't be ashamed to offer them to your betters. Get two packs, two as well as one, while you're at it." And Cimon, grinning over the mild chicanery, would slide over and slip out a couple of packages of cigarettes, one for his own hip-pocket and one slipped into the paper-dry hand of the poet at the edge of the tablecloth. Thus were both men served with the material of contemplation for a few hours.

Lord Byron was never completely happy save on the hot dry days that space the steamy warmth of mid-summer. He was faintly cold ten months out of the year, not in an uncomfortable sense, but as a snake is cold and torpid until August comes. And even in the hot season, when the wind blew from the inland, moist and choking, there was a clammy feeling down the back of his seer-sucker shirt; he never perspired, but in high humidity he seemed to exchange the raspy dry skin of a reptile for the somewhat viscous outer covering of an amphibious creature. Since he did not sweat, obviously the moisture collected on him from outside, like dew on a metal pitcher of icewater.

Perhaps, if you had searched the world over, you could not have found a living man further removed from reality, and yet more acutely perceptive of it, than this poor fool of God who was far smarter than the rest of his fellowmen in the matter of cadging beers and cigarettes and scraps of food and wisdom. Not even in a madhouse could you have found such a mixture of innocence and perspicuity; Tom o'Bedlam with the straw gyves upon his wrists never begged more eloquently, nor saw the world more crystal clear. This shell of a man, this papier-mache automaton

through whom other people's lives ebbed and flowed, since he sucked up their dreams and discouragements and existed vicariously through them, was most exceedingly sensitive to sight and sound, to texture and the delicate variations of color.

For example, he had observed during the past few days that Zoe's ordinarily rather sallow skin had taken on almost a pearly luster; her cheeks were faintly a warm rose contrasting with her white neck and arms. Sometimes the pseudo-poet's perception was so keen that he could actually see objects clothed with a sort of incandescent light, edged with luminous fur; so, when lightning furrows the air, the landscape stands out livid and unforgettable, as though it were frightened.

Insinuating the delicate snail-horn perception of his inquisitive spirit into Zoe's aura, he was perhaps the first to know that she was in love. Lord Byron could no more control his inquisitiveness than the little black white-vested cat who chased the cellophane balls from Christidos' cigars could control licking her whiskers. He probably was not even aware of it.

But, in his wilderness-wandering mind, he built up a legend about Zoe, a legend which bore little resemblance to the sturdy peasant body, the warm square hands, the affectionate eyes of the restaurant owner's daughter. Zoe was none of your exotic beauties; she was as pleasant to eye and heart as a loaf of new baked bread. It made a man feel good to look at her. But the poet, being something more or something less than most men, wove metrical garlands the girl would not have understood, even had he written them down and read them to her; she became to him the bronze-crested Kyani, daughter of the giant Scyllias, from Scioni in Thrace. This mythical pair, father

and daughter, dove for sponges in the dim old days that the poet firmly believed he could remember since he had lived in Turtle Run among the Dodecanese; they dove thousands of years past, for sponges and then for treasure, and they were hired by the attacking Persian fleet to salvage gold from the sea-drowned Greek boats. Being patriots, Scyllias and Kyani bored holes in the wooden hulls of the Persian boats instead, and when the enemy sank near Pylon they swam over and under the salt-breathing waters, the salt-blending spray, to tell their people what they had accomplished. And, since the consequences produced the end of the Persian wars, doubtless they have gone down in history as the saviors of the deciding battle at Artemision; nevertheless in the eyes of your pseudo-poet Kyani was heroic because she held to her bosom the shattered fragments of a man fallen upon the battlefield; because she assembled piece by piece, an eye, a nose, a finger fallen a hundred yards away, the semblance of a man and breathed into him the breath of life, and made him whole again. So did George Pappas, the leather merchant's son, observe Zoe Christidos, with more truth in his observing than the original legend warranted. So he saw her, in a sharp pure fringe of light, arrested lucently in legend like a fly in amber.

And your poet sees Stephen for a moment as if at a great distance, a true image of the boy-man turned into a statue, molded in the softest possible gold, the purest distillation and refinement of the metal; he sees this image as though it were on a pedestal at the end of a great hallway; leading to the tangible golden god the walls of the hallway are hung with black velvet, and a disturbing single shaft of light reflects upon these soft black velvet walls, upon this gold soft as flesh, making the vision dis-

tinct, yet indistinct. And, as he stares and worships, the shadow of John cuts across the image, steps into the shaft of light and cancels out the gold. The pedestal, the velvet hangings melt into air; now he sees only a sulky boy in a stained sweat-shirt skirting the edge of town, sneaking into his father's house through the back way, stammering excuses, ashamed even when he swaggers. No, even your poet cannot capture Stephen forever in the golden image; always it is cancelled out. Zoe remains lucent and eternal; John is a curious sort of doppelganger of them all, a shadow-man, friend and enemy, the pursuer and the pursuing, but deathless as time itself. Christidos, Spiros, Cimon, are all as permanent, and as unimportant, in the poet's dreams, as the shell road or the sunlight; they are pleasant enough and serve their purposes in their own way, but aside from the inconvenience he would not miss them if the earth swallowed them up. It is only around Stephen that this sense of impermanence clings, this feeling that any moment he might be whisked away. In the marsh a bittern makes its hesitant wavering flight, like a timid golden phantom, rising from the matted weeds and dropping back into them before you can be sure you see bird or flickering light.

It is uncomfortable, even to the irrationally perceptive mind of a man like Lord Byron, to idolize the transient. Perhaps the rest of us, who are utterly dependent upon emotional security, who fall quickly by the wayside when our gods of reality come crashing down, find something faintly risible in the portrait of a half-mad creature to whom unreality represents the only tangibles. Perhaps we do not quite believe that the destruction of a dream-image can be more devastating than any smashed atom. That is why Lord Byron knew, with the clarity of desperation,

that he must find himself a new idol on whom to fix his dreams, before the golden image he loved crumpled before his eyes and he stood staring at a handful of dust . . . or sea-wet weed, half-shrouded with a striped sweat-shirt and scuffed hand-me-downs.

How fearful we are of losing the thin thread of our security! The brief closing of a beloved door, the thoughtless word, the careless flick of a hand against the sensitive edge of friendship, and we are plunged into unhappy gloom. Your Greek is perhaps more finely tentacled than the rest of the human species; the delicate trembling snail-horn perception is heightened in him through thousands of years of observing essential beauty, and exploring essential pity and terror. Praxiteles conceived and carved the perfect marble man and woman while the rest of Europe was overrun with wolf and mastodon, and here and there a small colony of ape-armed slope-jawed male and female creatures crouched in caves, painted their bodies with blue woad and drank blood from the skulls of men and bulls. Egypt breathed sweetly along the Nile, as a perfumed woman breathes, drowsing, waiting her lover; to the east a curdled clot of fierce desert prophets with wild beards and lean bellies clawed out God's eyes in order to name Him Jehovah. But in that corner of the world we call Greece much of man's security was in direct ratio to his capacity to seize and immortalize sheer loveliness, particularizing beauty in a marble shoulder, a fluted column, a flowing fragmentary song, a philosophy neat as a knife. To your Greek, the fleeting and transient is the imperfect and un-beautiful; this may well be the reason why, though in ancient times their gods were deathless, their concept of the persistence of human personality after death was vague and wandering. Perhaps the unprovable equation

held no interest for them; perhaps the subject was too painful to ponder. But the fact remains that Sappho's apple tip-top that little tree on the Island of Lesbos has far more permanence about it than all the wavering dreams of future life that her whole race conceived. Nike is headless, but the stone feathers of her great wings still lift our hearts. Immortality can only be contained in words well-woven and the chiseled stones; immortality has nothing to do with the few years allotted to your individual man.

Heraclitus the Dark, the weeping philosopher, maintained that men are mortal gods and the gods are immortal men. Men feared him, since he said that their souls consist only of a fragment of fiery vapor. Men hated him because he frightened them by declaring that the only unchanging thing in the whole universe is the constant law in accordance with which things change; he frightened them because he speculated about appearance and reality, and proved that no one of us can step into the same stream twice, since the flowing water and the very banks through which it flows, and yea, even ourselves have changed with the changing stream, since when we step into it for the second time we do so with the memory of the first time we entered it. Heraclitus was perhaps the most disturbing of the philosophers; he made his fellows nervous with his theory that immobility is an illusion, and mankind has remained nervous these twenty-five hundred years, ever since the weeping philosopher propounded that man's place in the cosmos is not only transient, but insignificant and immaterial in the great total flux.

And to your pseudo-poet, to whom his dream-world represented the only tangibles, the thought of change was a terrible and haunting horror. Zoe could be fixed forever in his visions; John, the dark shadow-man, was ever present;

but golden Stephen whom he adored slipped ever from him: the dream changed: the unreality became real, and therefore mortal, and subject to age and ills and death. Before the poet fell too fatally under Stephen's spell he must seek another idol; he must abandon the golden boy about whom clung the cloak of change from life to death, perhaps not quite abandon him, but reduce him in the hierarchy of worship, and elevate another . . . someone who would not betray him. As yet he could not know the form of this betrayal; he only sensed that here he must not love too much, for what is more pitiable than a man weeping in the rubble of his broken dreams?

Never, by tone of voice or small wave of his almost femininely fashioned long white hand, had the blind Major acknowledged that he even knew of the existence of Lord Byron. Christidos had told the poet in no uncertain terms to stay away from that particular table, as he did not want either the blind man or Mr. Economou annoyed by petty cadging. It was possible that Alexis Dragoumis did not even know such a man AS the poet existed; there was no reason why he should. And yet, during the hot dry days of midsummer when the wind blew from the Gulf and the skin of the poet stayed dry as pale and faintly crumpled tissue paper, the transference of idolatries was made; the soft gold of the image dims and fades; the small figure that was an almost-god retreats in distance, and in his place at the apex of the hierarchy stands Prometheus, his eyes pecked out by the vultures, though their pits are still flecked with blood-dark fire. Here is an idol who cannot crumble, an image in which there is no slightest hint of change; a tragic symbol who remains the same, immobile in sorrow, as hopeless tomorrow as he was yesterday. Here is the ultimate one on whom the poet can fix his fancy

and his affection; the final hero of the poem which never will be written. All else is petty and will pass, save only the fire-bringer whose very weakness is his threshold upon immortality. It has been said that truly the gods themselves cannot recall their gifts; no more can poet or painter, or carver of stone or molder of fine metal recall the gifts bestowed upon their subjects; the gifts of beauty or ugliness, arrested in a single instant of time. Earth is at the mercy of her artists in word and line. And when an artist, even a poor half-crazed pseudo-poet who never writes down his dream, falls in love with the images therein, the wise well may tremble, for it is in his power to make a devil out of a saint, or a vast towering jinni out of a meek and ordinary man.

That night Lord Byron could not eat his meagre fare for staring at the blind man who methodically cut his meat and lit his cigarette and folded his napkin when the meal was over. Zoe stopped for a moment and said something that brought a smile to that stark face; the poet leaned perceptibly nearer, as though the words had been spoken for him, though he could not possibly hear them the length of the room. Cimon poured the Major's coffee and, when he was ready to leave, fetched his visored hat and the crop he always carried; a shudder of hatred crawled over the poet's flesh, that another, and a coarse clown, at that, should serve this noble Athenian. Somehow, and soon, he must ally himself with Alexis Dragoumis; in some way he must make himself necessary to the other man, an essential companion, not merely a crutch like crooked little Pete Cockinos, nor a casual dinner companion, like Economou, nor a fetcher of cap and crop like Cimon, but true brother and intimate. How or when this seeming impossibility would be accomplished he

could not know, but it must be done. To become essential to his Prometheus, to partake of the immortality he created, to merge into his very being, his shattered eyes, his strong long white hands . . . the straight swing of his shoulders, the firm definite step that never stumbled; somehow he must become the single beloved subject of the world over which Prometheus was lord. Studying this matter, he went out and along the shell road as happy as a child into the lengthening shadows; the sun still hung on with gold fingernails to the western rim of the waterfront, but in town lamps began to wink on, one by one; mothers called their little ones shrilly; here and there a dog barked affectionate welcome to a master turning in at the threshold. And Lord Byron kicked a smooth pebble along the shell road, a smile playing curiously about his lips; sometimes he whistled and jiggled a few paces into the growing dusk, and once he stopped and clapped his hands and ran to hug a tree and weep, as though it were some loved one met suddenly after long separation.

The sponge, as such, the commercial commodity used to wash cars and mop toilets, has no appeal for our poet. It is sordid and crass and vulgar; moreover, it stinks abominably. To his mind, there has been only one occasion since man has inhabited the earth when the sponge was used nobly. That use conferred eternal knighthood upon the unpleasant little stench-and-slime-robed creature. "Do not forget," said the almost-god Achilles to his armor-bearer, "to place a sponge in my helmet. It keeps the battlesweat from running into my eyes." Oh, he would not need to be chided, were he Achilles' armor-bearer; how he wishes he could bear armor for Dragoumis! He would never forget to place the sponge most lovingly under the brazen crest.

To that other historical incident, when a Roman soldier held a sponge soaked in vinegar to the parched grey lips of the Man upon the Cross, George Pappas gave little heed. What else, indeed, could the soldier have used, when that morsel of pity bade him slake Christ's thirst? The sponge was the soldier's drinking cup; a Caesar or a slave dipped water to mouth by its means. Doubtless that same sponge from which the Lord sucked His last mortal drink swung, later on, at more than one sweaty hip and was dipped into a hundred polluted pools and crystal streams before its usefulness was over and it bleached beside the rusted skeleton of its last owner.

Chapter Fifteen

CHRISTIDOS was perhaps more observant of his children's moods than most devoted parents, since he had served for so many years as both mother and father; he was a worrying sort who brooded a good deal and who constantly accused and examined himself as to whether he had done right or wrong in their upbringing. However, his patterns of worry were well established; he was so accustomed to searching Stephen's face for storms of rebellion lightened only by rare moments of sweet and unsoiled affection that now he did not distinguish between the old sulkiness and the new expression of shock and heart-sick guilt. As yet he had not discovered the theft of sixty dollars in folded bills secreted behind the back panel of the cash-register's till; when he did, perhaps he would look at the boy with different eyes. But now Stephen's somehow furtive and frightened manner of speaking, his new jumpiness, and the way he hung around the Parthenon at odd times, watching and yet not watching his father and Spiros and Cimon, seemed to mean little or nothing. Christidos was glad enough to have the boy at home a little more, without asking questions about why or when the change had come, or if there was even any change at all.

It was the same with Zoe; he was accustomed to her usually sunny nature clouding over at rare moments, just as Stephen's sulks occasionally broke into the most brilliant imaginable sunniness. In love she was like a sun-

shower, graciously sparkling, glowing with the springtide of passion never felt before . . . and yet, to her father's love-accustomed eyes, she did not seem different; she was obedient, smiling, affectionate; if she spent more time in reading, and the little shelf of books in her room grew full, he was proud that she improved herself, for to a man who could barely read it seemed a fine thing to have books in the house and learned offspring to read them. If she spoke more carefully than usual, weeding the countrified phrases out of her speech, that was good, too, though who there was in Turtle Run to care if a young girl spoke elegantly he did not know. And if she occasionally lingered at the table where Mr. Economou and Major Dragoumis took their meals, well, it was only seemly that the two most distinguished customers of the Parthenon should be waited on by his own daughter; since she no longer went out to work, she had assumed many duties about the place, tending the cash register, helping out at the tables, even checking the accounts which had always been a nuisance to him; and if she had not paid some special attention to the sunny front table where the grey little diplomat so frequently joined the blind hero, Christidos might well have indicated by a soft word or a nod in their direction that she was neglecting the courtesies expected of her.

No, he had never worried about Zoe, nor John either. All his worried moments had been reserved for Stephen; you might say the boy's name was marked out plain over that large compartment of his mind and heart that Christidos kept for the explicit purpose of worrying. A little over Zoe, maybe, especially when she was small, because he knew nothing about what went on inside the heads of little girls. But as she grew up her father saw that all was good and fair within, as it was without; he was disap-

pointed that she and Spiros' Philip had spurned the arrangement which was as long-standing as their brief lives, but he never doubted that it was a temporary spurning and in time the young people would come together. And if they didn't, there were plenty of other eligible boys, only he would have liked to link the two families even closer in this manner. Somehow he never supposed that his youngest and Spiros' girl Evridiki would get together; he knew long ago that he could not control Stephen beyond a few short years. All his hopes centered on Zoe and Philip.

John, no, John had never been a worry. Even when he was away at war, Christidos had known the boy would come back unscarred. John was safe and sure; John could be trusted to pick his own wife; he would make a sensible choice among the daughters of his father's friends. John could be trusted with girls, and with liquor; he had a fine steady job and was one of the most highly regarded pilots on the line. This Christidos knew from an airlines official who came to Turtle Run for the fishing season and never failed to come into the Parthenon several times during each trip to eat a good Greek meal and to compliment the father on a son who was outstanding among a group of outstanding boys.

No, John was no source of worry; neither was Zoe, and Christidos was so accustomed to the nagging worry of Stephen that he would have felt lost without it. And yet, these days, he was full of unease. Everything was the same . . . and yet everything seemed different. It was as though he wore a new pair of ill-fitting glasses that gave the world before him a curious distortion. Business was far from good . . . and yet it wasn't bad, either. It was just about as usual for the summer months when, even to

a citizen of forty years standing, the climate along the west coast of Florida became oppressive and appetites went slack. Spiros, the companion of his life, went about his work as usual, mopping his brown little monkey face as he stooped over the low ovens; Spiros always mopped his face, even in winter. Perhaps Cimon had come in drunk a bit more often than usual this summer, but then, heat always made the slew-footed waiter thirsty, and there had been an exceptional number of baptisms and weddings and funerals, all of which required considerable wine-sipping. Lately Christidos had taken to staring about as though the rest of the world were playing some vast conspiratorial trick on him, so great was his uneasiness. Once or twice he mislaid his spectacles or his pen; sometimes he had to count small sums of money over several times before he could be sure of making the right change. Often and oftener he endured the slight headache he had suffered recurrently all his life, and these small signs made him suspect that all was not well with either himself or the world at large. He even watched the little black cat with the white vest doubtfully; although still very young, she had taken to mewing and clawing the screen door at night; he heard her while he lay sleepless upstairs. In a vague way he wished she'd get her restlessness over with, and in another vague way he wished she wouldn't; the small cat's mother had never produced less than four, and often six kittens every time she bred, which was as often as possible, and while Christidos shuddered from disposing of the small blind balls of fur, nevertheless he certainly did not care to be overrun with cats. Something must be done, he said to himself with a shrug. Something must be done with the children, all save John, who was self-sufficient and no worry; something must be done to bring

in a bit more business; something must be done about his own sleeplessness and the odd uncertain way he felt . . . now, even something must be done about the little black cat with a white vest who no longer was content to drape herself over his arm or chase the cellophane balls from his cigar, but who snuffled and scratched the doors at night and cried piteously for what she would later spend two months regretting.

No, Christidos did not sleep well of nights, and often his dreams were troubled. It was in this brief mid-summer period when he knew something was at fault, and yet knew not wherein the fault lay, nor whom it chiefly offended, that he had a most singular dream which later he reported in detail to Spiros. The dream was so extraordinary and so vivid in every particular that long after the actual events of this mid-summer dimmed in his recollection, he could close his eyes and re-live each visionary atom of his dream experience.

As a rule, he tossed long in the hot dark, got up, sat by the vine-screened window to smoke, lay down again, turning and twisting the damp pillows for what seemed like hours before he slept even briefly. But on this night he fell immediately into a strange stupor; his head was aching again, but he felt too drowsy to rise and pour out one of the white powders which sometimes relieved him. On this night almost immediately the dream began: there was a sense of being lifted high above the earth; though it was pitch black night he could look over the edge of whatever carried him, something like a cross between a plane and a giant bird, an automaton of wind and wing, and as he looked over he could see earth below, and the crawling things of earth by the myriad, each glowing with its own minute yellow lamp. And above him loomed the stars, like

broken chunks of cold light, some larger, some smaller, but all so close he could feel the icy rush of air as they brushed by.

And he flew, buoyed on the bird-machine, for what might have been years, but really was only an instant, (since an instant is a very flexible portion of time when applied to eternity, though it represents but one tick of the clock when we section it off with man-made measurements), and after this insufferably interminable instant they came to a place which was warm and dank and moist and smelled of sea-slime and soft decay; it was a huge domed vault, and Christidos realized that the bird-machine had flown him clean under the earth and come up in the darkness on the other side. And on the floor in the middle of this domed dank vault lay two piles, one of dead men's bones and one of fine soft gold pieces, and between the piles sat a cowed man, with a fat pale face, sifting bones through the fingers of his left hand and slick sweaty gold through the fingers of his right. And ever this fat pale man murmured over and over, "Death and the dollar, death and the dollar." And it came to Christidos that he had heard this phrase somewhere before, but he could not remember when or where.

Stepping from the bird-machine, he stood before the cowed man and asked: "What place is this?"

And the man answered: "This is Hell."

And Christidos crossed himself and asked: "Why am I brought to Hell?"

The fat man pulled the cowl closer over his pale wide face and jiggled the coins playfully in his right hand. "Why do you think?"

Christidos pointed at the gold. "It's not for that. I was

never greedy," he said, but his finger waggled uncertainly, like that of a man who has lain abed of a long illness.

"You seem none too sure," said the fat man, but he left off playing with the gold and began clicking two thigh-bones together as though they were drumsticks, and the click of the bones made a dreary little tuneless tap-step tune. "Did you love man or woman overmuch? Were you sufficiently in love with life that you fell in love with death as well?"

"I don't know," said Christidos wearily. "I loved only my wife, my three motherless children; I loved my friends . . . a few." He put out his square, blunt hands, still stained with kitchen stains. "My loves were not great loves; here, see, they would all fit into these palms. My wife, my kids, a friend or two . . . planting the garden, picking the fruit. I think I loved my God, also my two countries, the small land I left long since, and the big one I came to ..."

"A philosopher!" The cowed man snorted. "I see you'll argue the meanings of love with me, *eros* between man and woman, and *philiās* between friend and friend, and *agape* . . . what do you make of *agape*, my fine inn-keeper who thinks he thinks?"

"I don't know," said Christidos again. "Being one's true self, I suppose, and not hurting one another . . . that's *agape*. Why ask me, who can barely read the news and sign my name and figure my accounts? I tell you, my loves were little loves, and wholly beneath your notice, should you be the judge of loving, though from the look of you I hardly think you are. I think there's been some terrible mistake. And I might add that I never hated anybody either, except maybe you just now, with your fat face, taunting me about my poor little human love . . ."

He stepped up to the cowed man, and he was grown suddenly furious and fierce. "You . . . asking about my dead wife, my family, my nice little clean restaurant, the good people who eat there . . . you, even knowing anything about me and my business, in this dank foul place with your gold and your bones!"

"In Hell, you mean," said the fat pale man, stepping warily back. "No, I don't think you belong here, Christidos. You're right; you came by mistake. There has been enough love in your life to keep it from being wholly worthless, although worthlessness is certainly a sin which would qualify you to stay here. And yet there wasn't enough love to make you sin in love's name, and so I can't claim you on any of those counts; lechery, jealous murder, nagging the beloved object, or over-solicitude; any of those, and a few dozen more, would authorize me to punch the ticket for you to go on Down Under. But since you haven't sinned, you'll have to get out now and stop wasting my time; I have more work than I can cope with, these days, with death and the dollar on every hand . . . One bit of advice to you: Alexander of Macedon once rode straddle of an eagle, much as you ride tonight, and to lure his mount on and to steer it, he held out a gobbet of meat on the tip of his lance, ahead of the bird's beak. And, when the meat was gone, he did not boggle at slicing off a chunk of his own flesh to make the bird go as he willed. That's the difference, little man, between you and Alexander. Or, at least, one of the differences. You'll fly as long as flying is comfortable, but you don't want to get hurt . . ." He went back to fingering his greasy gold and his grey slick bones, and long after Christidos spewed the fetid smell of the domed vault out of his lungs and sucked in

the star-strained icy air he could hear that dolorous murmur: "Death, death and the dollar . . ."

Yet all this seemed most reasonable to Christidos in his dream.

The bird-machine flew another tremendous instant below the crashing cold stars, and among them, so that Christidos frequently had to duck lest he be struck between the eyes by some celestial particle, and finally it soared above them, so far above that when he looked over the side he could no longer see the crawling golden snail-trails of the humans below. And in time he arrived at a great wall rising sheer up out of the black, and in this wall there was a huge arched gate, and by the gate he saw a small and shriveled and sour-visaged old man who had sat still so long that his beard had grown round and round the staff leaning in his hand.

And, stepping from the bird-machine, he stood before the small sour-visaged old man, and, suddenly realizing that his black Sunday hat was on his head, he snatched it off, because he was aware that he confronted Saint Peter, the door-keeper of the many mansions. The old man looked up at him and sniffed loudly.

"Don't bother to tell me," said the old man, in a rusty-sounding voice like a creaky hinge, and as he spoke his jaws snapped as though they were little used to opening and closing. "Don't waste your time, or mine. One of those fishy-smelling fellows again . . . the sponge-stench clings to their very souls." And he closed his eyes and turned his head to one side.

And Christidos crossed himself again, as he had within the slimy pit leading to Hell, and he asked: "Why am I brought here?"

Saint Peter opened one bright blue eye, like a parrot. "Why? Why are you brought to Heaven? Heaven only knows . . . I don't," And he shut the eye again.

Christidos spread his blunt work-worn hands. "Look, Little Father," he said. "I don't know why I'm here, and if you don't, I don't know where I'm going to go, because I've been to Hell already and there was no place for me there."

At that the sour old saint sat up and opened both eyes, and cleared his rheumy throat, the way old people do when they are at a loss for words.

"Been to Hell, eh? And even they didn't want you? I suppose they've got enough smells down there, what with the sulphur and brimstone, without adding sponges . . . and garlic," added Saint Peter, sniffing again.

"Holy Petros," cried Christidos desperately, "Little Old Holy Saint, surely there must be some place for me; true, I was once a sponger, but I've kept a restaurant these thirty years. And surely you shouldn't mind the smells of the sea, you who were once a fisherman . . ."

"Don't remind me!" The old man shuddered. "The things people keep casting up at me, lo, these two thousand years! No, you've got me doing it . . . I said *casting*. Well, as long as you've come this far, let's look at the score. Why didn't they want you in Hell?"

"That fat man in the cavern said I hadn't sinned," Christidos muttered.

"Haven't sinned, eh? Well, have you got any special goodness about you? Would you call yourself an innocent man?"

"I don't know what you mean," Christidos said helplessly, rolling his hat around in his hands by the brim.

"Are you innocent? Are you pure, clean, unspotted, un-

soiled, undefiled? Did you ever do anything you're ashamed of?"

"Yes," Christidos muttered. "I did plenty of things, I guess . . ."

"That's enough," snapped Saint Peter. "The very fact that you know what shame is proves you're far from innocent. You must do something bad to feel shame in the first place."

Christidos had a flash of memory; when he was a baby, barely able to walk, his mother used to shake him and cry "Aren't you ashamed?" when he soiled himself or broke one of the thick white bowls from which they ate their porridge. And so had his children's mother shaken and scolded them, one by one, as they changed from babyhood to childhood. Saint Peter seemed to read his mind.

"No, I don't suppose you could be innocent," he remarked. "Very few are. We have to get them very young, almost immediately, so to speak, and then they're really very uninteresting. What can you think of about yourself that's on the credit side of the ledger?"

"Well," said Christidos, thinking hard, "I was mostly honest in business . . . at least, I never cheated a friend. I loved my wife and the three kids . . . I never laid hand on them . . . hardly ever." He sighed, remembering how, methodically, he had slapped Stephen; how, dimly in the past, he had administered correction with a cuff now and then.

"How about whoring after strange women?"

"No!" and then, almost whispering, . . . "Only a few times, after she . . . she died." The dough-woman, Mrs. Samarkos, smelling of spice and powdered sugar, rose pinkly in his vision and faded.

"About these three children? You satisfied with the way you brought them up?"

"Yes . . . yes . . ." and then over Christidos there came the almost uncontrollable desire to sit down beside this old man, who did not look so sour after all . . . more like his ancient grandfather whom he vaguely remembered back on Symi . . . and to tell him all about John the dependable, and Zoe, his one ewe lamb, and Stephen who troubled his heart. He fumbled in his vest pocket where he always kept snapshots of them. "They're fine kids . . . here let me show you. But what am I doing . . . you haven't time for such things!"

"I've got all the time in Heaven," said Saint Peter. "And then again, I haven't. Why, a million souls might come trampling up here any minute, roaring and raging for admittance. Of course, they wouldn't get in. We haven't opened this door in centuries. Folks have to come around by the up-to-date entrance now, and take the elevator ..." The old man put his head in his hands and began to cry. "Nobody thinks ever to come straight up to Heaven any more and knock at the gate and ask in, like gentle folk. Now they've got all these modern contraptions, organized creeds and twenty dozen kinds of rituals, and a million books a year on how to live a better life, and psychiatrists' offices with slick leather couches, and every Tom, Dick and Harry qualified to read, write and preach the common good." He looked up at Christidos through a tangle of hands and whiskers. "Sometimes I think the Devil invented the printing press on purpose to put me out of business . . ."

"I know just what you mean," Christidos nodded. "I've heard tell of these millions of books; both John and Zoe like to read, and I've tried to make the youngest get an

education. And Zoe's intended, the one she just quarreled with, he brings home those books about minds and bodies and I don't know what all."

"Go on away and leave me alone," Saint Peter muttered. "Just because, in a luckless moment, when the Lord was walking by the Sea of Galilee, I happened to be casting my net into the water, and He called me to catch men instead of fish, am I ever to be plagued with the smell of fish? Am I never to get the stink of fish gut out of my nostrils? Must you come here to remind me, with your salt-bleached blunt hands, how the fish-scourings hide beneath my fingernails? Oh, go away and don't bother me. I have a headache. You've only upset me and made me more lonesome, coming here and smelling of fish and reminding me of the good old days when men's prayers came straight up to Heaven and we caught them and heaped them up in baskets. Though I must say the prayers asking for things were always more plentiful than those of thanksgiving. Anything you want, before you leave?"

"Only to know where I'm to go," said Christidos, "and maybe, Holy Little Saint, if you know anything about the future, you could give me a hint as to what's to happen to the children."

"What happens to all children," snapped Saint Peter. "They'll live, and love, and die, just as they fell down and bumped their noses and howled when they were small. It's as simple as that. They'll curse, and lie, and steal, and whore, and sin . . ."

"Not John . . . not Zoe . . ." cried Christidos, knowing that Stephen had already done some of those things.

"Both John and Zoe are well along the path," said the sour-visaged old man darkly. "And don't let it worry you, too much, either. I can see right off that one of your main

sins is worrying. As to where you're to go ... go back to earth, and when you *come* this way again, take the elevator. I won't be seeing you, but it's far easier. Now get out and stop stinking Heaven up with your sponge smell." And he turned his face to the wall and let his hands slide down his staff to the spot where his beard twined about it in pale shining loops, and Christidos got back on the bird-machine very quietly, because he knew Saint Peter was fast asleep.

That was the dream a troubled man recounted to Spiros, searching the small brown monkey face intently as though the other man could tell him the meaning. And, since he could not, Christidos persuaded himself that perhaps there was no meaning after all, but all through the mid-summer, and long after, when the events of reality dimmed in his mind, it haunted him, and he would often stop whatever he was doing, counting change or stirring the kettles or lifting a spoonful of soup to his mouth, thinking of his vision arid pondering it, and seeing both prophecy and the fulfillment thereof within his vision.

Chapter Sixteen

ALMOST every day Zoe walked down the shell road toward the hill where the hospital stood; she and Pete Cockinos had a tacit arrangement. Not a word had ever been spoken, but Pete watched from the hospital verandah; when he saw her, small at the foot of the slope . . . indeed, the green cockchafer nibbling a leaf not an arm's length from the crooked brown man as he crouched watching loomed larger . . . the very instant she came in view he hurried, crab-like, to the Major's room, swinging himself up the stairs by his hands on the banister. And Alexis knew, and knew that Pete knew, that it was time to leave the hospital, at four in the afternoon, instead of at seven as before. At the foot of the hill there was a narrow kink in the road, a curse to motorists and a blessing to these two lovers; in the bend of it Zoe could wait, unseen from town or hill, until the ill-assorted two came down the hill; her hand took the place of the dark seafaring claw on the officer's sleeve. And they smiled, all three, in accord with one another, and Pete turned to make his painful way back up the hill, since there were no cronies to gather with until later on, and she and her sightless sweetheart walked southward to the slope of flowering trees and treeless, sheltered hollows.

Pete Cockinos had a sturdy and unswerving belief in the strict letter of morality according to the interpretation given to that somewhat ambiguous generality by the people of Niceros, his natal island. If you asked him, out

of the blue, should a virgin of her own accord bed down with a married man, he would have answered with horrified negatives. In the old days such a wanton would have been stoned to death by the whole village, and the man involved might have been branded, ear-clipped, castrated or done to death by her avenging family, according to how strongly they felt about it. In these days, the consequences, though unlikely to take such violent physical forms, were nevertheless devastating; a good Greek girl whose foot slipped only once might easily be driven on the streets . . . or to suicide. And in a social scheme which operated on a total double standard, the bars of which were let down only to acknowledged prostitutes, (who certainly had their place in the world, though that place was unmentioned) a man who consorted carnally with a nice unmarried girl, a girl destined from babyhood to become wife and mother, was unutterably low in the eyes of the people.

And yet, to Pete Cockinos, the fact that his beloved Major, whom he had followed through thick and thin, and most of it thin at that, whom he had cradled in his arms after the landmine exploded, wiping the red-drenched face, clothing the stripped body with trousers and blouse snatched from a near-by corpse, lest others should look upon his leader's nakedness, whom he had lugged back to shelter, the long legs dragging; the Major, whom he had companioned in and out of prison-camp, who had often eaten his food, not knowing how Pete divided the meagre shares, one larger than the other; the Major whom he sat beside in hospital and followed to the operating room, outside whose door he hunkered like a dog at disturbed times when the doctors would not let him in; the fact that this man went to the southern slopes with a girl for the sole

purpose of love-making was as nothing to him. The island morality did not enter into the matter at all. The Major needed soft words and sweet caresses as much as he needed food and drink; as, at rare intervals, he had desperately needed the quick drugging from the doctors' mysterious needles. And so he ungrudgingly handed his charge over to Zoe, with a sort of natural trustfulness, as he handed him over to the doctors from time to time, though so far the doctors had done him little good.

A little before seven, the three met once more in the kink of the shell road; Zoe's hand was replaced by the dark sea-faring claw, and again there was no need for words. The brief shy smile, the hesitation while her colored cotton skirt flicked through the weeds, taking a cross-cut home to the Parthenon, then the ordered progress of the eyeless and the halt, welded by necessity, down an accustomed road. Pete Cockinos would no more have whispered a spicy bit of gossip about his Major and his Major's girl to his cronies as they fingered their greasy cards and made small insignificant bets than he would have confided the details of bedpan and urinal, both of which he attended to after the operations, when Dragoumis lay strapped to the bed, his entire upper body immobilized to give the delicate optic organs a chance to float normally in the artificial jellies that always failed. Zoe was good medicine for his Major, maybe even better medicine than the long bright needles wielded by the doctors, because after those sometimes he woke up screaming, and after he had been with Zoe he smiled.

Crooked Pete Cockinos whistled a crooked little tune, the words of which he would have blushed brick-red to speak aloud before the girl. And Zoe hummed snatches of song picked up from the radio, and very often, alone early

in the morning, weeding and watering his garden, snipping the succulent herbs, dill and basil and savoury, which leaked sweet aromatic juices in his palm as he cradled them, and plucking thyme and origanon, whose small dry scales made angry scratches across his fingers, Christidos mumbled the words of an old island song, neither singing it nor speaking it, but saying it over and over with a thick inner voice so that it came out blurred as the heavy vapid buzz of a laden bee: "Daughter of Samos, daughter of Samos . . . you of the moon-shaped moles and the black eyes . . . daughter of Samos, love cannot go on pleading in vain forever . . ." Sometimes, during this singular mid-summer, Christidos felt like a boy again, excited and afraid in the months before the marriage arranged by his father and the father of his future bride whom, in all his life of eighteen years, he had never seen. Those were the days when he would gladly have run away, have stowed aboard any passing freighter, have taken his luck in his teeth and made a break for it, were it not for fear of his mother's tears and his father's whippings if he were caught. Those were the days before he married the mother of John and Zoe and Stephen, falling in love with her after the ceremony, but not very long after, because she was soft and gentle and because she looked up to him, which was a thing nobody had ever done before.

Such were the songs surrounding your perplexed island people, set against the backdrop of the picture-post-card town of Turtle Run. There are no more which immediately concern you, although many tunes, in key and off, are sung and whistled and chanted there from one year's end to another. John and Stephen do not sing at all; Alexis Dragoumis remembers symphonies and operas performed in Athens, attended in the pleasing and perfumed company

of his mother, his aunts, and a silken young lady "invited for the occasion"; Spiros is too caught up in his own busy buzz to sing; the General is totally tone-deaf, and what the pseudo-poet sings makes little sense. And so let us leave off considering the songs of the place entirely, save only perhaps the locust's hot metallic signature, or the brief monotonous brittle summer music of the seaside sparrows, who chitter "ching-ching-ching" in the marsh grass through which Zoe and Alexis pass to their sweet-grass couch on the southern slope, under the maple and sweet-gum trees, past flowering now; under the shadow of the ironwood just come to flower, behind the banks of wild growth which have changed from pink mallow to goldenrod with the advancing season.

Love cannot be realized in an open space; it requires the privacy of walls, be those walls only a hedge of rusty yellow bloom. It requires a roof; sun and shadow can provide such a canopy, if only the lovers do not look up to see infinite space above them; if they can imagine sun-dappled leafage lidding their secret room. Beyond the southern slopes lay the silver-flecked vast table of the sea; that vastness was none of their affair. To the lovers safe within, this secret room of love may quietly grow large while they inhabit its strict extent; the walls shove out, the ceiling rises over their heads until it seems the sky; and they themselves become enormous earth-shapes, cloud-contours, enfolding and embracing and mingling into a middle state somewhere between dust and dew. But love requires walls of rusty gold and a roof of leaves finger-printed by sun and shower before it can yeast up into this self-loving and hermaphroditic genie; Shakespeare called it the beast with two backs, but, under any name, the question is, how do you get the genie back into the bottle?

Your Greek has a congenital distrust of the amorphous; the shapeless, the formless, the anarchic, the chaotic are numbered among his chief abominations. He is infatuated with definitions; he demands frames about his subject, even though that subject be a sweet-breathed girl lying in fragrant grass. Logic is his law, and he can only function freely and confidently in an ordered cosmos.

Long before Pythagoras the Golden, by a species of inspired lunar arithmetic and stellar algebra, reduced the universe to harmonious numbers, your Greek had observed the planets dancing in a solemn measure, and became obsessed with a hankering for order and moderation in all things. This abhorrence of excess is as natural and as necessary to him as are the wine-sparkling skies and wine-dark seas of his ancient archipelago. Logic is the religion of his mind, and proportion its high priest.

Indeed, Macedonian Alexander might have sighed less and enjoyed life longer if the siren voices of unbounded ambition had not drowned out the sweet reasonableness of his mighty tutor Aristotle.

Your Greek has always been aware that there are certain reasons which Reason, unaided, can neither explore nor explain. Profound realist that he is, he knows that there are certain areas of human experience, certain emotional and spiritual crises, which elude logic and the cool serenities of Euclid. They cannot be caged neatly in a geometrical equation. Such events crowd our brief calendar from birth to death and beyond, and they are unfailingly engendered in the dark regions of man's helplessness and despair and feeble hope. They lurk eternally behind the lightning and thunder of passion; they pounce upon the naked pathos of the spent lover in whose dull bones the ecstasy begins to die.

Your Greek, who is first and last a thinking animal, turns to his hierarchy of gods and heroes, his rituals, his processions and his priests, his songs and statues and dramas and dances, when he is faced by the faceless mask of unpredictability. He must rationalize even the apparently irrational, or die in the attempt. Sometimes he dies; sometimes he works out the irreconcilable through an arbitrary *deus ex machina* which he invents, post-haste, to save his sanity. But, however inventive he may be, not even the seven-fold shield of Ajax can save him from the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. Hence his universe is populated with divinities; his firmament sparkles with godhood, and still he seeks meanings and breaks his heart in the search. You cannot serve subpoenas on the cloudy witnesses that throng the periphery of experience.

And so we come the full round once more; how do you put the genie back into a bottle?

Though Zoe and her lover find themselves a gentle nest in a sweet-grass hollow where the wind breathes soft and warm; though they kiss and sleep and wake again for a thousand years; though time smiles and makes their hiding place an island where no anxious moment stirs; though they are safe and sacrosanct through the acts of love, still the narrow finger of the world will hook them back like recalcitrant toys who have taken on life and begun a play of their own making. Dragoumis knows this more sharply than Zoe; the worms have already eaten his heart, while she is comparatively untouched by life. Perhaps he does not love her with the terrible burning urgency which had spent itself in assault upon Lisa's cool pale citadel. Perhaps, he thinks, that was not love at all, but only the Narcissus-infatuation of two beautiful people reflecting

one another. She had been fire and ice by turns; Zoe was all sweet-smelling warmth and grace; he was far gentler with her than he had ever been with Lisa; since, though gentleness was essential in his nature, he had always to remember that the pale proud beauty required a modicum of pain with her passion, and would have scorned a lover who often merely drowsed in the beloved arms, vulnerable and yet confident in the sheltered security of love. Man sleeps, exhausted, after passion, but he dreams most pleasantly, and without exhaustion, on the breast of peace.

And yet the world hooks them back with a crooked finger. Years have passed; Lisa is married to her Italian, formerly a munitions-manufacturer and now a safe dabbler in harmless farm-instruments. The sword has most vengefully turned plowshare; the explosive has converted to fertilizer, but both stink of phosphate.

Divorce is necessary; he has discarded the anonymous personality he passed into when his officer's uniform was changed for that of a common foot soldier on the battlefield. There is no purpose in revenging himself on Lisa; she is like the pretty porcelain doll his sister once loved; broken, it was kicked to the dustbin amid many sobs, but nevertheless kicked, or dropped, or wrapped tenderly in a silken scarf and buried with all honors . . . he could not quite remember the proceedings, but his impression was that his little sister had screamed herself into such a fury that she stamped and spat on the disgraced fragments. What is not perfect can have no health within it, even in the eyes of a child.

And so Major Alexis Dragoumis, after the correct, if tedious, legal process, can return to Athens with a new wife, and friends who remember Lisa will be careful not to speak of her. An impoverished Athenian, blind, lean of

purse, yet proud in family, could bring back a Greek-American girl, sturdy of body, coarser in speech and feature than the ladies of his social sphere, and little would be thought of it; the war had changed much in this respect. And no one need know that they had lain long in the sweet grass, hearing the monotonous tropes of locust and sea side sparrow.

Yes, it could be fitted into a pattern; not the pattern he was born to, but perhaps a better one. A pattern of a sort, save that he could not see it, since he had no eyes. And Alexis Dragoumis disliked the emblems of his mortality. If he could have his eyes again . . .

"There is to be another operation," he said to her, braiding the strands of unseen green succulence between his fingers. "Another and always another, but this last they promise will be the answer. Either that, or it's past all hoping . . ."

"I don't care, dear. I don't care," she said, feeling pain at the thought of his being hurt once more, even though under anaesthesia. "It will make no difference to us; we'll go away somewhere . . . I can be eyes for two . . ."

Yes . . . it was a pattern of a sort.

"I suppose we could beg, or steal, or I could go back to Athens and scrape up the leavings," he said bitterly. "Yes, there's a thing or two left in the world for a blind man; I wouldn't care for making brooms or baskets. But I could probably get a job teaching; there must be a few of my old friends, or my father's, left who would recommend me. I might teach our young Greek boys to write discourses and debates in the French language, and to deliver them with atrocious accents and fine attention to grammar. I might even teach them the noble history of their land, and make them regret their former glory. And people

would say: there goes Dragoumis; he was a proud man once, and he liked going to the opera, not so much for the music, but to see and be seen with a woman with beautiful shoulders, a woman with a small head nicely balanced, and lovely jewels at her ears and her throat. Your shoulders are beautiful, Zoe; I can feel the bones under my hands, and the warm flesh, but I will never see them under the soft yellow lights of the opera house . . .,"

"Hush," said Zoe, and wept, making no sound, as she often did when he tormented himself with chapters out of a past she could not share.

"I remember a little peasant boy I used to play with, when we were small," he said. "A pretty brown boy, somewhat flat of feature, goat-nosed, but very strong. His people were shepherds who kept the flock at my father's country estate. And I used to beg excuses to eat at his house, even to sleep overnight, though it drove my mother frantic, and she dreaded that I would bring home fleas and lice from the place. The hut was not very comfortable and the bed not very wide, but when I was ten or so it seemed most wonderful. During the winter months we went only occasionally to the estate in the hills, I and my father alone, since my mother and sister did not care for it except in the summer when they could have lawn parties. But we loved it, we two, father and I, and the minute we arrived, while the carriage was still being unloaded, I would run to Nikol's house. There would be frost in the air, up there in the hills; my cheeks were hot with frost and with running, and around my neck there was a big woolen muffler. Before I came to the hut, long before, I could smell the fresh bread Nikol's mother took out of the oven; the smell was like Jesus in the cold sharp air . . . Do you think you could live like a peasant, Zoe?"

"I am a peasant," the girl said simply.

"Not as they are. You'd not care to live on grits and greens, my girl, and neither would I, nor would I allow your doing it." He laughed shortly. "Nor would I care for a host of wild little hill-children growing up around me. And so, young Zoe, we'll be married by book and bell, if and when this next scientific butchery they're trying on me works out. If I get a mere glimpse of light and dark, so I won't stumble through life grabbing for your hand to guide me, we'll make a stab at it together. Because, I can't live without you if I ever reach the light, and I can't live with you, or with myself either, in the darkness."

And that was how the blast-blinded Athenian made a formal proposal of marriage, lying in the warm summer grass, with his sturdy sweetheart beside him, her skirt pulled decently down over her knees for modesty's sake, even though there were no eyes to see, not even his.

A practical consideration of marriage to Alexis Dragoumis was amazing, almost frightening, to Zoe. From the first time she had gone to the sheltered southern slopes with him she had dedicated herself to whatever he might need; she would be his servant, his handmaiden, the buffer between him and reality; she knew, as well as Pete Cockinos, that she was good medicine for him. She, who had been brought up in the knowledge that one day she would make a conventional marriage, settled and arranged through her father, had lost sight of the normal course of things; if Dragoumis had beckoned, she would have gone with him as in a dream, drowsing through the permanence or impermanence of his needs and affections. Perhaps she had fleeting visions of equal comradeship, but since marriage seemed the most impossible of all possibilities, she had not let the wing of promise brush her eyes. And now

all was safe and secure and assured; her father, her brothers, the whole town could know that she was engaged to marry. And yet . . . they could not; at least, not until after the next operation on his eyes.

"It's a good deal of an experiment," he went on saying, and she realized that she had missed some of his words in the quiet and blessed excitement. "They transplant, I understand, like taking a geranium out of one pot and sticking it into another. Only sometimes the geranium, or anything else, I suppose, perishes in the process, and I don't imagine the tissue of a living eye is as hardy as a geranium,"

"It doesn't matter," she said again, trying to shield him against disillusion.

"It matters very much, only let's not talk more about it today," he answered, and they were silent in the sunny hollow because he wished it so.

No, Zoe has not yet realized that she will marry Dragoumis; as yet the handsome, gentle, tormented man is as far above her as were the lords who claimed *droit de seigneur* in the feudal lands. Among her people a girl's one commodity, providing she were passable looking and a good housekeeper, was her virtue, and that commodity could be but strictly won between the cool married sheets. Without marriage, she throws her neat safe little world to the four winds to become a nameless and claimless creature; yet she would love more than most wives do, since she has only that love to lean against when the earth darkens, and a wife can settle down in the comfortable rocking chair of convention. She would rather die than leave him, not because she wishes to revenge herself in case he tires, but simply because she cannot live without him. Such is the

fate Zoe has accepted with open hands; that she may become wife and mother has been beyond her dreams. How much easier, now, to tell an incredulous father; the ceremony would make all the difference between grace and disgrace in his eyes. And yet, she had been willing to wound him by running away unblessed, and so she still would, if this new experiment the doctors wished was not a success; she would follow her blind lover, even though he disclaimed her.

Zoe was convulsed with a wild joy; she both wept and prayed, yet joy and tears and prayer were all turned inward, lest she trouble her lord. This girl, who could slap and scratch Mr. M. Diamond, when he merely laid a hand on her thin sleeve, who was as flip with Spiros' Philip as any healthy wise-cracking American girl, turned back a hundred years, or a thousand, since she had known and loved Dragoumis. She asked nothing but to serve him; the circumstances of her servitude were of little importance, since the very fact of her privilege was so great.

She had read, sketchily, about various surgical transplantations; she knew that the Major had already endured a considerable amount of plastic work on his face. It seemed wondrous to her that so delicate a mechanism as the human eye, or any part thereof, could be lifted from one body to another, and she lowered her head and looked long and curiously into his large brown sightless stare; today there was no black patch, as there was so often over one or the other eye, and the clear brilliant depths were heavily flecked with fire, like fabulous opals. She wondered if the eyes themselves would be changed; if the fire and intensity of color she knew and loved would be lost in this last desperate hope. She believed it would not, and yet she

could not quite believe those great compassionate orbs would ever look upon the world again. And if they looked . . . could it be that they would find her fair?

For a moment Zoe covered her face with her square, capable hands, so different from the white fingers of the Athenian ladies he remembered. But only for a moment: then she rose and straightened her wind-tossed hair and smoothed her skirt.

"Come," she said in a matter-of-fact voice. "Cockinos will be waiting at the bend in the road, and I've work to do, and so have you; the work of waiting for the time to come . . ." Suddenly she whirled into his arms. "Oh, my dear, my dearest love, what have they done to you?"

"Given me my deserts, I expect," he said with a dry chuckle. "More than my deserts, far more, now that I have you. Now that there's a chance I won't have to give you up." He fingered the grassy wreath sun-withered on her wrist. "God will not turn his face from us as long as we wear garlands."

Chapter Seventeen

IT IS possible that an extremely unobservant tourist could have sped through Turtle Run on his way to some publicized beach resort and never known he was in a Greek town at all. Enveloped in a cloud of white coral dust churned up by his own wheels he might never have noticed the place at all, for after all, the town itself was a little off the highway, and there was no sign cautioning him that here America hesitated a moment and a brief interval of island folk began. And, should he catch an unfamiliar whiff of garlic, a wave of sponge-stench . . . has he not passed phosphate plants and turpentine works and grapefruit canneries along the way to the publicized resort? Have not his nostrils been assailed by many strange smells, all of which are native to the west coast of Florida, and none of which are more pleasant, or more pungent, than the railroad-yard and shoe-polish factory and sulphur dump he breathes in his northern home?

But turn off the highway, the cracked cement re-paved with ground stone coral, and go down the shell road past the filling station and into town. Here the street signs are in Greek and English; here the church is curiously domed, reminiscent of the turban-like turrets of Saint Sophia; here the small white homes and the old grey boarding-houses are neatly set under the palm and jacoranda trees. Turtle Run is a picture-postcard town; the side-walks, the small flower-plots of scarlet salvia and elephant's ear, edged by shells or sea-whitened stones, are immaculate. Should a

stranger, a tourist, carelessly toss down a cigarette butt on such a side-street of small homes, some little half-grown girl, broom in hand and her head done up in a kerchief, runs out to whisk it into the gutter. A grandmother, swathed in black wool though the sun is high, sits on the porch; her wide bare feet have never learned the everyday use of shoes, and so are cramped in them only on Sundays; she crochets endlessly, and the ball of thread is trapped snugly into the pink-lipped, pink-lined shell of a big conch on the porch floor beside her.

A block or so from the waterfront the stores begin, and the coffee-houses, where the old men sit all day over countless cups of thick sweet Turkish brew, spinning yarns, playing their interminable card-games. At high noon most citizens of Turtle Run are in their houses, or at their places of business, half-dozing through the three warmest hours of the day; even the waterfront drowzes from noon to three o'clock. A woman picks her way to the fish-stalls; if she is a Halki islander, then she patronizes a fish-market kept by a man from Halki, though his wares, down to the small keg of imported salt anchovies, are exactly like those stocked by a man from Symi, who is proprietor of the market next door. She buys *bdklava*, the delectable sugar-powdered cakes called *kourabiedes* and other pastries at a coffee-house kept by one of her own island-cousins, standing outside and bargaining through the wide open front where the case of sweets is at hand, since no Greek housewife would set foot into a coffee-house save on pay-day nights to drag her man out by main force, if it seems likely he will gamble away the whole week's substance in that garrulous sanctuary. She may look longingly into the window of the lone department store, skipping over the ready-made rayon dresses coveted only by

young girls, but dwelling long on the fine white-enamel cookstove and washing-machine; she knows that, while her husband might grumble and refuse her personal luxuries, it is her right and due to demand and get anything he can pay for in the way of kitchen improvements. She might never learn to turn on the shiny switches; she might bake the rest of her life in the clay oven set into the chimney, but the fine machine will sit in state in her home, the wonder and envy of the neighbors, if he can keep up the installments.

At noon a child or two or three will run home from school, bawling over some playground slight, only to be gently or soundly trounced and sent back to the font of learning, their mouths stuffed with assuaging sugar-plums. At noon an old gaffer, twisted and shrunken from the bends, can bear his thirst no longer; he nags his peevish daughter-in-law free from a quarter and shuffles to the nearest saloon. At noon the curio shops are idle; the flower-like brooches and necklaces of small multi-colored shells gather dust; the packaged oranges, each in their tiny crate marked "souvenir of Florida" spoil in the sun; the inevitable parrot whistles sleepily and picks lice around his scrawny neck; the curio-shop-keeper comes out with a bucket of water to wet down the sponges and sea-fans on his sidewalk stand, lest they blow away in the wind.

And at noon Stephen makes his way along the waterfront, past the stalls and the curio shops, past the Olympia, which he would enter if he had even the price of a coca-cola, Stephen, for the first time in his seventeen years, is seriously looking for a job. He will go to this and that captain and explain that he is at home in a diving-suit; he has had practice on the excursion boat, where the manager

lets him go down to the river-bed full eighteen feet with a half-decayed but unstripped sponge in a concealed pocket while the barker urges the customers to watch the famous diver wrench the living weed from the ocean floor. If he can go down eighteen feet he can negotiate sixty, eighty, a hundred ... far more than the young divers will tackle nowadays. Once the water closes over your head, it's all the same, if you have guts ... a little darker, a little dimmer, but nothing to the rippling muscles of the sea-hero Glafkos, who dove naked from Symi those thousands of years ago. He will talk to the captains; they all know his father, but he will not trade on friendship; they will forget the kid who grew up hanging around the waterfront, tagging after the crews, asking questions, round-eyed with their tales and the jingle of coins in their pockets; no, now the captains would see him as a strong youth, a superior and indispensable sponger, a diver second to none, fearless, daring, in superb control of the heavy hook, the keen short-bladed knife of his art. Something very near a god; the boy shuffling his feet along the shell road grew taller with his dream. Adventure and danger, a fight with an octopus; sharks and a jealous life-line tender overhead, knife poised over the air hose; he was supreme over them all. Girls hanging on his arm; the menial deckhands kneeling to strap on his lead-soled boots; the last cigarette before going down, the small vigil lamps in their red glass cups burning before the crucifix in the captain's cabin.

But the answer was always the same. He swung up to the door; the men sat smoking their stubby pipes around some kitchen table; in the background there was a woman stirring the kettles, slapping the steamy dough, chopping vegetables for the stews. Someone called for Captain Mike,

or Captain Joe, or Captain Pete. "Hullo, it's the Christidos kid, the youngest. So you wanta go out with the fleet? Not on my boat you don't, sonny; we don't need no half-baked kids, and besides, we know your Pop don't care for you to mess around sponges. Yeah, he talks a lot about his kids, he expects all that reading and writing to take hold. We don't want you on our boat, sonny; your Pop wouldn't like it, and besides, we need guys who're toughened up. Guys who stick. You never had a steady job, you dunno what work is. You'd be a Jonah, or worse. Get your Pop to take you on sweeping out the Parthenon, get a job in the drug store, you're not old enough to drive a bus but maybe you could go round to the company in a couple of years and they'd let you run the jitney. Maybe you could clean fish at the market; maybe you could pick fruit or sort curios, but we don't want you on the sponge boats; you're no sort of a man, big as you are, and we want no trouble with your father Christidos; we eat in his place and we want to keep on eating there." That was the word from Captain Mike and Captain Joe and Captain Pete, from twenty gruff-voiced Greek-speaking islanders who liked the father but wanted no truck with the son, who had no use for pretty lads with soft hands, no matter how broad their shoulders were, who knew the boy as a hanger-on and an excursion-boat swaggerer; a kid who used to dive for nickels tossed by the tourists and who now cadged quarters by showing off in a not dissimilar way, in the patched old suit with the impressive helmet and the dead sponge in the hidden pocket, which he rose with dramatically enough as the climax for every twenty-minute exhibit. The manager of the excursion boat knew well enough that he would have to pay any other helper regular wages, even a bent old man disqualified from the fleet

would have demanded and received a stipulated wage in addition to the petty and unreliable largesse of the tourists, but Stephen would go into his act for laughs and for the fun of showing-off, and for a curious kind of self-wounding spite, since it was as close as he could get to the real thing. Before, when his father made him go to school, even though he was near a man grown, there were only a couple of hours a day when he could come down to the docks; sometimes he managed to go out for only one trip into the river; sometimes there were no tourists, in the off-season months, and days passed when his pockets were empty. Even now, having spent what Christidos considered suitable pocket money for his youngest son, there was nothing to do but hang around hoping for a trip on the boat with its shoddy little pretense of diving. Or he could steal a little from his father, a dollar here, fifty cents there. In future he must be more careful, but also, in future, he must have money. Money was power, money was influence; with money in your pocket nothing became impossible. Without it, he was a shiftless kid whom nobody trusted to scrape a sponge . . . and he was even willing to take on that most disagreeable and distasteful of jobs if it would give him a toehold toward becoming a diver. It was a practical concession to glory that he had never before admitted to himself. Always in his dreams, nourished by the cozening and comforting tongue of the pseudo-poet, he had leaped full-armed into fame, even into legend. To be a sea-god, stooping to scrape sponges on a slimy deck running with the odorous sticky ichor; to be such a gallant god, and to be refused, crammed back into the frail boy-shell, clad in a striped sweatshirt and scuffed sneakers and hand-me-down pants that John found he had outgrown when he got back from war; a boy-shell with

fifty cents in his pocket when his father saw fit that he should have it. A boy-shell packed with hot wild longing for freedom he could not yet, perhaps not ever, understand.

Stephen Christidos remembered all too well the day when John, old stick-in-the-mud that he was, turned from boy into man. Something over sixteen, but not seventeen yet, he volunteered to dive for the Epiphany Cross. There were six contenders; Mike Andriotis, a man of thirty-nine, had brought up the dripping symbol for eight years running, and the other five, save only John, had made numerous attempts to win the singular and signal honor. Nobody considered the boy seriously, there were few bets laid in his favor, and those only by his father and by Spiros and two or three loyal friends who were willing to lose their money for the sake of island and family ties. All during the fantastically beautiful procession down to the waterfront and beyond, to the jutting spur into the bay and the little raised stone platform from which the visiting bishop would throw the beribboned cross, the procession of priests and church dignitaries in robes of white and gold and purple, and of the mayor and the town officials in their correct black suits, and the whole town trailing after, on foot and in old jalopies decorated with rosettes and colored streamers. And then there were the tourists, coming to town in droves to see the show, and most of them generous with their pennies to a pretty little Greek boy, nine years old at most they judged (for Stephen was small as a child and late to get his growth) whooping and hollering and running alongside the parade, catching up as often as he could with the narrow group of divers, strangely naked in their trunks and towels, but hedged and protected at the heart of the procession, yelling out to

everyone "That's my brother John! That's him! That's my brother, going to bring up the cross!"

Afterwards Mike Andriotis had a mouthful of explanations; that a cramp caught him as he hit the water, that he had but newly recovered from a bad cold and was not in condition, that he suspected someone, whose name he hesitated to mention, rabbit-punched him under the surface, or at least tried to. Eight years he had emerged triumphant, the gleaming golden symbol with its wilted water-soaked ribbons rampant in his hand; eight years he had stood puffed and spraddle-legged while the church fathers counted out the prize, a full fifteen hundred dollars of American money translated into good Greek gold. For eight years they had made a chair of their arms, and carried him hero-wise through the town, and at every house they knocked and let him down to receive largesse.

And now John, his boy-body thin and milk-white across the chest and shoulders (since your Greek, though he be a sun-lover, is unlikely to bask at high noon until pigment gathers to protect his skin, he being either too busy or too drowsy during the sun-tan hours), now John dove and held high the cross; the white dove, symbol of Christ's own baptism, was released across the waters, and bandy-legged bitter-mouthed Mike Andriotis, with his brown hairy body padded with the beginnings of fat, might curse all he wished, and even shake his hand, spread-fingered, at the boy, calling down the evil of five serpent-devils upon him right under the nose of the church dignitaries, but John was the one to receive the prize . . . fifteen hundred dollars of good Greek gold. John was the one to be carried triumphantly from house to house, where more and more was added to the purse, since his brief visit brought luck for the whole year. Moreover, there was the matter of the

bets; Christidos and Spiros and his friends cleaned up that year, since the odds were so great on the untried youth. That was a day when a pretty little boy of nine years could whoop and holler and shriek glory for the brother he adored.

Stephen, having exhausted the possibilities of the waterfront, having been rebuffed at every door, scorned by every captain, turned at the end of the shell road that toppled into the vacant lot of refuse and rusty cans and rotted orange crates. Nearly to the end of the road was the little sweets shop where, as a small boy, he had run whenever he was in trouble, to bury his head in the ample flour-dusty apron worn by Mrs. Samarkos and to be coaxed, bite by bite, to tell her his woes, to be cozened into sitting in her wide lap for sweetmeats; even the expensive pastries she sold for a dollar a pound to the tourists were none too good for her favorite, and many a pound he ate of them, all the while sniffing over his hurt feelings and she pressing more upon him. Since Stephen had learned to swell around and smell of beer he hadn't stopped in for a visit with Mrs. Samarkos in maybe a year or more. Maybe two years. He seldom came anywhere near this far down the road; his interest in Turtle Run stopped several hundred yards short of her sweets shop; stopped with the last tavern and coffee-house and curio shop. Here at the end of the road there were only a few poor shanties and this syrup-sticky little pockmark in space that was Mrs. Samarkos' sweets shop.

Cushioned in the pleasant cloud of his dream of the nine-year-old Stephen who worshipped his big brother, the hero of Epiphany, he went up the three worn wooden steps. The screen-door creaked and scraped as it had done last year and the year before, and for twenty years be-

yond that; Mrs. Samarkos' apron was dusty with flour and powdered sugar; her hair, pulled tight and knotted like a punishment to every possible escaping strand, was streaked with white as well, but of a different sort; she was fatter than he remembered her, and her fat old tomcat was greyer and lazier, although he still enjoyed licking sugar from the cracks in the floor.

For a moment he thought she didn't recognize him any more. Then: "My darling! My golden one! Little Stephen, he that ain't been to see Mama Samarkos all this long and weary while!" Now she had to tilt back on her heels to look up at him; she teetered on her absurdly small feet. "So big, so big a man!" She ran her hands over his arms, his back, and as she touched the flat muscles of his shoulders, under his striped sweat shirt, she unexpectedly shivered; she had been long without a man, and when she first married, before Samarkos got fat and lazy as her tomcat and finally died from ill-advised nibbling on *baklava* and *kourabiedes* and honey macaroons, he had been sleek-muscled too.

"Stevie?" Mrs. Samarkos peered closely, her smallish eyes, red-rimmed from the constant irritants of flour and heat, were not as good as they used to be. "Something troubles you, Stevie?"

Under the caress of her voice, cloying as warm batter, the knotted nerves of the boy began to relax. True, the captains wanted none of him, but here was Mama Samarkos, plump and sugar-powdered, fairly steaming with sympathy. Almost he could throw himself at her feet and bury his head in her apron-swathed thigh and sob out his adolescent woes as he had so often done before.

Stephen's childhood fondness for Mama Samarkos was his own secret. As a baby, he had been warned not to ven-

ture that far without some older person, lest he be lost in the weedy marsh beyond the town. Always rebellious, the waste lot leading to the marsh became his private hiding-place as soon as he was old enough to run that far; when his father and John supposed him to be playing ball or hide-and-seek with the younger boys, he was like as not secreted beyond the slope where pink and white mallows grew rank, a magical screen, tall as a forest to a very little boy. The games he played alone, with imaginary companions, were not always pleasant ones, but at that, they probably were no more imaginatively gruesome than those contrived by any other solitude-loving child. He was a bit over-fond of mock burials; huge cockroaches and big fuzzy spiders and frogs and river-crabs and sparrows, when he could catch them, suffered extravagantly long funeral services during which the boy chanted and wailed like a banshee, with real tears pouring down his face, both because he was moved by the solemnity of the occasion and because he acutely disliked the actual killing of the creature, which was necessary before it could be properly eulogized and interred. During these lengthy funerals, which took place nearly every day, or as often as he could escape unseen, since he was in terror that the other children would follow him and deride these dramas so needful to his heart, he recounted over and over to himself all the imaginary slights and sorrows that were put upon him; he soundly believed that the mildest reproach was a dire threat, and with each burial he buried himself, lost in the marsh, drowned at sea, run over by a car on the highway, kidnapped and tortured to death by bandits, and a hundred other deaths which would cause his cruel father and his unfeeling brother and sister to spend their lives repenting him so cruelly lost. Sometimes he pricked his

finger and so was enabled to bury a drop of his own blood with his small victim; this symbol heightened the reality of his fancies and by the time he turned back, hot and disheveled, to enter Mrs. Samarkos' sweets shop he was in a fair state of collapse after the outburst of childish hysteria.

For some reason, the mock funerals stopped short, that great day when John won the cross at Epiphany, and Stephen never visited the little graveyard of sleeping bugs and mice and sparrows again. But he still went to Mama Samarkos for comfort and cakes, and since nobody knew of his visits, nobody forbade him to go there. If Christidos had known the boy made a habit of it, he probably would have forbidden him, because, though Christidos always gave everyone the benefit of the doubt, and though he tipped his hat to the plump pastry-maker as gravely as he did to the finest lady in town, still he knew something that was not common knowledge to the women and children of Turtle Run: Mrs. Samarkos, after the death of her husband, occasionally unlatched the back door of her house at night to let in a man who was careful not to be seen walking her way; perhaps some recently widowed captain, unused to a continent bed, or some sponger whose wife was pregnant past the point of enjoyment. Even bankers and real-estate operators and packers may, or may not, have knocked softly at that door. Even Christidos . . . long ago, in the year or two when he was most horribly alone after the mother of his brood died in his arms, and his hard brown hands were powerless to hold her back. Even Christidos . . . which would have been a double reason why Stephen should not clamber in her lap, pressing his baby fingers, sticky with honey, against her plump

cheeks. But since he never knew Stephen went there, he did not forbid him . . .

And now she cooed, "Stevie? Something troubles my Stevie, my boy grown so big?" And, with the tug of her warm pink arms, surprisingly strong for her height, but firm and muscular from much kneading, with the strain of her arms around him, his shirt began to loosen at the back, to pull taut around his shoulders, and a cool rivulet of sweat ran from the back of his neck down across his flat boy-breasts and rilled into the bunched dampness at his navel. He lurched, frightened, against her, and whirled and ran panting out into the road, through the wasteland of rusty cans and broken orange crates, through the rank hedge of pink and white mallows, not seeming so like a forest now, since they reached only to his waist, and threw himself down, sobbing uncontrollably, on the sand spit which had been his treasured graveyard of heroes not so very many years before. He shook as though with a chill; his body felt the touch of fire and ice by turns, and he was more afraid than he had ever been before in his seventeen years. Stephen had run away from many people and places and situations that frightened him; it was never in his nature to turn and fight, but never had he run so hard as when the huge pink moist arms of Mama Samarkos encircled him, and her wide pink mouth with its faint moustache, each hair glittering with sweat, reached for his, and her small eyes with their red rims stared into his. He ran from a nightmare figure, a pink dough woman, big as a house, big as half the sky, and there was no place to hide save on the graves of his small forgotten victims. Here in this sandy spot behind the mallow hedge he was overlord and king of life and death, and though his subjects re-

sponded only with faint and dying squeaks and chirps, it was he who squeezed the demonic hand, choking out their life.

And, as he lay there sobbing, it all came back to him . . . the slights, the rebukes, the sense of being younger and inferior that had made him seek a secret kingdom where he was sole ruler. All the failures welled up in him, the tear-stained school-books, the stolen pennies, the running away from fights because he was afraid of being hurt, the fear of water closing over his head as he dove, the horror of any kind of snake, even the babyish fear of the dark from which his father had tried to wean him. The fear of being taken for a dumb Greek kid when he went into American towns, the fear of growing up and living and dying trapped in the narrow confines of Turtle Run when there was all the world to warm his hands at, could he only begin . . . the disgrace of being refused by the captains when he came honestly wanting work. And finally, the one failure which he never admitted to himself, which he kept closed, at the back of his mind, shut away as safely, or almost as safely, as though it had never happened, because he could not bear to think of it. The failure of winning the cross at the Epiphany services.

Stephen dove only once for the cross, two years before, when he was fifteen. For days before the event he was sick with fear and anticipation; his head spun with tales of boys stabbed by envious competitors under water, in the very act of seizing the coveted prize. Indeed, there was an old man with one hand off at the wrist whom Stephen remembered seeing as a child; he was long dead now, but his legend was still told in the coffee-houses; his hand had been lopped at the wrist but still clung like a crab to the golden standard as the victor waved it at arm's length over

the water, and the blood of the defeated stained and muddied the blue surface. That tale became a nightmare to the boy in the week before he was to compete, and yet, on the appointed day, he swaggered up to the platform, elbowing through the other lads and older men for as prominent a spot as possible. And, when Stephen knew that the bishop's eye was on him for a moment, he crossed himself ostentatiously three times.

Perhaps it was an unconscious compulsion that made the bishop throw the cross so obviously toward the spot in the water which would favor the beautiful golden boy who made so pious a gesture. But the crowd booed as he popped up from the surface, waving the holy symbol; even now Stephen could hear their booing, like surf, through the pounding rush of blood to his head. And so the bishop, who was only a substitute from an inland diocese and knew little of these island superstitions, or so the Epiphany service seemed to him, muttered something about throwing the cross thrice, which seemed a silly gesture to all concerned, but the crowd put up with it, since apparently anything this bishop did would be silly, if he had such poor judgment as deliberately to cast the cross in favor of one candidate only. And three times he threw it, dripping with draggled ribbons whose purple was bleaching into the salt water; it would be the two best recoveries out of three. On the second throw, Stephen was so blind with grief and rage that he muffed his chance entirely and came up ten feet from the scene of operations; on the third plunge he felt his right hand come in contact with the cold slippery gold; the cross gleamed dimly before his eyes, and there was a flurry of churned-up silt and a dull thud across the back of his head. After the victor cried triumph, someone remembered him and fished him out in

disgrace; he may or may not have struck a sunken piling, or he may have been rabbit-punched, or it may have been all a dream that he saw the gleam of gold before his eyes; perhaps he fainted in the water from sheer anger. Truly, he won the cross on the first throw, though through an advantage, and an advantage he had created unfairly. But it was equally true that he had not made the best two tries out of three. And so, though there was feasting and dancing in Turtle Run that night, Stephen took no part in it. He avoided the commiserations of his father and sister, and of the Spiros clan, and of their friends; he felt his father's eyes reproachful upon him, knowing how little the self-blessing had meant save to attract the bishop's notice. He slunk away from the celebration to lick his wounds in silence, and, having magnified them to high tragedy, he shut them into a tight compartment of his mind and never took them out again, because they were still too sore. Never, after a few heart-sick days, until now, had he relived those few terrible minutes under water; never had he admitted this fatal failure to himself, even though, to his father, it was trifling compared with his failures in school and his small pilferings.

And now this last, this final, shameful failure, getting scared of a fat old woman, running like a scared kid when she only wanted to pet him up like she used to . . . or did she? Stephen had never cared about the young girls at his school; he hardly bothered to show off and swagger and shout like the other boys. To be accepted as a man among men, with money in his pocket and fine words on his tongue, the young sea-hero, the demi-god Glafkos, risen to claim these thousands of years of accumulated glory . . . this was his dream. Sheep's eyes and blushes

and giggles were no part of his make-up. Somewhere ahead there was a long-limbed cool-eyed woman, like a picture in a book he once read; she was clothed more in dream than in flesh; she was like the heroines of the majestic epics Lord Byron conceived and never wrote. She was a fit companion for a demi-god, and she lived somewhere in the far reaches of Stephen's imagination and spoiled all temptations of the flesh for him.

After a long period of lying alternately sprawled and taut on the warm ledge sand beyond the hedge of mallow bloom, the boy rose stiffly, his clothing stained with sweat and spittle, and made his way like a hunted thing, skirt-ing the edge of town, scuffling through scrub palmetto, stumbling into marshy pot-holes, avoiding the road, the houses, the curious eyes. He came into the Parthenon Bar and Grill the back way, up the porch and through the service pantry where peppers and garlic hung in looped necklaces. He went quietly past the kitchen; Christidos, his back turned as he tended the fire, did not hear him. Cimon the waiter sat on the front steps smoking his inevitable cigarette; Spiros had not yet arrived; upstairs Zoe hummed a current song she had picked up on the radio. Stephen stepped quiet as a cat on his sneakers, straight to the cash register, and eased out the drawer, as he had learned how to do, so that the bell made no sound. No fifty-cent piece, no dollar or two this time; his quick fingers found the compartment at the back where tens and twenties were kept. Gingerly he plucked out a few bills, not even looking at the amount, and stuffed them into his pants pocket, easing the drawer back as silently as he had withdrawn it. His heart raced and his knees shook until he thought he would fall; he leaned against the jamb of

the door and when Christidos turned and looked joyfully and lovingly upon him, glad that for once the boy was home early, he seized the broom and began busily sweeping crumbs toward the rear of the restaurant. If it had not been for the slight support of the broom handle he might well have crumpled at his father's feet.

Chapter Eighteen

AT THE time Zoe had administered her rebuff of Mr. Diamond's affectionate advances, he had accepted her refusal to be pawed and petted, and perhaps subsequently married, if he found the pawing and petting sufficiently pleasurable, with a dignity and outward quietude nobody suspected him capable of, least of all, himself, because in his own mind he was a fierce and fiery man of action. However, nobody knew of the incident except himself and Zoe; a fact for which he thanked his gods and his good luck, both night and morning. Of course, old Christidos knew something had gone wrong, but he couldn't know the truth, or he would have come raging like seven devils after his daughter's traducer.

But inwardly this greasy little Caliban seethed and sizzled in his own fat. To be turned down, to be flown at and slapped and scratched, just because he patted the girl's shoulder and maybe ran his finger an inch or two down the front of her blouse, and she nothing but a waitress in her father's restaurant, now, leaning over tables so any sponging riff-raff could get a look up her legs or down her neck; she, a small town girl, a girl who had never been anywhere or seen anything; she, no tearing beauty, and already a year past twenty, a little old for being housebroken into the kind of marriage he cared for; she, child of a stupid islander, keeper of a small old-fashioned restaurant, who obviously could have afforded little or no dot (not that he would have demanded one, priding himself

on his modern notions—but there you have it: back in Greece the girl would have been anything but desirable as a wife for a successful business man, one of the richest men in town, who had already buried one mate and therefore knew how to treat a *wojnan*), that she had refused him! A man who could spend any evening he wished in the company of blond American women in Tampa or Saint Pete, even in New York City, women he could pat and paw as much as he liked, women who didn't mind taking everything off, up in those little private dining rooms he liked so well, and letting him get a good look before the lights went out, such a real successful up-to-date gentleman turned down by a dumb Greek kid who thought she was better than he was! Who snooted him every time he stepped in the place for a bite of dinner, keeping well over across the room from him, never bringing so much as a glass of water to his table, even running upstairs if she saw him coming and thought she could make it! And her old man was cool enough, too, acted like he didn't care whether Mr. M. Diamond stepped foot in the place or not, like he didn't care to keep good customers, and lord knows he couldn't afford to lose any! Not with the Olympia putting in technicolor juke-boxes and pin-ball games and heaven would only discover what other up-to-date improvements!

And yet Mr. Diamond couldn't keep out of the Parthenon. He'd stay away a few days; in the middle of turning a deal he'd actually forget about the whole matter. But then it would begin nagging him again, asleep and waking; he'd get angrier and angrier until at last he would have to go into the place and sit down at one of the neat white tables and figuratively pick the scab of his old wound, seeing Christidos' expressionless nod, watching the girl

moving capably about her narrow domain which was always the side of the room that did not include him. At first he did not notice that she paid any particular attention to the table where Major Dragoumis sat; she would almost have had to turn her head deliberately not to look in the blind officer's direction, since the cash register which she often tended in the evening was directly at the rear of the restaurant, in a straight line with Dragoumis' table at the front. However, Diamond came to notice that her face was radiant and softly sad by turns, these days; that she stared often and musingly toward that front table; perhaps she was only looking past it, through the slatted blinds out to the sun, but, if so, why did she startle, as though she were a long way off in thought, when Christidos or one of the customers spoke to her? No, it became evident to Diamond that the girl had subtly changed; for one thing, she seemed far more attractive now than she ever had while working in his office; there was an odd combination of shyness and assurance about her which tantalized him as never before. He pondered this change, and came to the fairly simple deduction that the girl was in love; what else was there on earth to make any sort of change in a young woman? She'd been engaged long enough to Philip, and never looked like that, and so Diamond further deduced that she must be in love with someone else, a situation calculated to create a fine dust-up when her old man heard about it, which obviously he hadn't, because no dust was rising.

For one whole fatuous night, after deciding that Zoe's special brand of starriness was caused by amorous yearnings, he believed himself to be the object of her affections. Why not? He wasn't bad looking; in fact, he was a fine figure of a man! Half a dozen times, he got up and turned on

the light and examined himself in the mirror, totally disregarding his baldness, his pot-belly, and the creased rolls and pads of white sweaty fat that started at the fringe of black hair at the back of his neck and followed a more or less regular progress of larger and smaller contours down to his ankles. No, a fine sturdy girl like Zoe wouldn't be attracted to some skinny kid; she'd want a real man by her side, something solid to get her arms around. Of course, as to money and position, there was no question but what he was the best catch in town, and he wasn't so old that he wouldn't be able to enjoy a good time, and show her one, for a good many years yet. That was it; she loved him, and that was why she was so dreamy lately, modest and shy, scared she'd offended him and too proud to admit it. Well, he'd make it up to her, show her there was nothing to be scared of. Tomorrow he'd walk right up to her first thing, and chuck her under the chin and tell her not ever to act scared of him again, unless, maybe, she did something wrong and he got sore at her, and then he'd show her something really to be afraid of. Before he finally got off to sleep he spent some little time in the bathroom splashing his head with hair tonic, and he resolved to get a little more exercise in future, and also to get up a little sooner from the table, because there was no sense in letting himself go to seed, especially with a pretty young wife to keep him on his toes.

But by morning the beautiful dream faded into reality. Mr. Diamond had a certain amount of hard common sense, even about himself, and that common sense asserted itself to inform him in terms, that made his white flesh cringe, that neither Zoe nor any other woman would ever have looked at him twice, except to snigger, unless his pockets had been so beautifully plump. No woman, not even his

dead wife; he remembered how her father had haggled over the dowry, and how, later on, as he became fatter and more smug, her favors became more expensive. He well remembered how, in spite of the fact that she cooked for him, and perpetually worried about his headaches, and was never seen sitting down without a basket of fine sewing in her lap, since she made all his fine shirts and silk underwear by hand, she would keep him out of her bed for weeks on end, until a new living room rug or a refrigerator was forthcoming. And once, when she wanted the house painted and he didn't care for the idea, it was three loveless months before either one of them would give in. As for those highly perfumed blondes in the big cities, he'd always spent a pretty penny on presents before they'd come up to a hotel, or let him give one of those intimate little private dining-room parties where lobster and champagne were the order of the evening, and sometimes the girls got him so drunk he couldn't enjoy the fun afterward, and in the pale gold-green fog of champagne fumes he faintly heard them giggle and the door close behind them.

No, there was nothing about Mr. Diamond which brought the blush of love to Zoe Christidos' cheek. Diamond got up out of bed with a cold chunk of hatred inside him where the fires of love had burned alternately with anger and tenderness. It is often supposed that the human heart is the seat and residence of affection, but to Mr. Diamond, the location felt more like his stomach. And that night he could no more have kept out of the Parthenon Bar and Grill than he could help this hatred which seared him like dry ice, and which transformed him from a rather ridiculous fat small Caliban in a checked suit, to be kept in his place by the memory of a slap, into a thoroughly dangerous and vicious creature, to be thoroughly dreaded and

feared by Zoe and all she loved, all who loved her. That night he never took his wet-marble eyes off the girl; even as he lifted cup to lip, or broke the fragrant white bread, or cut his meat, he observed her. She knew he did; he always stared at her, and though at first it made her a bit uncomfortable, she no longer paid attention or particularly minded; her thoughts were elsewhere.

As closely as he observed, Diamond discovered nothing. Zoe gazed pensively toward the window, but she also read, from time to time; there was often a book open on the counter beside her, and she had always spent idle moments in reading. Now and then she and her father exchanged soft words; Diamond could not hear what they said, but evidently all was in agreement. She crossed the room to take Mr. Economou's order, and again when Major Dragoumis came in; she gave twisted little Pete Cockinos a special warm smile of welcome; she stopped for a moment at a table where her father visited briefly with a group of packers, all friendly enemies who would eat together and slap each other's backs tonight and go home to sharpen up their wits for a mutual throat-slitting in the Sponge Exchange tomorrow. She herself brought the General his coffee, merely because she had nothing else to do at the moment and Christidos had told her that, in spite of being a bum and a pensioner, the General was a very distinguished man. She also served coffee to Economou and Dragoumis, and she carried a plate of ice-cream out to the porch and handed it to some nameless little girl whom Diamond vaguely recalled as belonging to a recently-widowed coffee-house keeper who often sent his brood packing anywhere in town, rather than have them hanging around the smelly old men gambling and cursing in the back of his shop. No, Diamond could learn nothing by

watching Zoe; a dried-up old diplomat and a blind man and a table of fat packers, each married and complete with family; a cripple and a bum and a little girl in a dress as dirty as her face. With minor changes, that was the assortment of people Zoe spent her smiles and dimples and gentle words on. There was nothing there to make her glow with love as though she had swallowed a holy candle . . . but glow she did, however much he sought the cause and could not find it.

In his cold hatred Diamond longed to pull Zoe and her father and the neat small restaurant to pieces as a cruel boy pulls wings off a fly. He wanted to smash, to crush, to leave them broken and crawling, and his busy, clever little mind ran around in circles, seeking the way to accomplish his wants, because he knew very well that no matter how well-armed any man stands against the world, there is always a chink in his armor. In the case of Zoe, maybe she was armed with innocence, but he didn't think so. She wouldn't look so radiant if she hadn't left at least a shred of that precious virtue in some back room or behind some hedge, and he proposed to find out when and where and with whom; such information would give him exactly the necessary leverage on the rock of destiny he needed to bring it crashing through the Christidos roof, or to withhold it, according to how Zoe conducted herself toward him.

Yes, every well-armed man has a chink in his armor; every apple has its worm; every family has one member who is weak, insecure, unstable, who can be bought or bribed or threatened or flattered into doing exactly what you want him to, indeed, into actually becoming inventive and adding his diabolisms to yours, if a diabolical turn of events becomes necessary.

At least, so our Mr. M. Diamond, small, petulant, with a kind of cunning shrewdness as small and petulant as himself, thought as he looked about him for a weapon to use against the source and cause of his hatred. Perhaps hatred is too strong a word for the niggling emotions of the Mr. Diamonds of the world; intense feelings are somehow ennobled by their very intensity, and there is nothing noble about our Mr. Diamonds. Nevertheless, for a few hours during which he deceived himself into the belief that Zoe mused and blushed because of him, he came very close to actual love. And, having examined himself and realized differently, the sour resentments curdled and turned cold, and he hated as only a narrow heart can hate, meanly and nastily. Mr. Diamond most certainly would not have come out with it; had anyone asked him his opinion, say, of Christidos, he doubtless would have replied that the man was a respectable man, and, as far as he knew, paid his bills and minded his own business. But, had the questioner implied, in a finger-beside-the-nose sort of way, that he knew what he knew about the Christidos family, Diamond would have been the first to bask in gossip, and to spread it, savored with his own brand of venom, should a fertile ear prick to the advantage. In a way, a meddler and gossip who wishes you ill is worse than a man who forthrightly bloodies your nose and kicks down your front door to do it. And so, when Diamond's eye, after he paid his tab to an unsmiling Zoe and left the restaurant, fell on Stephen, hands in pocket, slouched against the porch-post, neither in nor out of his father's house as he was neither in nor out of grace with either earth or heaven, he knew that his weapon was at hand. It was common knowledge in Turtle Run that Stephen was a problem to his father; Mr. Diamond remembered the

incident at Epiphany two years before and added it to this common knowledge; he stirred in the times he had seen the boy duck into the Olympia, the talk around town as to how he'd been out for a job, and been turned down by every captain, the discouraged slump of Stephen's shoulders as he hunched away from the porch-post and turned down the shell road, the sag of his mouth and the scornful way he spat and hitched his pants and scuffed off into the shadows, bound to hang around outside some tavern, Diamond figured, without a dime in his pocket; if he smoked, he'd pick up a butt on the corner curb, not even bothering to break off the saliva-stained end. A sulky, rebellious kid, under sporadic paternal discipline; that was all Diamond needed to get at Zoe, and the fact that he was her brother made no difference; probaby it was even better.

When the sexual interest is aroused in mortal creatures, cats and dogs and monkeys and men, frogs and flies and fleas alike, and everything else in the crowded catalogue of the living, become extremely stubborn in the pursuit of the objects of their desire. We are trapped by whatever attracts or repels us. Since the angel and the demon both cohabit within us, and since the demon can assume angelic shapes and guises and talk in heavenly tongues, both love and hate take part in this interchange of fascination and repulsion. The desire to inflict pain is part of the Authority of love; every child knows this, and only by tears and whippings does civilization educate the instinrt out of us. Love and hate are the two sides of a coin smelted in soft gold; sometimes the stamped head on the one round comes through to the other and blurs the definitive garland and the official seal.

At best, hate gives the hater a hollow victory, a thorny fillet, and the sharp taste of blood and bitumin in the

mouth. But the victories of love, in the highest sense, belong only to those who willingly forego them. The withered garlands trampled in the dust beneath the chariot wheels of a proud and implacable Cytherea bear mute testimony to the triumph of the vanquished. In the ultimate hour of the purgation of souls we know that in hatred all life is a long dying, but in love a long awakening and awareness. Hate is finality, and in a world where Change is Law it becomes a cardinal sin for man to impose his will by making an end of anything. Hate is sterility; in a world where reproduction is the order of the day it becomes unwise, as well as sinful, to be sterile. Hence the man who is stuffed with hate is stuffed with stupidity in equal ratio.

Nevertheless, we must not confuse stupidity with lack of cunning. The dull-souled are often most astute in matters of a petty and practical nature. And, as for Mr. Diamond, it was easy for him to see that Stephen could become his instrument. The boy, already infected by the bot of discontent, could be turned to account, although Diamond did not yet know how or when. The matter needed time and thought, and the pudgy resentful man had plenty of both, when it suited him to turn them to an absorbing enterprise.

Chapter Nineteen

CHRISTIDOS has counted the packet of money at the back of the till over and over. Always the count is wrong; it does not tally with the added figures on the small white slips he saves from week to week, from month to month, until he gets around to totting up the whole. Christidos is not confused by two and two making four; he adds, subtracts, multiplies and divides carefully and slowly, checking himself after each computation, but heretofore the count had always been correct. Now the total is something over sixty dollars off; the count is false.

Lately Christidos, who has always been subject to mild and chronic headaches, finds the pain pressing more closely upon him. He gets up in the morning and goes to bed at night; he tends the pots when Spiros takes his rest, he ties his shoes and combs and cleans himself, and for an hour or so in early morning he finds a kind of peace in the garden, hoeing, watering, nipping off fresh herb-shoots, gathering melons and tomatoes and squash jutting from the vine like long green fingers. But lately it is almost impossible for him to figure sums of money. Ever since the three dollars missing from his dresser he has loathed the slick, handled, used, human body-smell of bills . . . the tens and the fives not so fetid, but the ones smelling and feeling like the greasy waist-bands of the sponger's pants, where they were so often sewn until spent. Zoe has taken over most of the accounts; she cares for the cash register and makes up the double-columned ledger which he has

wrestled with for so long, but still, occasionally, he must figure, calculate, add and subtract, since he is a restaurant owner and that is part of his business. But he is never sure, any more, that the sums are right; his head aches dully whenever he looks at rows of figures; it is so sore about the temples that he dreads putting it on the pillow at night.

Yet money must be earned and spent, money must be fingered and counted over, even for that sacred trinity of water, wick and oil to keep the votive lamps glowing through the long smothery dark . . . even for holy things, the coppers must grow slick from finger-rubbings.

"Death and the dollar," the spongers sigh, "Death and the dollar," while the thick white saucers overfill with ashes and cigarette stubs and the sweet thick coffee cools. At least, at death, there's an end, but Life and the Dollar, that's the cursed thing. Man must buy bread, and the baker must buy the flour to make it; the miller buys the wheat to grind, and the farmer buys the seed to sow. There's a good meal to be had for a dollar at the Parthenon Bar and Grill: lentil soup, or soup with lemon and egg; baked or roast lamb, cooked with the omnipresent pilaff and okra or squash or greens; salad, fruit and cheese and sweets and coffee . . . and the bread comes free, for nothing. A man can eat it or leave it, as he chooses. But should a man come in for coffee only, and demand bread, then Christidos must charge him ten cents for it, ten cents for bread only; the coppers grow slick from finger-rubbings, since the baker buys the flour and the miller buys the grain. Ten cents—for the holy thing called Bread. And, every day, it is harder for Christidos to figure sums and to be sure that the sums are right. Now the count is over sixty dollars off; the count is false.

Christidos rests his aching head on his forearms; there

is no one to see the proprietor slumped over the counter as though he were sick or drunk or weeping. And should some one come upon him, it would only be supposed that he suffered from one of these lesser illnesses, and not from the mortal heartsickness that assailed him.

He must have slept, because somehow he was back on the sand-grain of Symi; he was high in Symi's hills, in that pre-spring before most flowers bloom, and with him were the other children . . . his brothers and sisters, even the baby who died of the choking sickness when she was three, even the oldest lad, who broke his neck diving from the rocks the year Christidos left the Islands, even pretty little Sophie, whom no man would marry, after her dress caught fire and her face became like that of a queer wild beast and her talk was strange. Scarred Sophie, drowned Peter with his broken neck, baby Elena: they were all there, but clean and pure and whole as once they had been, and the others, too, who interested Christidos less because their lives went on, and came to an end or did not end, after he left Symi. Only these three were vivid, these whom he watched come to death, or very near it.

And with the lost ones he ran and leaped and sang, and all together they cut armfuls of witchhazel, enough for their mother to make brooms for the whole village. And the witchhazel was the only plant in bloom on the hillside; it had just begun to uncurl those sticky little yellow stars that come long before the violet-eyed myrtle and the hyacinth. Christidos knew that his mother would scold the children for not cutting the witchhazel earlier, before it budded and blossomed. This way, it was much more work for her to make the brooms; whip by whip she must strip the limber twigs of gold and green before they dried and stiffened, otherwise they would litter the floor with

crumbled flowers instead of cleaning away the dust and sand. And yet, he himself had scouted the hills no more than a week before and found not a trace of bud or bloom; surely here, as in many other places in the world, but never, never in Turtle Run, is the spring swift. The spring is turgid and heavy-footed in Turtle Run; it moves dully through all tropic-breathing lands.

At first it did not trouble Christidos that, among the other children, John and Zoe and Stephen darted and danced, telescoped in time by dream alchemy to his contemporaries. But there was a separation in distinctness; he saw distinctly only the death-kissed ones and Stephen, and for a moment he thought Stephen was one of his brothers, gone before him to the grave. Only scarred Sophie, drowned Peter, baby Elena and Stephen were sparkling with a sort of feverish vitality; the rest were blobs of motion among the green, their voices like bird calls against the half-meaningful chatter of the death-kissed ones. And when Christidos knows Stephen not for a brother lost, but for his living son, he wakes and shakes himself like a dog, and puts aside the ledgers and shuts the dull sticky mouth of the cash-box as though it were all one to him; six dollars or sixty, more or less. Strangely, there is no traumatic shock in knowing Stephen among the death-kissed; it seems, now that he sees the children on the hill, he has known it always.

Chapter Twenty

THE General's plans for becoming a leader and savior among his people were not working out well. They did not work out well for the obvious reason that they did not exist, at least in any tangible and practical form. Each day the General rose from his neat cot in the tiny spotless room behind the coffeehouse. The white sheets were clean and uncrumpled; the single frayed blanket was still tucked in smoothly at the foot, for even in sleeping the General was meticulous. He might well have merely spread back the covers for the bed to be nicely made, but, nevertheless, it was his habit to pull it all apart and remake it as trimly as though the corners were turned with a carpenter's angle. Each day the General washed himself and examined the fit of his new teeth, examined the whites of his eyes and the knot of his tie in the gleaming mirror as anxiously as though he were about to step before the eyes of the whole world. Often the nail scissors was employed to snip off a tag of threads at collar and cuff or an equally untidy tag of moustache hairs, before he could undertake the hundred yards or so to the Parthenon for the bread and coffee which Christidos' courtesy extended him for breakfast. And, each day, the General ordered his thoughts before emerging from his room; he would do thus and so, and speak to this one and that one concerning their need for a leader; he would not push himself forward, but, like a true savior, would be modest and

selfless; by afternoon, a crowd would form about him; by evening, who knows, he might be carried shoulder high!

Unlike most Greeks, the General had a fear of introspection. He believed that indulgence in self-examination was a sign of sickness, and he prided himself upon his tidy, stupid mind as much as upon his tidy, angular body, allowing neither to be rocked in ecstasy or anguish, or even in the long trough between those wave-peaks, where most of us constantly dwell. Proud, polite and lonely, he was utterly unlike anyone else in Turtle Run, and by being so, perhaps was even more intensely Greek.

However, since his plan, which was no plan, was getting nowhere, he was well aware that either plan, or circumstances, or his attitude toward the plan, must be revised. One thing was sure: he would never give up the dream of leadership; the histolysis from worm to butterfly had advanced too far in one fierce surge.

Still, to be a leader, a man must have at least one follower. What unrest there must have been among the earliest gods, to determine which among the galaxy commanded the greatest number of human hearts! What divine suicide took place when a deity found he had no worshipper, no, not one! The General could no longer be a General without an army; he had held the title all his adult life, and never noticed the lack till now. Even among the plankton, that living dust of the sea, falling forever toward the hungry siphons of the clams, there must be one falling first, and the others follow. Even among the myriad fiddler crabs, an entire beach in motion, wheeling left and right and whirling burrowwards at a footstep, there must be one to give the signal which sets off the horrid mechanical precision ballet. And there must be followers.

Therefore, the first step to being a leader was to find a follower; then, as if by a miracle, his plan which was no plan would begin working. The General determined, this morning, that a follower would be found. Between bed and the end of breakfast, he would inevitably encounter certain people, none of whom he had ever offered more than a stilted greeting. But this morning some wise word, some pithy phrase, must draw one of these to him. He considered the possibilities.

Christidos the General eliminated at once as a putterer at trifles; melon seeds and *mousaka* were surely the compass of his world. He disliked Spiros because he fancied that once the little man had been rude to him. Cimon the waiter, sour and comical by turns, was not a serious man. And George Pappas the poet was mad; besides, the General bitterly resented him as a fellow-pensioner and poseur. Who else? Who else? It had become utterly clear to the General, that crystal morning, that he must make a beginning, that one follower must be found, one who called him master and messiah, else he would cease to be a leader, even to himself, and in so ceasing, would cease to exist also. Having lived these fifty odd years, but having come to life only a few days before, he could not return to the days before he began to dream. Histolysis is harder on man than on moth or butterfly. The winged creature accepts a handful of golden days as payment in full for months or years as egg and grub and chrysalis; men question such uneven-handed justice, even stupid men like the General, and therein they come to grief. No more can the butterfly escape the consequence of being beautiful; the opalescent shimmer ends in a pinch of greying dust. Nor can he return to the safe shelter of the chrysalis; histolysis is inevitable, and dust, in a day or two. But the butterfly

does not question; he never seeks self-death to escape the cycle.

The General must command an army, and even a helot can carry a spear. One follower attracts others, as one ant leads hundreds to the honey pot.

Stephen had been staying home lately; he hung around the Parthenon Bar and Grill like a child clinging to his mother's skirt. A dozen times, he'd taken the sixty dollars out of one hiding place and crannied it in another; nowhere seemed safe, unless it was pinned into the clothes he wore, and yet the spot burned his flesh, under the pocket of his shirt or along the waistband of his pants, as though it were sopped with acid. He'd seen Christidos counting and recounting the contents of the cash register and the drawer underneath; the tens, the twenties, the fives, the greasy singles, even the copper and silver, but never once had his father's eyes rested on him in speculation. The enormity of such a theft made it impossible. And Stephen, plus sixty dollars, added up to freedom of a kind; a fraction of that sum would buy him a bus ticket to some part of the country where shameful adolescence was forgotten, where Greeks were unheard of, where his yellow hair and American slang would afford him the accolade of the commonplace. He could become a man—cowboy, F.B.I. agent, big-town gambler—O, how many grade-B movies channeled his desires! He could come back, some far-distant day, perhaps when his father lay dying, and raise the old man from his death-bed with a kiss, and be forgiven at last and receive the sacrament of paternal love. And yet he could not leave the Parthenon these days; a block away, and the acid sop of guilt burned his flesh; over and over, he hurried to the bus station, only to turn away; he haunted the highway, but when he tried

to lift his arm to flag down the flying wheels, it turned to lead, and the bus hurtled to free lands while he dragged his feet toward home. Still, the sixty dollars was security; he would never confess; torture could not drag the secret from him, the guilty money he could not bring himself to use. And of course he could never spend it in town. A twenty-dollar bill in Stephen Christidos' hands would cause a ripple of rumor straight to his father's ears. He could protest that he had found the money in the road, but who, save Christidos, had lost such a sum? Any citizen of Turtle Run, in his right mind, would tear the town apart if he dropped a quarter!

So Stephen's pocket burned with the sixty dollars, and the General softly curled his hand around a thin fold in his own pocket, seven singles neatly folded under a paper clip, all that was left of his inheritance after he paid for his teeth and his shoes, after he tipped Cimon for a hundred meals, but attempted nothing on his debt to Christidos, as that item was too staggering to think of. And suddenly he realized how to acquire one follower, by the simplest kind of conquest since coins became common tender.

Cigarette money? Beer money? Moving pictures? Girls? What could tempt his convert most? As far as he could remember, he'd never exchanged a word with Stephen; he had no idea what the boy was like. But the son of an islander and a peasant could only be an islander and a peasant himself. Moreover, he must make a beginning with his follower, plow into the storm instantly, or he would never do it. His hand, moving inside his pocket, stripped a one dollar bill from under the paper clip and smoothed it.

With a dollar he could hire a shiftless, greedy boy to

run a few casual-seeming, carefully invented errands. He could send him to the coffeehouse to buy cigarettes, to the drugstore to fetch toothpaste and scented soap; this would be a sign that he was too busy a man, too important to attend to these annoying details. Certainly Stephen would say "Cigarettes for the General" at the coffeehouse, and "Toothpaste for the General" at the drugstore; it was a beginning, even though it cut deep into the thin fold of money under the paper clip. Ten cents an errand, that would be it, and he needed the purchases; he had made do with so little for so very long. But Stephen must be sure to say "This and that for the General, the busy man of affairs," on every errand.

"Sure, I get it," Stephen said, speaking English, though he knew that the General, like the other older men and women in Turtle Run, preferred their own tongue. "Sure, I don't mind a dime here, a dime there . . . and cheap for you, at that. But what's it all about? I'm to say 'This is for the General' . . ."

"Yes," the General said, squeezing the words narrowly through his new teeth.

"I just buy whatever it is you want, and say that, and come away?"

"Precisely."

Kid's work, Stephen thought scornfully. Kid's work. Little kids run errands and speak politely for a dime. But he'd do it, he'd do it because there was nothing else to do, and because he liked cash, even in minute silver circles, and because he knew the General stood in the shadow of fame. Someday he wanted to hear the real story of the General's father, the whole, true account of a man whose legend stood so tall that it cast a shadow across the craters of the moon.

The General pursed his lips and pressed the dollar into Stephen's hand. "Ten errands," he said softly. "The price of ten errands, first off, for doing nothing, to bind the bargain. And now . . . a quarter . . ." holding the coin between his fingers so that the sun caught its ridged glitter. "Go to the coffeehouse. You might add that I have recently come into an inheritance . . . humm . . . a bit of money, really quite a large bit, and that I am extremely busy with investments . . . humm . . . of an intensely confidential nature. I pursue these investments, although my inheritance is quite sufficient to keep a man, even a man out of the noble past, in luxury, because I intend to benefit, yes, that's it, benefit my fellowman. That's the word to pass along, boy, benefit my fellowman. To think that I never guessed how simple it all is! And don't forget to come back with the cigarettes . . . unopened!"

He stalked into the Parthenon Bar and Grill and sat down at one of the front tables, instead of making his usual modest entrance and slipping quietly to the back of the room. Something would turn up, something must, before his meagre store and his new confidence were exhausted. Somehow something always did. Christidos raised a weary eyebrow; he had noticed signs of the General's recent affluence, but nothing had been paid on account. Christidos had expected nothing, and so he was not surprised; yet there was a dull ache of betrayal when Cimon had grinned the other day and flourished a ten dollar bill, truly a tip for a hundred meals at the Parthenon. Well, if Cimon had benefited by the windfall, Cimon could do the work. Just now, the acid clown was sweeping the back steps. Christidos leaned on his elbows and studied the newspaper; the General could sit from now till doomsday and not be waited on, for all of him. Besides, he might as

well have a glimpse of the paper before that other bumba, the poet Lord Byron, snatched it from him.

Cimon finished the back steps and leaned on his broom as Stephen came by. He beckoned; his voice was hoarse with conspiracy.

"Money passed between you," he hissed. "And who plays lamb, and who plays wolf, between the two of you?"

Stephen had toddled at Cimon's apron when he was little, but since he grew up he disliked him, and so answered sulkily: "I don't know what you mean,"

"Oh, well, if you take that tone, Mr. High-and-Mighty. There could be an old fable, and if Aesop didn't spin the yarn, at least he clipped the wool for the spinning, concerning an old bluffer and a young loafer . . ."

"I can't imagine what you're talking about," said Stephen loftily.

"A young loafer who likes silk shirts and wants money the easy way," continued Cimon blandly. "I like you, boy; you ought to listen to me, because I'm looking out for your good, and there's no particular good in *his* direction." He jerked a scornful thumb toward where the General was outlined against the front window. "Look at him; I feel like going to your father and handing over that miserable tip for the miles I've walked from kitchen to table for that faker, and I'd do it, too, if I hadn't finished the last fine alcoholic drop of it last night. There's no particular good, and no particular harm in him, either, which is just what makes him dangerous to somebody."

"Him? He's just a harmless old man!" Stephen scoffed, turning it into an insult by staring hard at the coarse sprinkle of white in Cimon's thin hair.

"Dangerous? Yes, dangerous. And pause to think, I said only to somebody. That somebody . . . might be

himself. I smell death around that fellow these days, even though he's taken on a kind of rejuvenation. They say corpses flush at their cheeks after they have lain three days underground. I wouldn't take his money if I were you; all I got out of my share was a week of headaches . . ."

"Ahhhh . . . you and your corpses, you and your dumb superstitions," Stephen said, going off abruptly to end the talk. Suddenly he turned and came back and put his hand on Cimon's arm; all at once he was the little boy with wide blue questioning eyes whom childless Cimon had once so dearly loved.

"There's something funny about it," he said, "there's something funny about . . . a lot of things," and looked at Cimon as though he expected an answer. No answer came.

"Ahhh . . . you and your dumb Greek superstitions," the boy muttered, and shoved roughly past the waiter and went swaggering down the path, though the waistband of his pants burned his skin at that certain spot where sixty stolen dollars were sewn, and he fingered the warm crispness of the General's dollar bill.

Chapter Twenty-One

BEYOND the waterfront, the sponge market and the curio shops and the narrow ships with their furled rigging, beyond the tar-flowered hills and the hedges of mallow bloom, beyond the warm landward drifts of sand lay the beaches. There the mouth of the salt-brackish river tugged at the full breast of the true sea; there muddy river sand churned out to clean white silica and pounded shells. But the people of Turtle Run seldom visit the beaches. Most of these men, whose lives depend on the mercy of wind and wave, can not swim at all, or at the most, only with a childish dog-paddle which they learned as boys around the edges of the lagoons. Even the boys, diving for the Epiphany cross, are far from accomplished swimmers. And as for stripping and sprawling about in the sun, it would never occur to them to do so; waist up, their bodies are scorched with sun and wind already from the month-long trips out into the Gulf; to be fully clothed is something very like a luxury. Therefore the men take no joy of the beaches, nor interest in them, and for the women swimming or gamboling on the sand or lying about idly in the sun is unthinkable; even if it ever occurred to them, modesty would forbid it. Thus far have they descended from the nymphs and naiads and demi-gods who bared themselves freely to each other upon the sand-grain islands of the violet-shadowed Aegean, and who lived in and gave life and perpetuity to the waters. And, should some of the young people slip off by themselves, away from the cen-

sorious eyes of the old, they feel awkward and exposed if they venture beyond the shelter of the low pines on the hills and the mallow hedges.

The sea is no pleasure to these people; the beaches are not picnic grounds. It is so among many folk whose life and sustenance is drawn from the ineluctable saline depths; the auspices of the sea are omnipresent. Always, washing in and out of the innermost recesses of the thoughts of the people, awake or asleep, broods the omnivorous and inscrutable sea, the cradle of Poseidon and Christ, half-pagan, half-Christian, punitive and capricious, spendthrift and niggard, shaper of their eyes and hands and hearts, ruler of their passions and appetites, accepting their homage like a courtesan, rejecting their sacrifices like a queen: the life-giving, life-sustaining, youth-devouring sea. The Sea giveth and the Sea taketh away: blessed be the name of the Sea.

No, the sea is to be taken seriously by these people; and her beaches are in no wise picnic grounds or fine level stretches contrived by nature for human horseplay. Man, even in an idle moment, keeps one eye on the sea, as though it might suddenly fling out a tentacle and snatch him waterwards.

The poet Lord Byron, who was once George Pappas, unhappy scholar-son of a leather-merchant smelling of saddle-soap, could always count on having the beaches to himself, that is, if one can speak of having anything so crowded with many-legged and multitudinous life-forms as a sea beach to oneself at all. Like all your Greeks, Lord Byron was gregarious; moreover, he was unhappily aware that there was small comfort for him in human companionship. Here, beyond the shallows and the mallow marshes, he peopled the gleaming shores with endless fantasy, nor did

the sea-men mock him as the land-men might. Often he walked beyond the pine-odorous hill where Zoe sometimes lay in her blind lover's arms, beyond the sun-warm drifts of sand where Stephen had played at funeral services for beetle and mouse and broken butterfly, down to the busy solitude, the populous silence, the pregnant wasteland of the sea.

And there on the beaches he wandered, sometimes walking fast and sometimes slow, sometimes straight and unseeing, sometimes zigzagging to pick up curious mottled shells, the purple snail and the pink-ochre conch, the spiny helmet of the murex and the star-stampings on bleached cuttlebone; these polished homes of once-living sea-people were finer to him than mortal treasure, and he had been known, when first he came to Turtle Run, to attempt to pay for a meal or a drink with the elegant and mathematically precise convolutions of a pearly whelk.

Once or twice, when he had wandered the beaches just at dawn (for day and night were much the same to him, and often enough he slept badly or not at all) he had come upon a great gaggle of sea-birds clustered together, hundreds upon hundreds of birds, great grey-brown pelicans bobbing upon the incoming tide or waddling like rheumatic old women on the sand, gulls, both snowy and slate-blue, tearing the kelp strands with their golden beaks for entrapped crabs and snails, plovers moving sedately on their stilt legs, and miniscule quicksilver sandpipers running along the lace-edge of the wave. And among all these, yes, hundreds and hundreds of birds, were the huge black buzzards from the swamps, their wrinkled necks scantily feathered, stalking and pecking like the devil's own chickens, breaking the backs of helpless baby pompano smashed ashore at high tide. Lord Byron felt a crawl of horror on

seeing the buzzards; more than once he had watched them at work, on a dead dog at the side of the highway near Tampa ... a dead camel in Cairo ... a dead child in Tunis. Lord Byron's mind seemed unable to associate what he perceived in any useful sequence, but he saw, more neatly that the wholly sane, the calm deliberate logic of events, and, after all, vulture nature is vulture nature, no matter where it occurs.

This convention of birds, so many sizes and shapes and types and kinds, playing solemnly upon the tide or eating or searching for food, would seem to be natural enemies of one another. And yet the tiny quicksilver sandpipers darted fearlessly about the cruel clawed feet of the devil's own chickens; the great black-headed gulls and the long-billed oyster-catchers dug in the soft wet sand for blue crabs without quarrelling, and neither drove away the laughing terns and snowy kittiwakes. From a mile away one could hear the mewing and bleating and cawing; the air at dawn on the beaches was heavy with noise.

Though Lord Byron was afraid of the buzzards, and would have liked to stone them, he never did, because he wished not to disturb the other birds. Closer and closer he crept, like some queer crane himself, his black chiffon tie fluttering, the tails of his narrow jacket flapping in the wind. And then, just as the sun rose, all the diverse birds rose to meet it; they flew up in a great burst of light and split into flocks; the solemn pelicans to patrol the seas in long string-straight lines of flight, the gulls and kittiwakes to wheel in screaming circles, the sandpipers, in little groups of four or five, to keep their fluttering sparrow-flight just at the edges of the waves, the buzzards, all awkward ugliness, to metamorphose into unearthly grace aloft, drifting landward toward the swamps where they

would spend their day. Daylong and nightlong these diverse birds would avoid one another; flight swerved from flight by instinct, and should they pounce simultaneously upon some flotsam of food they would bicker and quarrel and the stronger would drive the weaker away with beating wings and vicious, hissing, jabbing beak. It was only at this daybreak hour that they assembled in noisy conclave to scream their paeon to the sun, and got along with each other better while doing it than you could possibly expect as many hungry, pugnacious humans gathered together in single purpose.

Lord Byron watched the birds until they were gone, all save a few big grey herring gulls who jabbered and snatched among the sand-drabbed shreds of crab and baby pompano. More crane-like than ever, he stood on one leg for quite a while without thinking about it at all, for no particular reason, his parchment-yellow lids slatted down over his flat obsidian eyes, staring about him at nothing and at everything. Then he carefully selected a smooth, pleasant dry spot near the round mouth of a tunnel that was a crab's home, and sat down. The crab had tidily piled his excavations of sand and shell-fragments a little to one side, and had dragged a scallop shell over to partially conceal his entrance, or perhaps the tide had tossed the shell precisely there; it little mattered which.

"Good morning, Sea-Person," the poet said, and cocked his head toward the crab hole. "Good morning, not that there's anything especially good about this one. All mornings are good, because they are beginnings; all beginnings are good; it's only the endings that turn out badly. Good morning, good morning."

It would not have surprised Lord Byron if the crab had

emerged and answered; likewise, it did not particularly surprise him that it didn't.

Down in the hole the blue-green crab crouched secure; his saw-toothed claw-hands nervously rasped their vermillion edges. Some huge creature squatted above, some being larger than himself that thumped the sand and threatened him; how good it is to hunch safe at the bottom of a tidy shaft, too narrow for enemies to enter!

Lord Byron told the Sea-Person a long and somewhat disjointed tale about a buzzard he had once seen; was it in Tunis or Cairo or Crete? Be that as it may, it was kin to the buzzards of the beaches, and as he watched the lumbering lazy carrion crowd lift from the carcass of some dead creature and turn to grace and glory in the air, one vulture, staggering, drunk with obscene gluttony, came forth from the ragged body cavity of the beast and floundered about, too sated and sodden to take wing. With horror and disgust he saw the living death-eater shoulder through that fetid cave of death, its feathers stinking with sweet-sour decay. And he wanted to run away, but could not, so he did the next best thing; he found a stout stick and thought to put an end to the foul bird. And that he could not, either, for at that moment he knew a buzzard to be God's scavenger, created by Him to purify the refuse-heaps of the world, and through His wisdom and mercy given a great appetite, in order to do so. Before his eyes the loathsome sooty monster took on the cloak of divinity; we, and all the other living, can conquer all but King Death, he thought, and you, O Vulture, trafficker in excrement, translator of offal, winged and wonderful sarcophagus, by whose official economy the corruptible puts on incorruption, you conquer Death himself, and batten on his blood and fat and bones, and turn Death into Life and

crawl out of his belly, sound and whole, trumpeting your raucous paean of triumph: Death is swallowed up in victory! While he thought these thoughts, the buzzard recovered itself and flapped clumsily, poised, took stiffly off, and endured that miracle of transmutation from reeking carrion-consumer to immortal grace. That was part of the long, disjointed tale Lord Byron told the crab.

After a while he rummaged at arm's length along the sand and gathered a small pile of shells, paddling them about between his fingers.

The function of the poet, he mused, is something very like the function of the vulture, for after all, is not the poet a kind of magnificent scavenger, snapping and scissoring away at dead dreams and deader history, absorbing all the ugliness, snipping away the sham and leaving at last only the pure clean picked bones on the ground, the ecstasy of perfect flight aloft?

Or is the poet not very like the diver who brings up the sponge, already with the smell of death seeping out of its black veil; the diver, bringing up the sponge that will be beaten and trodden and stripped clean and bleached white before it can be used? Is man's soul the inert sponge, and the poet the diver who brings it forth from the dark cran- nies? Lord Byron had never so much as ducked his head under salt water in his life, but suddenly he could envision how in places the water had thumbled the thick sunglow into patches like oil bloom, like peacock flare, and he was the diver, descending, slipping from ship's aft, from the hammered bastions of deck and rail down under dense foam slaver, down under tons of weed trash, down to the cool uncluttered garrisons of the deep sea. There he blundered through dim turquoise water-smoke; he crept among corroded old quinquiremes and galleons and Chinese

junks and swan ships of Egypt, patterned in lapis lazuli and gold. Every vessel that had ever brawled with the waves lay there, and a glittering phosphorous vapor went out from them, and blunt inquisitive fishes vexed their beauty with vacant solemnities.

And he learned that his flesh was pleased indeed, alone in the phosphorous vapor which began to go out from him, too, like some magnificent streaming hair; it curiously delighted the bone of his thighs to go under, beyond the realm of sun-maddened water, into the turquoise smoke, bumping fish with enormous eyes, sliding down a sleek-shouldered dream.

Only through Stephen, the gold-dark sulky boy, could the dream be realized. He set the handful of shells up endwise in the sand; this smooth olive-shaded one was Zoe, this fluted russet coil with the broken crown was her Major Dragoumis. He knew, now, that they were lovers in fact; he had crept quite near, under the blossomy hedges, as they kissed under the pines. They are self-sufficient; they do not require his fancies and his dreams. Their legend is lost to him. And this golden spindle shell, perfectly proportioned, satiny as a girl's skin, this elongated bubble of light was Stephen Christidos . . . he played idly with the shells, tossing them from hand to hand, the dark and bright together. And then he put the golden spindle that meant Stephen carefully in his pocket, and tossed the others waterwards, where the sandpipers skipped like quicksilver just ahead of the froth.

"Good day to you, Sea-Person," he addressed the crab-hole. "Good day, and to my mind you are a very dull Sea-Person after all." He selected a sea-worn pebble of exactly the right size and fitted it snugly into the mouth of the hole.

"There, that'll give you something to think about," he said pleasantly. "Good day, Sea-Person. Dig yourself out. That's more than man can do,"

And he went off, saying over to himself lines and catch-words of the poems he never wrote, and as he passed a tar-flower bush he picked two of the sticky rose-pink whorls and attached one to each of his ears, where they clung like earrings with the glucosity of their own sap. If he had remembered these ridiculous earrings by the time he reached the town he would have brushed them off, because he really did not enjoy being laughed at, but he forgot them in his hurry; the sun was already high and the Parthenon Bar and Grill had been serving breakfast for a full hour.

Chapter Twenty-Two

“TWELVE-loaves-every-two-days, twelve-loaves-every-two-days,” the dough sighed and squeaked sulkily as fat white arms pummelled it into equal fatness and whiteness, for the snowy, silky-textured doughnut-shaped Greek loaves must be beaten well and often in the making, or, like bad children, nothing much can be expected of them when they are out from under the hand of discipline. And Spiros, watching his huge wife piston-ing plumpness and fineness and discipline into the dough, tapped his teeth angrily with the letter in his hand and reflected, both with wrath and sorrow, that his chief failure as a father lay in the fact that he disliked beating his children, and so neglected this duty until the time that he looked at them in amazement to find they were so much larger than he that it would be impossible to chastise them. For example, if Philip had been as well pounded, from babyhood, as that dough under Sophia's hands, he would never have dared to have written the letter; he would never have dared the acts which prompted it, and, more than likely, he would be down on one of the sponge-boats where a Saturday night drunk would be all the wickedness expected of him, instead of this American evil he had learned in college. Spiros sighed more windily than the dough; to have a son in the professions was a great thing, but if he forgot to honor his father and mother in its achievement, it was not good.

This was no matter to discuss with Sophia; he was in no

mood for wailing and mother-weeping today. He would tell her, and then deafen his ears, or go out to a coffee-house. On such a day he had need of man-talk only; woman-chatter would only sour his stomach, already sufficiently out of sorts that he had no desire for the glass of *tsipouro* which Sophia poured invitingly at his elbow.

"Philip is married," he said in a flat voice. "Married . . . to that American Frances he talked about when he was here. You might as well get used to the idea that our oldest son is dead, or worse than dead. Ill not have his name mentioned in this house from now on."

Sophia pulled her hands out of the dough and stared at her husband. "Old man, old man, what is this you tell me?"

"Married, and to that American woman. With paint on her face, like as not, and no manners and no morals. Who knows better than we what Americans are? Who reads the papers more carefully, the quarrels, the murders, the loose living?" Suddenly he slammed his fist down on the table so hard that the glass of *tsipouro* jumped and slopped over. "Well talk no more; it's done and over. He's married her, old woman, and I'll not have his name spoken in my hearing again."

Philip . . . her oldest, her Philip, married . . . sorrow and joy struggled in her, but sorrow won a temporary victory, for she knew that Spiros, once roused to real anger, would be long in forgiving. And she remembered, too, her father's anger, and the anger of Spiros' father, when she married the little brown monkey-man; it was not until after Philip was born that the two families made up. Spiros looked at her and knew her thoughts, as people know who have been a long time married.

"It was different with us," he said shortly. "You were from Cos, I from Symi, and, moreover, our people were

none too friendly to begin with. But at least you were a Greek, and an Islander, and even though there was much anger and my people and yours would not speak, we were decently married in your father's house, and my father was satisfied with your dowry. That was only a small anger, a matter of a year or two in mending. But this ... this American who has stolen our son, who is son no longer to us from this day onward! Ah, never did I think he would go so far! He might flirt with her; that was to be expected when we sent him to an American college, that the girls there would entice him. He might even have a sriiall affair; experience is good for a man. But to be friends with these foreigners, to take one to wife . . . no, no, he is no son of mine any longer. Nor ever will he be." He sipped his *tsipouro* absent-mindedly, forgetting that he was too angry for comfortable habits, and, catching himself in the act, slammed the glass down on the table.

"I'm going out now," he said, "and let me find you in bed, and the rest of the children asleep, when I return. And no talking, mind, no mulling this over with the little ones. One bad olive need not spoil the dish, if it's plucked out quickly enough."

He went out, and Sophia looked after him and then turned back to her dough. "Twelve-loaves-every-two-days, twelve-loaves-every-two-days," the dough sighed in windy suspiration, and, one after another, the slow tears slipped down her plump cheek and dropped upon the white yeasty mass. Oh, how she longed for all the gay wedding preparations for her firstborn! How she would bake and brew, and plan with Christidos; what lovely dreams she had, of these preparations, for the wedding of Philip and Zoe! There would be flowers to string in fragrant festoons, and whole lambs to roast on spits, out in the garden behind the

Parthenon; there would be big cornucopias of honey cakes and spice cakes and sugar cookies, and the wedding cake, which she herself would bake, would stand nearly as tall as the bride . . . Mr. Vlastos the grocer would bring his mandolin, and someone else would bring an accordion, and her Spiros would take down his dusty old fiddle which he seldom played any more, but surely, for this occasion, he would be tempted. The tears fell faster, as she remembered the sweet island songs of almond blossoms and crescent moons with which the little brown man had courted her so long ago . . . And their Evridiki would be bridesmaid, and one of the little ones would be flower-girl, and after the ceremonies the staid married people would dance like the careless young; even the very old would dance decorously, holding the corner of a handkerchief, bowing and dipping, then suddenly leaping high and clapping hand to hand, hand to thigh, hand to heel . . . Oh, a wedding was a gladsome thing to look forward to, and now she could plan no more for Philip.

How well she remembered the joy and triumph of her wedding day! Even though the families frowned on each other, they presented a united face to the world. Sophia's trousseau was carried through the streets; the proud display of embroideries and laces worked by the bride's own hands was bigger and more brightly colored than any for years to come. And, after the priest's blessing, big Sophia and her small groom walked the length of the town, followed by the laughing people who pelted them with flowers, and the young men shouted coarse jokes and the young girls giggled, and the fiddlers set the tune for the people's singing: "O, the sun fell in love with the moon, and married they were, they were! O, their in-laws the stars came to see the fun! O, the rivers ran wine and the

guests drank deep, and soon the clouds rocked them to sleep! O, the sun fell in love with the moon, and married they were, they were . . ." She hummed the tune as she slapped the dough, and the tingling memory put extra vigor into her arms. O, this would be a perfect batch of loaves!

But of course that was all nonsense, about never forgiving Philip, never speaking his name in the house. Spiros would be angry for a while, but wait till a grandchild was born. Then there could be an end to her mourning. Certainly she would never welcome this American daughter-in-law, but, on the other hand, she was far more practical than Spiros in such matters. Daughters-in-law were not of much account, one way or another. She was genuinely fond of Zoe, and had been very nearly a mother to her, but one stranger would be much like another. And when Philip came to see his father, holding his own baby son in his arms . . . well, Spiros couldn't stay mad after that. So, it was all a matter of waiting, and being lonesome for a while.

"Twelve-loaves-every-two-days . . ." the bread sighed and was silent, and Sophia's educated hands went about the business of shaping it into perfect doughnut-loaves, crisscrossed on top for proper rising, while she snuffled and rubbed her cheek on her big arm to wipe away the last tear. After all, there was Evridiki to think of; she was growing up fast, and, while Spiros had not as yet spoken to any suitable family on the subject of a marriageable daughter, she might just mention to him that the druggist had a good, steady son, only a boy but already working in his father's store, and the inheritance of a fine business like a drugstore was not to be sneezed at.

Evridiki would be a pretty bride; her mother hoped

she'd marry in the late spring, when the peach-blossoms were in bloom, for there was nothing so fetching as peach-blossoms in a bridal crown.

Even after the loaves were done and set to rise, Sophia fussed cheerfully about the kitchen, planning Evridikfs wedding. Sixteen was not too young to begin giving thought to these matters; at home on Cos, a girl would have her linens hemmed and half her embroideries done by the time she was only twelve or so. And the druggist's son was a very handsome lad, small and neat, as she liked men to be, with only a slight cast in one eye which the girl might well find fascinating.

The children were asleep; she carefully closed the windows to shut out the night air which was considered most unhealthy, especially when the moon was round and high. Just as a precaution against small devils and evils, she opened the still glowing firebox under the oven and cast in a pinch of cloves; ah, would God she'd burned a whole handful, the night Philip first mentioned his American woman. And then she went to bed and fell asleep instantly. She mounded huge under the bedclothes, a great soft comfortable bolster of a woman, breathing in warm little puffs like a big cat. Like many large and comfortable people Sophia was a light sleeper; she would wake and welcome Spiros the moment he approached the bed.

Chapter Twenty-Three

STEPHEN by now had two sources of fragmentary income, neither of which Christidos would have approved. Small change from the General was picayune; Christidos would scorn it. But the larger handouts from Mr. Diamond would both have angered and frightened him, had he known of them.

It had been some days before the pudgy slick-eyed little man discovered how best to put Stephen to use. The aim was to get at Zoe; the means, Stephen, and the by-product of revenge would please Diamond very well if it accomplished the discredit of Christidos, the failure of the Parthenon, the disgrace and reduction to beggardom of the whole family. Discreet inquiry revealed what Mr. Diamond had well known before inquiring: that Christidos owed no man either money or debt of honor. And it never occurred to him that John was perhaps the most vulnerable of all; it never occurred to anyone in Turtle Run, or even to anyone, man or boy, executive or pilot or ground crew out at the airfield, that John was susceptible to inner wounds. No, Zoe was the unattainable white bird flying across the moon, and Stephen the arrow that would bring her down.

But to use the boy to any ends, he had to have him more or less at hand, and so Stephen was hired for an hour a day, the noon hour, so that Mr. Diamond could walk out of his office and lunch like a gentleman. His duties consisted of sweeping out the office and the hallway, and see-

ing to it that the ant-cups at each leg of the desk were filled with poisoned sweet water and the Hoodoo tape tightly bound. Occasionally, he answered the telephone and told all and sundry to call back later. Mr. Diamond expected something more from Stephen than this left-handed attendance; business was none too good these days, and for a while he had decided to do without a girl in the office all day long, and do the work himself. It would have been scarcely a burden to any man, but Mr. Diamond always made a great fuss about it; to watch him fidget between desk and file and cabinet, cracking the joints of his sausage-shaped fingers, sweat glittering on his bald head, you might think he was the busiest man in seven universes. But, more than likely, he was only recalling the name of some brother Elk met in a convention months ago. Mr. Diamond welcomed any and every plausible excuse for writing letters, but found it not nearly as much satisfaction to tap them out on a typewriter himself as to dictate to a presumably humble secretary.

Needless to say, he bullied Stephen occasionally, because it was his nature. But he never attempted to teach him anything about real estate or insurance, or principal and interest, or rates of interest or even the simplest book-keeping, which might well have captured his attention, since money and the pursuit of it, and the satisfying clink of it in his jeans, had come to be very near an obsession to the insecure boy.

The opportunity to attack Zoe came sooner than Mr. Diamond expected; in fact, long before his muddled little thoughts squirmed into any kind of pattern at all. Nevertheless, it was as effective as though bald-headed Odysseus' crafty ghost sat at his right elbow and sniggled advice into his ear.

One day, while Mr. Diamond was at the Parthenon Bar and Grill, leaning back after a comfortable lunch and picking his teeth and looking about him at everything, listening to everything, the people at the tables, the tissue-paper rustling of the palms outside, and Cimon's slew-footed progress to and from the kitchen; yes, while Mr. Diamond ruminated and digested lamb and egg-plant and baked noodles and sweet pastry, and belched comfortably and then tasted an unpleasant back-taste of oil and onions and wondered if he hadn't better cut down on his eating for a while; yes, while Mr. Diamond idly fingered the edge of his fourth glass of *retsina*, whose fresh pine-needle taste had staled in his mouth; yes, while Spiros clattered pans in the kitchen and slammed the oven door and grumbled over the quality of squid which the fishermen were bringing in lately; yes, while all this went on, and Zoe parted from her blind lover and lingered at the turn of the road where Pete Cockinos led Major Dragoumis up the long shell road to the hospital; yes, while Zoe pressed the palm of her sun-brown hand against her cheek and remembered how Dragoumis had kissed them both, Stephen quite deliberately opened Mr. Diamond's desk, ruffled through a tidy array of papers, and neatly removed some forty-odd dollars paid in cash for rent on a bit of property Mr. Diamond owned in Tampa.

There was no sense of guilt. The money did not scorch his fingers nor burn his skin as he tucked it into the waistband of his pants. There was no shame. Stephen took the money as automatically as though he had mislaid it himself and just come upon it unexpectedly.

Of course, Mr. Diamond noticed that it was gone almost as soon as he came back to the office. The envelope had come in that morning's mail. Mr. Diamond, according to

his usual orderly custom, sorted the morning mail, neatly pigeonholing bills, notices of fraternal organization meetings and personal letters separately; the pigeon hole of personal mail was skimpy because, as has been observed, nobody liked Mr. Diamond very well; in social matters he was always the pursuer and never the pursued. And, still according to his orderly custom, he neatly tucked any incoming cash or checks in the desk drawer; after lunch he spent a pleasant half-hour totting up the score and locking away the profits in his small, heavy, old-fashioned safe. Theft was almost unknown in Turtle Run: Mr. Diamond had no need of a safe for safekeeping; it was only one more tangible evidence of his ego. Had Stephen, or anyone else, planned an effective theft, he could have tipped the safe up-end and kicked the tin bottom out of it in a minute's time. But no one in Turtle Run, save Stephen, was a thief, and Stephen was no thief in the sense that he calculated stealing.

Had Stephen dipped into the envelope next to the one bearing the Tampa postmark, he would have found nearly six hundred dollars in crisp new bills; an account in Charlotte, North Carolina, unpaid these many years, had happily come home at last. Perhaps if he had, such unheard-of riches would have propelled him into flight to a new life in a new land. As it was, he had, now, something over a hundred dollars at hand; enough to take him to Texas; enough to become a comic-strip cowboy. A month ago, he would have leaped on the first bus going west, leaving only a smudgy note and his father's tears behind him. But today he coolly put the money in his clothing and continued tidying the office. There was something of manliness in the act; this was no schoolboy dabbling his fingers in for jampots, but a mature casting of a die. For

Stephen well knew, without analyzing the matter, that his father could forgive him much; the petty abstraction of dimes and dollars, even the sixty in bills, with their strange acid of guilt which welted his skin, even that, which, was half Spiros', Christidos would replace, looking older-and sicker and sadder than before. But he would not reproach Stephen; He had never reproached him since that afternoon when he had slapped the boy nearly insensible. The disgrace of stealing from an outsider, though—no, that Christidos would never forgive. Stephen cut himself off from his father's forgiveness, from his father's grace, as efficiently as a midwife cuts the umbilical cord, and with far less blood.

Mr. Diamond's fat fingers scurried through the papers in the desk. Of course he could not have mislaid the money; he never mislaid things; it was right here, it had to be right here; here, in truth, was the empty envelope. There was only one answer; there could be only one. He had always suspected the overly-handsome, overly-casual kid; he had noticed, even when Stephen was fourteen or so, how the prettiest girls cut their eyes at him on the street, how older women sometimes blushed, thinking their naked thoughts, as he went by. *He* noticed, lately, how frequently that faker, George Pappas, hung about Stephen like a love-sick girl; that, indeed, would have been a pleasant kind of weakness to catch the brother of Zoe out in, but this was better. This was ready-made, to Mr. Diamond's hand. He knew Stephen had the money, and Stephen knew he knew now let the boy sweat; like cat with mouse, he would not call the police, he would not even speak to Christidos, just yet. Instead, he lifted his head and let his wet black marble eyes slide over the boy from head to foot.

"My desk was opened while I was out. I do not like to have my desk tampered with."

Stephen shrugged and went on filling the ant-cups at the desk-legs with the sweet poisoned mixture. The operation required that he practically kneel at Mr. Diamond's feet.

"Are you deaf? I said, my desk was opened. There is money missing,"

"I didn't touch your desk."

"The money was here when I went out. It is not here now."

Stephen kept his eyes on the small pitcher with which he filled the cups; his sweet full lips, so like the acanthus-mouths of the ancient statues of lovely long-dead lads, pulled downward in a sulk. But he neither flushed nor blanched nor stammered, and Mr. Diamond was justified in expecting him to do all three.

"I don't know anything about your money. Maybe you forgot and spent it!" He looked up impudently, straight at Mr. Diamond. Mr. Diamond had a sudden impulse to fling out his foot, in its polished and pointed shoe, and send Stephen sprawling. It was one of the few honest impulses that he had had in years. But of course, he did no such thing; the way that he could use the boy was forming rapidly.

"You might tell your sister," Mr. Diamond said, pursing his pink lips and attacking a thin sheaf of pigeon-hole papers with a sudden fury, "that I will expect to see her soon. In fact, I'll expect to see her here tomorrow morning, ready to go to work. Ready to do what I tell her to. Anything I tell her. Anything. Tell her that I'm no longer angry with her; she has treated a good employer very shabbily, but I'm not even annoyed. Only tell her to be

here tomorrow; I'm a patient man, but there's an end to anybody's patience, even God's." He carefully inserted the papers back into the pigeonhole, selected and lit a fat tawny cigar, and tipped back in his chair, making an instantaneous switch from busyness to leisure.

Stephen filled the last ant-cup and got to his feet, easy and insolent.

"There's an end to patience," Mr. Diamond repeated, feeling the resentment in the boy, feeling the instinctive scurry of dislike and contempt and fear of the older male animal for the very young, the challenger.

"I'll tell her," Stephen said, and went out of the office, along the path under the blue-dripping jacoranda tree with a kind of swagger. Having deliberately accomplished the small quick act that could trigger his ultimate disgrace, he walked as though he were proud of himself, and he had no regrets, at the moment. He didn't know why Mr. Diamond had not summarily accused him and summoned his father and cursed and struck out and phoned for the police; if Mr. Diamond had done these things, the whole guilt would have spurted out like a bursting boil; if Stephen was searched, the sixty dollars stolen from his father would have been discovered, taken from him, no longer to scald him with shameful sweat-prickles. Death and the dollar, death and the dollar, the old men murmur in the coffee-house, fingering their fidget-beads monotonously, letting the strings of cloudy amber or sweat-polished wood slide along their blue shirtfronts, dangle on their comfortable bellies. This rope of beads, this rosary without holy images, slipping through the arthritic fingers of an old man, represents an act of expiation. If Stephen were caught now, there could be an act of expiation, too, and somewhere in a corner of his mind he hoped for it, though

if it had come he would have clawed and fought and fled like a cornered cat. No, he didn't know why Mr. Diamond had not accused him, but since he had not, Stephen was fairly sure that he was not completely in the fat little man's power; dimly he guessed that, rather, they were in each other's power, and the key was Zoe. Good, steady Zoe; anyhow, she didn't pick on him, the way the rest of the family did. If Mr. Diamond wanted her back to work, he'd relay the message, and what she did about it was her own concern. She could take care of herself. But he wouldn't put in a word for old Diamond, no matter what. And for himself, he wasn't going back, not even for the steady fifty cents a day. He'd wait and see, wait and see; he knew old Diamond was gone on Zoe, of course that was why he hadn't made a row over the money. He was, for the first time in a very long while, at peace with the world; he pulled a flower from the thick burgundy-colored clematis that looped, vivid and untrammelled, along the road. The four-square blossom dusted his fingers with self*exploding pollen; closely he examined the crimson stigmata, the pale green hammer-and-nails at the very heart that made it known as the passion-flower. And then he threw the tattered bloom away; it glowed and faded in the shell-road like a drop of blood.

Mr. Diamond continued puffing on his tawny cigar; he leaned back and put his feet up on his desk. It was a rare gesture of relaxation with him, and not particularly cosy; the swivel chair was suddenly very hard and he felt a crick at the end of his spine. Nevertheless, it was the proper posture of an executive, according to the soft-drink and tobacco ads which he saw in the magazines.

He rolled the forthcoming scene with Zoe on his tongue, tasting the secret spice of every word he and she would

utter. He would be magnanimous but very, very firm. He wallowed in the luxury of Zoe defiant, Zoe penitent, Zoe kissing his hands in gratitude for not exposing her brother, Zoe, finally, tumbling her golden flesh for his pleasure. He still intended his original purpose of marrying the girl, and he felt thoroughly noble about making the honest-offer. But first he'd have her, when and where he wanted, and on his own terms; there'd be no nonsense. She'd quickly find out that marriage would be a reward for becoming a dutiful and obedient girl; she'd have to earn that reward by her actions in the near future. So Mr. Diamond mouthed and tongued, alternately upon his cigar and upon his daydream. Zoe was trapped as easily as once his father had trapped conies on the Thessalian hills; she would be as soft and unresisting under his hand as a cony after the spring of the trap had snapped, breaking and bloodying out its life. Mr. Diamond well knew the old-fashioned, modest Greek daughter; it would not be the first time that one had had to swallow her pride for her family's sake. And, too, she'd get to like it well enough after a while, Mr. Diamond chuckled to himself; his paid companions had always complimented him. He paid them something extra after they did so.

However, the scene next morning caught Mr. Diamond flatfooted. It was the one contingency against which he had not provided an elaborate imaginary answer. Zoe appeared promptly at nine-thirty, when Mr. Diamond unlocked the office, and informed him politely but briskly that she could not come back to work as she was getting married quite soon and, more than likely, would leave Turtle Run; she and her husband would make their home in Greece. Then she went away as quickly and quietly as she came, and going to her father, kissing his hands as she

had not done in years, as he had taught her not to, since he had put aside the old customs for American ways, she told him of the love between herself and the blind Major.

She spoke modestly and hesitantly, as befitted a good daughter, and with the proper reluctance that a girl should display on the subject of love and marriage. She said nothing of the long hours on the piney hill; she could not wound her father by a hint at intimacy. Hers was a simple tale and briefly told; if it did not include all of the truth that was only to spare him. His hot salt ears fell as briefly on the hands she had kissed, and on her bent head, and then Christidos blessed her and thanked her for telling him of her joy, and made a formal little speech of good fortune for the marriage and the children to come.

Christidos' heart was full; his mind flowed with worrisome thoughts, twinkling one after another like mice, and as full of mischief. Alexis Dragoumis, patrician and patriot, was an incredible suitor for the restaurant-keeper's girl; in Greece, yes, on his own sand-grain of Symi, or in Egypt or Corfu or anywhere else of which Christidos had knowledge, outside America, he would have bowed low before such a man; a mingling of high and low by marriage was unheard of. He remembered, as a child, a ship's landing at Symi; some officials came through the town, Turkish or Italian, he could not remember which, carrying riding crops which they cracked against their shining black boots, and the people lined up on either side of the street and bowed as they passed; the officer at the head of the party was a Major, His father had hissed that fact into his ear, meanwhile making sure that he would bow also by shoving down on his back with one broad hand. And a man was hanged, that day, at the end of the street where the people bowed, and the officials went away. It was seldom

that officialdom, either Turkish or Italian, visited Symi; the island was too poor, too isolated, too unproductive to bid its conquerors take their ease upon its narrow shores. Those officers were Christidos' first glimpse of a uniform, and it was not a happy glimpse. The hanged man had been a neighbor and a friend.

But they were Turks . . . or Italians . . . what did it matter? Major Alexis Dragoumis was a true Athenian, an officer and a gentleman; Christidos time after time had observed his courtesy, even to Cimon, even to crooked little Pete Cockinos. Nevertheless, there was hardly anyone in Turtle Run of his own kind; grey, tired Mr. Economou was his only social equal. How then, Zoe, brown, deep-breasted Zoe with her square, firm hands and her peasant's speech, both blurred and guttural compared to the pure aristocratic tongue?

Moreover, what could be offered as a dowry? What paraphernalia could he offer, he, Christidos, to a patrician, without insult? A share in the Parthenon Bar and Grill? Christidos chuckled grimly to himself. He diminutive Spiros with his huge sons, and a real patrician, one of the noblemen of Athens, haggling over shares in a shabby little eating house which needed a coat of paint, inside and out? One of the lads on the sponge boats, now; that would have been different. A share in the Parthenon was just the ticket; Zoe would carry on the place after her father was gone, maybe, even, after she wore widow's black for a drowned sponger . . .

And so she'd reached into the grabbag and pulled out an officer and a gentleman; a gentleman who was only half a man, having no eyes to see the world, not even to see his wife. Maybe a whole man, a sponger, a man whose eyes and hands were shaped by the sea, would have been better

for her. Christidos thought quickly of Philip, son of his cousin and close friend, Philip, with his medical studies and his American girl in Baltimore. If Philip had only not gotten an education, if he had only gone out on the boats, perhaps even now he would have his own forty-footer, diesel-powered, smelling strong of dying sponges and garlic stew; perhaps even now Zoe would be married and a mother.

A half-man with no eyes, with a clipped, educated way of speaking, with the bright hard glitter of things military—shiny black boots and snapping crop behind him; an officer and a gentleman. A poor man, that he knew; Zoe had told him, and yet not the kind of a man to whom he could offer a dowry. A man who would go back to Greece with the girl, to be a teacher, respected, perhaps even beloved, always at the fringe of genteel poverty. A man so much older than she: in one way that was good, in another, not. And to think that he might never see his grandchildren, far over the sea! Christidos groaned and put the thought aside fiercely. If Zoe had found her happiness, if she was sure, it was enough. Maybe on Symi he would have ordered her otherwise. Maybe not. Christidos had never ordered his children about; he could not begin now.

Zoe had quivered with happiness at his blessing; her only regret was that he was not the first to know. She had told Mr. Diamond first. She had had to tell him, to save herself from those pudgy fingers, that moist pink mouth. And she had left him weaponless. When he spoke of Stephen's theft, she had only looked at him coldly and ignored what he said. Half an hour later one of the big Spiros boys came to the office with a sealed envelope and left as silently as he came. Inside the envelope there was no word, only the money, the exact amount. Neither Mr.

Diamond nor Stephen knew that Zoe had taken it out of her savings. And the hulking Spiros lad knew nothing at all; he often ran errands for the restaurant, and an envelope handed to Diamond was no more and no less of interest to him than an increase in milk delivery on the day his father made *yaourti* or a note to the fish stall requesting eight small pompano extra, for the luncheon trade on Friday.

Chapter Twenty-Four

A GOOD many years ago Spiros had bought a car, a third-hand model of common make, a cheap light car with many miles behind it and many more to come. How lovingly he had cared for the car at first, how meticulously he had polished its already dingy sides and brushed its spotted seat cushions! A car was nice for the kids, nice for Sophia, to take her and the babies out riding Sunday afternoon! A car was nice to have standing in the street outside the Parthenon Bar and Grill, a servitor at attention, ready to whisk its master to and fro upon his slightest whim! A car was nice for family, nice for business. Spiros sat very straight and pulled himself up as tall as he could when he drove the car; he sat up on a cushion so that he could see over the steering wheel. But he was never a good driver; his nervous stops and starts, his excited dashes hither and yon were reminiscent of a fervent wren. Sophia disliked the car on sight and, though she was an obedient woman in all other ways, she unconditionally refused to ride in it, or to allow Spiros to take the children riding. Gradually, his pride in the car grew lukewarm and he sometimes left it for weeks, negligent of wind and weather, either outside the Parthenon or off the road in the grass lot beside his house. It was less trouble to walk a couple of blocks than to start the car. A few years passed; occasionally Spiros put a couple of gallons of gas in the car and buzzed off briefly while the abused motor churned and

sputtered; the farthest he ever went from Turtle Run was the neighboring Portuguese settlement of Anselma, four miles inland, to buy fruits and vegetables cheaper than they could be found in the local markets.

When his Philip and Christidos' John began lengthening from chubby boyhood into gangling adolescence, Spiros was startled to discover that they had already taken the engine of the car apart and put it together several times, and that they could drive it just as well as or better than himself. He immediately forbade them to touch it, but on his next trip he took the boys with him, calmly overlooking the fact that it was a schoolday. By the time the boys were in their sixteenth year, they had rebuilt the distributor, hopped up the carburetor, added and subtracted parts of the steering gear, ripped out the old sedan seat in the back, dismounted the rear body and fenders and built a box-truck rear which Spiros found infinitely more practical, and painted the whole contraption a peppery, eye-stinging paprika red. It was much more their car than his. They used it constantly in their youthful business enterprises. The motor purred sweetly in spite of its age. They hauled fish in it, and manure, and grapefruit and cabbages. One summer they were off daily at dawn to the phosphate works up the river, hauling small-order lots of fertilizer to local farmers. They bought the gas for the car; they serviced it themselves, and when Spiros needed the use of it he often had to remind them sharply of his actual ownership.

But now the boys had deserted their old playmate; again the car stood, often for weeks at a time, outside the Parthenon or in the grass lot beside Spiros' house. Philip, at college, had his own jalopy. John, even while devil-diving out his fifty missions over enemy territory, had an

order in for a convertible; time passed, and after he had been home for a year and the order was still unfilled he canceled it and bought a second-hand conservative coupe in Tampa. He used it to drive to and from the airport. He was a good, fast, safe driver, with a mechanic's respect for machinery; on the occasions that he felt the red-black mist surging in, the world crashing around him, he left it where it stood and took the bus, coming back to pick it up days later. He never stepped into it either while he was drinking or when he had one of the nagging, pressure-forming headaches that began his descent to the secret, minor hells he guarded so carefully.

The other two Spiros boys, Achilles and Kostas, scorned the old red car with its box-truck back; they were ashamed to be seen in it, though they both could drive it if necessary. The girls merely turned their heads aside if they saw it bowling down the street. At school, their friends spoke of the fine cars owned by their fathers; some of them were allowed to drive. But until Spiros would buy something more modern, his children ignored the whole matter of automobiles. They knew there was no use in begging; they simply would not recognize the existence of the poor old red junk-heap.

Consequently Spiros was more than a little surprised when Stephen rather shyly expressed a wish to learn to drive the red car. Stephen had never shown the slightest interest in it before, not even when he was a little fellow. You might have expected him to go tagging after John, begging to take the day-long jaunt for the phosphate works, or to go inland to the citrus groves. Even today, he rode in John's coupe only on invitation. If you had asked the poet, Lord Byron, to tell you why Stephen had never

shown any interest in the red car, he might well have launched into a discursive chant concerning the old gods and the new; he might have opposed golden Apollo whipping up the horses of the sun against sooty Vulcan at his forge; he might have told you that a poem and a machine are natural enemies. Perhaps he would have told you the fable of the alchemist who mixed antimony with swill and fattened his pigs to monstrous proportions, and then, attempting the same combination for some starving monks grown cadaverous after a Lenten fast, only succeeded in killing them. Oil and water do not mix, he would say, and one man's meat is another man's poison, only he would so encrust these simple sayings with allegory that they would come near to losing their meanings.

If you were to ask Cimon, he would respond, persimmon-tart, that it was a queer kid who wasn't crazy over motors.

It never occurred to Spiros that Stephen would have to be taught to drive. Nobody had taught him; the salesman, those many years ago, had pointed out ignition, gas pedal and brake to him, shifted the gears once or twice, and told him it was all his from there on, Spiros drove off warily, accomplished the trip from Tampa to Turtle Run by a miracle, and since then had driven no better or no worse than that first time. And so he, who usually paid no more heed to Stephen than he paid to the little black cat sleeping, flat and relaxed as a cat will sleep, all day long on the rolls of toilet paper high on the shelf at the back of the Parthenon, agreed to teach him to drive. That evening, when business slackened up, he straightened up from his steaming stove, took off his apron, and led the boy out to the old red car, its brave paint so sadly faded now, so

dust-caked and scratched and dented that it was more nearly blood-brown. And he did just what the salesman had done; he pointed out the ignition, the gas pedal and the brake, shifted the gears a time or two, stepped out and went back to the Parthenon without a word. Inside, Christidos watched from a window.

"Is this a good thing, friend?" he asked when Spiros returned. "Can the boy drive? Will he be safe in the car?"

"Of course he can, and he will," Spiros answered, turning back to his ovens. "Your John, my Philip, learned how to control the machine, learned the coils of its guts and the heavings of its gizzard when they were hardly tall enough to see over the wheel. Even when they sat on the cushion, they could barely peep over. There's nothing to driving a car. And besides, didn't I teach him myself ten minutes ago?"

"That is so," Christidos said dubiously. And then he remembered John, sure-handed, reliable John, who had never been a moment's worry, working over the car's motor, listening with something like a musician's ear until it sang with a true pitch, and then putting it to use, hauling manure, grapefruit, cabbages, phosphates, so steady, so confident, so proud to be almost a man and earning! He saw John's eager young face, his hand offering the money: "I shall pay board from now on, father!" He heard his own voice, talking softly, telling the boy that he would take no board money from his own son; that the green bills must be put aside for an education, for luxuries, for fine things when he grew older. Beside this image in his mind was another image: Stephen, sulky, petulant and guilty, too smart to study, too stuck-up to work . . . the golden head and the dark one merged into one, as the divergent mirror

images at the bevel and the surface of the mirror separate and merge. Perhaps, perhaps it was well that Stephen learn to use the car.

Perhaps, now, he would find the sanctuary of honest work.

Chapter Twenty-Five

ONCE Alexis Dragoumis had taken pains and delight in his appearance; his good looks sat lightly and graciously upon him; you might say he was pleased that he was not ugly, rather than that he was pleased he was handsome. It seemed a matter of luck to him, like being born with good health, and then taking care of himself so that his health might continue. Once he had enjoyed choosing fine materials, consulting an expert tailor as to cut and finishing, selecting custom-made shirts, hand-woven ties in warm rich colors, shopping in Bond Street or the Rue de la Paix when he traveled. Such things were part of his world, and of his friends' world, thoroughly pleasant, but not too hard to do without, once he got the hang of it. As he knotted his tie in his hospital room, instinctively standing in front of the mirror which he could not see, he remembered that once he had been reasonably clothes-proud, even uniform-proud. He'd spent enough on his officer's blouse and boots and short cape to dress a platoon of privates; that morning, somewhere in Epirus, before he had gone out to inspect a bridge site and stepped into a landmine, he had brushed his uniform and polished his brass as though he were stepping before a regimental inspection, ignoring the fact that his orderly had readied his clothes the night before. And then the blood, all that precious blood, and the dear ichor of his eyes, the vitreous and the aqueous humours, spilled down on the fine twill, linen soft, of which he had been so proud!

And now, ^{una}We to see even the color of the suit he wore, to know the color of his necktie save that he hung the few he bothered to own in order, so that he could choose by touch, he dressed heedfully, with attention to detail, more attention than he had given his appearance in a long while, because he was about to call upon Zoe's father, his future father-in-law, and formally to ask for her hand in marriage. That the interview was unusual: aristocrat and peasant, blind man and troubled man, in the upstairs parlor above the Parthenon, against a backdrop of broiling fish and olive oil and garlic sauce bothered him not at all.

Christidos received Alexis with gentle and untutored courtesy; since his own heart was loving, he understood Zoe's love. But the fact that the major had a wife, a wife, true, who had affronted the laws of God and man with her bigamous marriage to her Italian munitions maker: a wife who deserted and denied her husband when most he needed her, but, still, a living wife, legally married to one Alexis Dragoumis: that fact stood between the two men like a wall. And, since walls are built to be torn down, grain by grain and stone by stone, these two men, so different in kind, began, one from one side and one from another, to pry and peck at the mortar of this obstinate, this unbudgeable wall of fact, to tease out the stones and sweep away the rubble, since it stood in the way of Zoe's happiness, and thus stood in the way of happiness for both. Other differences between them, even eyelessness, had dissolved; this, only, stood.

That Alexis had a wife was the hardest thing Zoe had told her father, and she told it badly, fumbling among words that came hesitantly to her lips. "Father . . . we want to marry. Father . . . but he is married, he is mar-

ried now!" How impossible it all sounded . . . and yet, and yet! Only the long hours on the hill she kept from him; only the heavenly peace beyond the banks of tar-flower and mallow bloom. Of that she could not speak; she must never frame the words, even in her mind, even soundlessly, for it was the one betrayal her father could not endure.

Alexis told the older man the entire tale of his gay, social marriage, his imprisonment under a concealed identity, the mistaken report of his death, his blindness, his long search for Lisa, his long search for sight. One search had been satisfied; he could speak now without bitterness, and he spared Lisa unnecessarily. Even if he had found her at once, he said, he would have insisted upon divorce; she would be helpless, tied to a blind man. Whereas Zoe grew in strength, Lisa's spirit would have drained away. All of him that would have been of use to her was his fortune and his name; she had taken the one with her to Egypt; she had discarded the other with her old wedding ring. Unsparing of himself, both humble and proud before Christidos, still he spared Lisa; he did not reveal that she had known he was alive, even known his whereabouts, this long and weary while.

"Mr. Economou . . . my friend . . ." and then, correcting himself, remembering that he spoke to the peasant he would some day call "Father," "Our friend, Economou, began the arrangements at once. As soon as we found my wife, as soon as we learned that she had remarried without questioning the preliminary reports, he began the necessary actions on my behalf. They are for her sake, too, and to protect her present interests. Unfortunately, I am the one who must bring the suit; she has indicated that she will do nothing; she lives in another country now, and

under other laws; shetis safe and . . . and comfortable. But someday it could crop up in her life, and she would not know where to turn. And, of course, for my hopes, for Zoe's, the divorce is essential, and must be immediate."

"It seems to me that your wife has known very well where to turn," Christidos said with unaccustomed sharpness. His heart ached; his very bowels turned in sympathy with Alexis, so defrauded of the things he held most dear. No, he could not place any obstacles before his happiness; at once, Alexis had become as dear to him as a son, or very near as dear.

"I know nothing of these things," he said, rubbing his eyes which itched with Weariness and unshed tears. "On my island, on Symi, divorce was unknown, or rumored only, from big islands like Rhodes, or from the mainland. Here, here, one seldom learns of it. But if it will make life good for you, if then you and Zoe can go hand in hand with honor, then let us accept divorce; let us put it behind us and go forth."

"It should have been done long since," Alexis agreed. "I would never have held Lisa, nor any woman, against her wish. I would bear this sightlessness alone, until such time as I die, or it may be healed. But your daughter has picked up a share of my burden and hoisted it onto her young shoulders; she longs to bear it with me, and, God help me, I long for her. This I can promise you: I shall keep her happy. She will never know life to be a light thing, light as a blowing leaf, as Lisa has known it. But whatever I have shall be hers, save only grief. That I keep to myself, but Zoe has all my love.

"I had been blind long before the Italians took my eyes; only I did not know it. There are so many ways of being blind. I think ignorance is perhaps the worst. But the time

for tears and reproaches is over. Now that I have found Zoe, I can see much that was dark before, and it pulses with pure light I imagine Saul of Tarsus must have felt like that when he was smitten. Like him I look now not with my eyes, but through them—and I see Zoe standing forever in the light. So the physical blindness falls like scales from my eyes. I refuse to wallow in it as if being blind entitles a man to special favors; as if it were an oak-root of self-pity where a fellow on all fours might snuff for truffles. I refuse even to think of the war—and yet. . ."

His hand went to the lightning-furrowed face, halted and hovered at the great fire-flecked eyeballs. Christidos felt his heart go out to him. He longed to tell Alexis that he loved him, not only because his daughter loved him, but for his own sake.

The Athenian went on, like a man sitting alone in the dark and talking to himself.

"When I remember my comrades-in-arms, who fought and bled and endured the agony of battle with me and died—and the shame that followed—I think often of those other Greeks long ago who, after the fall of Troy, would gather together, in the way of our people, and talk over their wine, while the lizards scuttled in the dusty grass and the crickets chirred. Maybe, as they drank and warmed their memories and their wounds, the boys and girls hanging around, who knew nothing of such matters, would grin and mock, saying to one another, 'Let's get out of here. We're fed up with these tall tales of Troy and Achilles. Why must they harp continually on an old quarrel and the names of dead heroes we never knew, and dull forgotten battles?' And so they would laugh and walk away, arm in arm, young and scornful under the large summer stars, while the lizards scuttled and the crickets

chirred and the scarred old warriors would recall the many pyres crackling and consuming their dead, and the beauty of an host of friends long since dust in a barbarous land, and the great deeds done and the grim folly of it all."

It was a strange moment. Intimacy folded the two men under a single cloak. They were silent; their minds seemed to mingle and flow together into the future. Christidos and Alexis dreamed together of the happiness of Zoe, and both found content in the dream.

"Much is accomplished through the channels of the diplomatic offices," Alexis said, "and because of the odd circumstances, this is no ordinary courtroom sideshow of a proceeding. Nor must we spend the usual year of waiting, or so I am told. I shall return to Athens very soon; in a short time I can send for Zoe. The civil divorce is a mere matter of paperwork and records, but I must go myself before the church, in my own city of Athens, and both explain and expiate. And then I must find a home for us to live in, and start my school, before Zoe comes . . ."

As clearly as though Christidos watched a scene on a film, he saw the noisy little schoolhouse, with its yellow walls and tidy red roof; he heard the bells and saw the children pour forth, the half-grown lads and girls, their minds a bobble of algebra and stick-ball, of sly flirtation and poetry and dates in a history book, and after them the tall straight figure of their teacher, going across the yard to his house, a little yellow house like the schoolhouse, with a neat red tile roof; a house noisy with children, too, and with the soft golden laughter of their mother . . . Was there a black patch over one eye of the tall teacher? Did he walk with a stick, or run confidently like one of the schoolboys? Christidos was not sure . . . but, sharply in the dancing sunlight, he saw the children in their little

smocks of blue and red darting like birds, and the herbed, with its origanon and basil and thyme, abuzz with bees among the small white and purple flowers; he saw the hives, and knew them heavy with honey, and the goat, and knew her swollen with kid, aye, twins, by the look of her, if he remembered the look of the goats his father once kept. And he saw Zoe, serene, deep-breasted, laughing up at her husband and taking his hand in hers . . . It was well . . . it was a true vision; neither the first Christidos had had, nor would it be the last, but in all ways, the happiest.

"You will come to stay with us, someday, Father," Alexis said. "You will play with your grandchildren, and help me to teach them . . ."

Christidos chuckled. "Me, teach? Teach the sons of the schoolteacher? Me, and I have trouble enough to read and write and keep accounts! Me, teach!"

"Ah," said Alexis, "There are so many kinds of teaching. Teaching goodness, for one, and teaching how to cut a willow whistle and blow through it, and how to make a net and catch fish, or catch them on a hook; how to bait the hook and take them off without tearing them roughly . . . how to chop wood without cutting oneself . . ."

"And what's to making a net? It's only a lot of holes with string around them!" Christidos rocked with delight; this blind Athenian aristocrat was a lad after his own heart, after all.

"I have one particular place in mind, a village on the slope of Hymettus," Alexis said, and he felt, as he spoke, more completely at ease with Christidos than he had been with any man for a long while. "Greece is in terrible need of schools, in need of teachers. I have already made inquiries . . . the village spreads in the sun, like a small

Chapter Twenty-Six

ONE wet hot afternoon, in a dingy bar at the tend of a dingy alley in the backwash of Ybor City, John slapped vaguely at an annoying buzz, man of mosquito, at his ear. His hand smacked a sticky stubble of beard; the stranger's head snapped back, his blood-streaked eyes rolling vacantly.

"Hey, whaddya hafta do that for? I was just tryin' to tell ya . . ."

A bum. A real stinking bum. John moved a few feet away; the bum followed him with alcoholic affection. Slime gathered at the corner pf the bum's mouth; old vomit dried upon his coat and stank

"Get away from me. I said, get away." John moved further.

"I was just tryin' to tell ya . . . Yer my friend, I want ya should know. Gold it was a big gold case, solid gold, half as much as they got in Fort Knox, I betcha. And when they opened it up, there was this little grey chip of wood, no bigger'n that. No bigger'n that." The bum held a ragged match folder in his shaking hand. "A chip of w0od, no bigger'n that. Lots o' the other stuff was in gold cases, dead bones and shriveled dead hands, ugh, stuff that'd make a feller's eyebrows crawl. But the biggest case of all, and all it held was this little chip of grey wood. They said it was a piece of the True Cross. Not that I believed 'em. What's the good of it, true or not? What's the lousy

good? Ah, the tales I could tell you of that place . . . buy me a drink, my friend, and I'll tell you a tale of gold . . ."

The bum spoke in English, but the English spoken in the backwash of Ybor City has become sufficiently polyglot to be a dialect in itself. Spanish, Indian, Cajun, the slur of the Negro, the gutturals of the North, all queerly mingled to make an odd sauce indeed. Through his whiskey-headache haze, John recognized something familiar in the bum's accent, something not often found in the Ybor City alley bars.

"You're a Greek . . . some kind of a drunken Greek . . ."

"Of course I am!" The bum switched immediately to a kind of ill-spoken cockney Greek which was unfamiliar to John, but reasonably understandable. "You're a Greek and I'm a Greek; you're wet, with a glass in your hand, and I'm dry, with none. Buy me a drink, Mister, buy me a drink," he whined, "and I'll tell you about a place I know where there's gold boxes, big as . . . big as coffins. I know, I was there, I was a monk in that priestly place, but I'm no monk any more!"

John spun a coin on the liquor-dabbled bar. "Here's your drink," he said. "Only get away from me."

"Sure, I'm going, I'm going. And thanks, Mister." The bum caught the coin deftly, in spite of his shaking hands, nipped it between thumb and forefinger like a crab nipping a bit of rotting fish. He backed away, staring at the coin, staring down to the end of the crowded bar where there was a small open space, not too narrow for a bum to crowd through to where the bottles twinkled and beckoned, the only bright things in the shabby room.

John drank, slammed down his glass; it was filled; he drank again. Time to move on, to drink more in another bar, and more in another, moving from one to another, at

last picking up a slut when he had become dull with drunkenness, when he had forgotten to be particular. As he lurched out, he saw the bum nursing an empty glass, staring about him vacantly and yet with a kind of cunning; he was looking for another sucker, John supposed. Well, a quarter more or less . . . he flipped another coin under the bum's nose.

"Thanks, Mister, thanks . . ."

The last thing John wanted was to get in a conversation with this drunk, or any other. And yet those wandering sentences teased at his mind; gold boxes as big as coffins, and wood from the True Cross. It wasn't ordinary barroom talk, not even in the backwash of Ybor City.

"Where is that place you are talking about?"

The bum cackled. "You'd like to know, wouldn't you? You'd like to go there, and get your hands on that gold, just like me? But it's not for the likes of us, that place isn't!"

"Where is it? Speak up and tell me where it is." Suddenly it had become very important to John to know its whereabouts.

"In Mount Athos, that's where it is. In a place where the monks live, live like monkeys they do, Greek monks, and I was one of 'em for a while. Only they didn't have no more use for me than me for 'em. Glad enough to get me, they was, and they chucked me out as gladly. Mount Athos, where there's peace and plenty . . . plenty for them and none, none left for me." The bum's eyes looked like holes burned in a blotter, his face was so white. A slow tear steamed over the burned eyelid-edge and splashed on the bar.

John stayed an hour, asking a question now and then, asking rough questions out of sheer perversity. The bum,

in his vomit-smelling clothes, talked wildly of the True Cross, of gold, of the black-robed bearded monks; John was fascinated, as a chicken is fascinated by a snake. It was a long meandering tale; the bum had once been a presser in a cleaning establishment in New York City; whether maddened by steam or heat or boredom or drink or sheer inertia it did not matter, but he killed the presser who stood next to him in that hot, dye-smelling, dirt-smelling, steam-swirling room, and he fled to the church which he had avoided and ignored since childhood. Only, the church, of course, never knew he was a murderer. He was clever, he was; he posed as a poor fellow, struck sick in the head, but strong in back and arm, eager to serve the monks on the holy fortress of Mount Athos. And the good fathers in the church in New York took pity on him and sent him to that Mountain of the Monks, perched on its Thracian promontory, saying to each other it was a pity such a pious fellow should be so grievously afflicted. Nevertheless, the monks needed strong backs to clean the cells and corridors and refectories, to sweep the holy halls, to fetch and carry burdens from the world across the draw-bridges and up the ladders to their fortress, to dig in the fertile lower fields. And so they took in the murderer who claimed immunity from life, saying that he was weak and sick in the head, but strong in the back and arms. He stayed with them one year, and then two; he qualified for monkhood, swearing the simple required oaths that he was of legal age, had come of his own free will, was unencumbered with either wife or child, and had no inheritance, hence need make no will. It was a good life; there was plenty to eat and drink, as long as he did his work, and not too much was expected of him in the way of complicated

prayers and meditations, since he was supposed to be incapable of them.

"Only," he said, and this John particularly remembered, "only there wasn't a single damm woman-thing in the place. Not even a chicken. Not even a cow or an ewe or a doe rabbit or a she-pigeon. That was when I began to think they was crazier, even, than I made myself out to be."

Being both strong and stupid, he was much trusted by the monks, though he could never have hoped, even had he remained, of rising to more than the simplest of orders. Then, one day, more than three years after he had come to the sanctuary, he was called into the holy of holies, the guarded shrine of sacred relics, to lift some of the great jewel-studded cases.

"It was kinda like a spring-cleaning, see," he said, "and the old fellers as was holy enough to shift the stuff and handle it was too old and weak to heft it. Gold, it was, boxes of gold, and one as big as a coffin, with folding gold doors, and set in the doors was jewels as big as hens' eggs, all for that scrap of grey wood. Big pale jewels, they was, emeralds and diamonds, like as not, and one or two was loose, and another I loosened with my fingers when those black-clad fellers wasn't looking, and stuck the jewels down the front of my robe. Like to got away with them, too, the old fellers was so blind they couldn't see beyond their own white beards. But some kind of inspector-monk came in to see if the cleaning had been done right, and they set up such a hulaballoo when the stones was gone, you'd think they was scalded cats. They found the stones in my cell, where I slept; I'd stuck them in my mattress. Some of them was for killing me, by throwing me over the walls, but most of them said I wasn't that much to blame,

not being right in the head. So they chucked me out, and was none too gentle about it, either. They look kind as sweet old grandpa, but I was a month getting over the beating. That was the fortress of Simopetra on Mount Athos, and well named it was, Simon Peter, Simon the Rock . . . the great jagged rocks like dragon's teeth, ready to rip your body and snap up your soul . . . Not that Simopetra wasn't a place of peace, at that . . . there was good mixed with the bad . . . ah, peace, peace, but ah, the gold, the gold . . ."

John left the bum to maunder in his drink. It was three days before he returned to Turtle Run, cleansed as a sponge is cleansed by being trampled under the strong toes and hard heels of a crew until its black veil slips from its supple skeleton, until its milky fish-smelling ichor spills and the deck is awash with bluish clotted sponge-blood; until it is beaten and dragged overside in the clean salt, and dried again and bleached and finally bartered for. He remembered almost nothing of his stay in Ybor City, save a few words . . . Simopetra . . . Mount Athos . . . the True Cross. Of the scavenger-tale in the tavern, nothing else remained to him.

Simopetra . . . the True Cross . . . the place of peace . . .

John had not been home in nearly three weeks; customarily his tour of flying, two weeks of short hops between St. Petersburg and Jacksonville, was spaced by a week off, then two weeks of flying again. He usually went straight home to Turtle Run, to his father's house; there was deep and quiet affection between Christidos and his older son. But when the compulsion pressed heavily upon him, as it had just as he ended his tour these two weeks passed, he spent a few days by himself, in Jacksonville or

St. Petersburg, or, occasionally, in Ybor City. And then, having descended into hell, and dabbled his fingers in the scum and sediment of the lowest brimstone pools, and painfully clawed his way upward, through the veils of sickish mist, the sordid barbershop smells and the barber's smirking (Sure hung yourself one this time, Mac, but well fix you up ... long as meat can move we fix it!) and the bored haberdasher selling a clean shirt, looking distastefully at the customer's soiled and stained one, he was on his way to his father's house . . .

Back in the bar, the bum fastened grimy fingers on the sleeve of another drunk, and whined out his tale. It was usually good for a couple of drinks, and whether or not it was true seemed a matter of no moment whatsoever.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

TO SIT upstairs over the Parthenon Bar and Grill, looking out rearwards through the bougainvillia-latticed window to the garden, the green onions in neat rows, the beets, the carrots, like shakoed soldiers, the gleaming purple-glossy ovals of eggplants, the melon patch with its fragrant musky smells, its leaf-secret fruit: to sit, looking out, hearing his father's voice drone on, seeing the pulse of rosy light at the end of his cigar; to sit, in the growing dusk, with his father. That was peace. And the news about Zoe; that was peace, too, of a kind. John accepted her blind Major more easily than had Christidos, because the matter of divorce bothered him not at all. Half the fellows at the field were divorced, or would be one of these days. It was a pity, but it was not the obstacle which had first loomed to a father's eyes. And he felt considerable kinship already with Alexis Dragoumis; they were both casualties, one in one way, one in another.

His father's voice droned on, recounting the small miracles in his catalogue of faith: Zoe was in love, the melon crop was ripe, his cousin and friend, Spiros the cook, had scalded his foot in a fit of exasperation; Spiros, the sure-handed, occasionally over-tipped a kettle when he got out of patience with something or somebody. Never a kettle, mind you, of food; even in temper, Spiros was a cautious man. It was always boiling water, which cost nothing, though his foot still pained him. Stephen . . . Stephen had learned to drive the old red car.

"Maybe now he gets a job, a good job, like you did, kid."

"Maybe he does," John grinned in the half-dark; Stephen had been something of a worry to him, and a burden which he felt, guiltily, that he had shied away from. An older brother ought to look out for a younger, and so he had, hell, he'd looked out for Stephen when he was sixteen and the boy was ten, when he was seventeen and the boy was eleven . . . when he was eighteen . . . and then he'd gone off to war, and come back with man-talk, with man-memories. And the lovely child, the frail beautiful boy who had limped in early childhood, and often had been kept home from school with colds and feverish aches, the golden child who loved and worshipped John his protector, had turned into a husky, sulky lad, aggressive and shame-faced by turns. Wouldn't study, wouldn't work, thought he was a man, but still wet behind the ears. Had to remind him to wash before sitting down to meals, had to remind him to kiss his father on saints' days. Had to know that he stole out of the cash register, or off his father's bureau, only a little at a time, though. Maybe the old man was too strict with him. Maybe he'd get a job, hauling at the phosphate plant, hauling for the citrus groves, now he liked to drive the car.

"Stephen, he's always been trouble." Christidos never told John how much trouble, even from his eldest he kept the nagging fears. The cigar pulsed, smothered in ash, pulsed again. How often had John, had Zoe and Stephen, separately or piled like kittens on the old sofa, stared through the dusk, hearing their father's voice, a bee lost in its own buzz, talking to them, talking to Spiros, to a neighbor, to a friend, until they fell asleep in the gathering dark, knowing only the cigar glow, the lapping of voices. The

little black cat with the white vest sat in his lap now; she was a young cat, but growing, plumping, soft-sided with cat maturity.

"Stephen, a big boy now . . . but he ought to finish school. He won't go any more; I let him off, finally, from going. He's tried the boats, but I don't want him to be a sponger. Always there is one . . . one who is a worry . . . and the boats won't take him, anyhow. No captain will take him. And for that, I thank God."

The little cat stirred, stretched, digging her claws affectionately into Christidos' knees, and then leaped silently to the floor and was off.

"Like a child," Christidos murmured. "Like you, like Zoe. Gentle and curious and loving, needing me, and then away. She'll find a life, too, no doubt, not far from the kitchen steps. But Stephen, ah, my Stephen, my youngest and weakest one . . ."

The harsh smack and clash, the crunch of machine against machine, metal upon metal, disturbed the twilight. Christidos started, then shook aside the ash from his cigar happily.

"Only the boy," he said. "Only the boy, sometimes he stops hard. The car is old."

A scream, then a scrabble of choked voices, then screams, shouts below, the wrangling tangle of excitement, shocked silence and then loudness again. Christidos stirred, John's muscles locked in anguish, as any harsh metal-upon-metal noise made them lock these days. Then both men dashed down the stairs, out into the street. There was a knot of people on the shell road, some yelling, more running. The old red car was over the curb, crumpled against a pole; the street lamp, so recently alight, still flickered,

crazily atilt; its loosened glass shade dropped with a sharp splatter into the street. There was a confused tugging and pulling at the crumpled front of the car; someone dragged a man-shape, limp, yielding as the shape of a run-over dog, free of the wheel.

"No!" John shouted. "No!" and, more gently, "No, no, father. It isn't Stephen." He gathered the old man into his arms as a mother gathers her child's face into her skirts against a horrid sight. "No, not Stephen, no, no. It's someone else, I can see him, father, it's that crazy poet fellow who's been hit. But not Stephen, I can tell you; Stephen isn't anywhere around."

An hour later, Christidos still sat on the low curbing beside the old red car. Stephen was nowhere to be found; he had vanished as though he had never been, save perhaps in people's minds. No one seemed to know if he had been in the car; no one had been looking out in the late and dusky afternoon. Could it have started by itself, on the slight downgrade, and by some devil's chance pinned George Pappas, mad poet, unseeing of danger, unheeding, wrapped in his own concentric universe, against the street light? No . . . that was impossible; the old car had never started by itself before; it was hard to start at all, and required ingenious tricks to splutter into any kind of life. And yet there it lay, like a crushed beetle, half-overtured, and there lay the fanciful Lord Byron, ghost-green, his black chiffon necktie soaked with blood that spurted and ebbed at the corner of his drooped mouth. They took him up the long hill to the hospital, carrying him gently and considerately, as though gentleness and consideration mattered any more, and as they carried him he seemed to wake; he did not open those flat and snake-like eyes, but

rather shielded them with a limply upflung arm, but he talked of many things, through the warm dark on the road to the hospital, and John helped carry him, along with the others, and Christidos saw Zoe walking in the small procession, but he sat down on the low curb to wait for his youngest, his little son.

Lord Byron guessed that he was dying, and he was not afraid. This misfit man, living out a lifetime on the edge of life, feeling some things more and some less than does the normal man, had feared death, the dissolution of ego, all his years, but now was not afraid. Except for small sharp pains, like the accurate insertions of narrow daggers in his chest cavity when he breathed, he was in no pain. For one fierce instant of suspended life he tasted the incalculable caress; he touched the hair of death, ran his fingers through it, and recognized it as woman welcoming him, woman he had never attained; plump, white-armed, with long bright hair through which his fingers ran. And he was no more afraid. Death was the woman he never had; henceforth he would clasp her, and make songs to her, and forget his dreams of golden lads, of heroes at grips with gods in immortal combat, of astral and impossible lovers: gone, forgotten his dreams of the white-armed women of Cairo, of Stephen-Apollo, of Zoe and Alexis, whom he had peeped at through the tar flowers on their pine-sweet hill. Death was his white-armed woman now, and he loved her beyond poor mortal words.

Save that there were two things he must do for the living, before he sank into her embrace.

It was a vast, consuming effort to pull his wrist down from his eyes, and when he opened them, he half expected not to see, but the world dazzled around him; a cabbage

moth fluttered a foot from his face, palest yellow, dappled with small blue spots; pink and yellow, blue and violet, flowers tossed by the roadside; even the dust joggled up by his carriers' feet glistened in grey-gold motes; he could see as clearly as at high noon, though it was half-dark and the street-lights swung.

His eyes, that was it . . . his eyes. He, who could see so acutely, would have no more use for eyes. Something plucked at his mind, something he had read recently in a newspaper met and mingled with pack-rat scraps of legend. As they carried him into the hospital the white-clad doctors and nurses scurried up; he plucked at a starched sleeve.

"Give him my eyes, my eyes. Give them to Major Dragoumis."

And above him other eyes met, mouths moved, but he could not hear well what they said.

"You can do it. Give him my eyes . . . they're all I have to give."

One of the doctors bent over the dying man. "Do you mean that you bequeath your eyes to Major Dragoumis in the hope of restoring his own sight?" He spoke distinctly, knowing that all sensation rapidly faded in a body so crushed.

"Such is my wish, such is my will."

Above him the mouths moved again. "Suppose it's the only chance the poor devil'll have to see again." "Nobody on staffs ever done a transplantation." "No time to get a man down from up North, either." "Hell, there's no time to get a man from any place." "We'll manage, If you know how to do a thing, you can. Whether you've done it before or not." "Totally blind anyhow . . . he'll jump at it."

The doctor bent over again. "Hell have them, old timer ... as soon as you don't need them any longer."

And so, as Lord Byron, who had once been George Pappas, and a poet of some distinction, had he ever written down his rainbow-colored dreams, lay dying on a stretcher-cot in an antechamber of the hospital, for it would have been inhuman to attempt to move him further to a proper bed, Alexis Dragoumis was being prepared for an emergency operation; the incredibly delicate transplantation which he well knew was his last, his only hope of sight. They did not tell him how the opportunity came about; there was no time for an explanation, and he drowsily supposed that by some miracle, a stranger's eyes would become his. It was only later that he learned whose they were. But in his supposition he was very nearly right, for George Pappas had seen Alexis Dragoumis every day, or nearly every day, for more than a year, and knew all, or very nearly all, about him. But Alexis was scarcely aware that George Pappas existed; he was merely a sound of feet moving across the threshold of the Parthenon Bar and Grill, across the floor to the rear corner table; he was only a whispery voice in the corner and a trail of cigarette smoke as he recrossed floor and threshold. A few times he had hesitated at Dragoumis' table, only to be warned away by Cimon or Christidos, who would mutter angrily, "Go along, now, and don't be annoying the gentleman!" And, too, Alexis had occasionally heard someone chanting and declaiming poems along the shell road, but it had not been a matter of much interest to him; there were any number of mad beggars in the world and Turtle Run doubtless had its share.

Having done one thing for the living, the poet rested for

quite a while before he did the other. The white-clad figures had ceased to cluster about him, but when he squinted through the closing dark he saw the glimmer one made quite near his head, and again he plucked at a starched sleeve. The other thing for the living must be done, done quickly while he could.

"Stephen . . . don't be too hard on Stephen. Tell him I forgive him. Tell him . . . that I saw the car . . . I tried to save him . . . save him from killing me. Only, I threw myself the wrong way."

Then he smiled and turned his head a little to one way, and died very quietly. There had always been something tough and ophidian about him, something very hard to kill, dwelling side by side with something lepidopteran and transitory, and, the first half of his nature having hung on as long as it could, the second half took over. His crushed body had become very small, like the crushed Luna moth struck down by some wanton boy with a busy stick, slashing among the bushes, lopping flower-tops, smashing beauty as he passed. So the great-eyed wings, throbbing pale lemon-green, pulsing with life and color, dissolved into pure light; nothing remained save the small drying carcass, the abandoned remains of some once bulky and comely thing, and a few wing-flakes to which a greying glitter still clung. So was the poet gathered utterly up, and distributed between light and dust, becoming something more and less than man.

Something of the butterfly nature stayed even with these poor remains. As they took him, almost still alive, into the antechamber of the operating room, for the transplantation must be made promptly between the dead and the living, his black chiffon tie dried and straightened. The

hands which prepared him attended him most gently; there are incidents such as this, which tear even at the tough-hided heart of a medical interne.

"Funny kind of a necktie the guy's wearing," somebody said, "Can't say I've ever seen anything like that before. Damned if it doesn't look exactly like a butterfly!"

Chapter Twenty-Eight

WHEN A boy breaks a window, his first thought is to put as much distance between it and himself as possible. He is at the other end of town before the glass-shreds stop tinkling on the sidewalk. When a boy breaks his mother's sugar bowl, or his father's fishing tackle, or the fine blue and white platter on top of the cupboard, the house becomes very quiet, because the boy is suddenly elsewhere. All broken things are most embarrassing to all boys, and most embarrassing of all to guilty boys: all broken things: watches and chair legs and the hearts of their first sweethearts; and guilty boys are adept at finding hiding places until the wrath attendant upon their acts blows over. Moreover, the blue and white platter can be mended, or almost always; the cracks will show, but after a while be forgotten. The watch goes to the watch-maker; father grunts and swears over the fishing tackle; mother forgives; and the sweetheart goes, nose in air, to find a new fancy. But what cement, what fine wires and glue, what forgiveness or sweet disdain can mend man's body so broken that the soul reluctantly leaves its ruined house? And what hiding place can there be for the boy who does the breaking?

It never occurred to Stephen, as he fled headlong through the scrub palmetto, through the riot of wild thorn, as he vaulted the impenetrable tangled mounds of scuppernong and black-cap, that he had mortally wounded George Pappas, that the pseudo-poet lay dying, and then

lay dead, in a small room off the ante-chamber of the hospital on the hill. He fled with pure boy instinct, knowing that he had done something wrong and would be blamed for it. He was pretty sure that good old Lord Byron would never accuse him of running him down, but, crazy in the head the way the poet was, you couldn't much tell what he might say. A hundred things could have happened . . . a million things. The old red truck-car could have slipped its hawser, come off-brake on a down-grade, and smashed into the street-light pole of its own accord, even if nobody had been within a mile of it. A tramp could have climbed in, or a drunk. Or kids, little mischievous kids, could have started it up and not known how to stop it. A million things. Only, there was no downgrade save the hill to the hospital, and the old red jalopy was pointed the wrong way to make that lie possible. Even his father wouldn't swallow that. And there were no tramps in town, or he'd have known of it. And no more drunks than usual, and all the ones Stephen could think of were low-caste spongers, deck-hands, scrapers and the like, who would no more climb into an automobile than they would twist the tail of the devil, superstitious, sea-weathered fellows who recoiled in horror from every kind of machine, even the auxiliary engine of their ship, the working of which was left entirely to the mate. As for mischievous kids . . . , that didn't sound too likely, either. Nothing sounded too likely. And there wasn't anything he could think of that did.

Three things. Three choices. Go back and face the music. Confess that he really didn't know how to handle the old red car; confess that the car went out of control, took over, pinned a man against a street light pole while he clung, frozen with fright, to a wheel he could not turn, while his

foot fumbled at a brake he did not press; confess that he had run down George Pappas out of sheer confusion and funk and inability to respond to the frantic signals of his scared mind. He'd known, somehow, that he'd hit the pole. He'd twisted the wheel that way when he saw the crazy poet step out of the flowering hedge directly in the path of the car. He'd run into the pole on purpose, trying not to hit a man. He'd really been trying not to hit him; he'd wrecked the car, run the risk of killing himself, or near to it, so that he wouldn't. But then there was a blur between him and the on-rushing pole, the diamond-black glitter of those hooded eyes, the red O of a horror-stretched mouth, the flutter of the chiffon tie, "undertaker's tie," Cimon the waiter called it, and the sick sound of the crash. Trying not to run the poet down, Stephen had done it anyhow, and done a thorough job of it. Fear of consequences, the sense of the enormity of his act did not come to him until after his flight began. He ran from the car as a boy runs from a broken window before the sound of falling glass subsides. Now he threw himself down on a hummock beyond the palmetto ridge; his lungs scalded with running; splinters of red fire dancing before his eyes; he could run no longer. Three choices, and to go back and confess was one of them. Confession and temporary disgrace and ultimate forgiveness had never failed him. Maybe it wouldn't this time. But what of the incidents he had brazened out, the lies, the petty thievery, all the sins of omission and commission of which his father knew nothing? Would confession have absolved these, too? Three things, three choices, and the third was to run away.

Beyond the dry palmetto scrub, with its myriad rustling life of insect and arachnid, of lizard and snake and scorpion and flies so delicately winged that a host of them was no

more than a dervish of pale haze upon the air, stretched the sunny meadow-marsh, and the hummock where Stephen threw himself was like a little island in this marshy grass. Here there was no wind, and the only sounds were those of the meadow-marsh life, the whispering hustle as they moved among their dry-straw shelters or plopped into their brackish pools, the constant zinging of their zigzag flight, soft whirring, shrill piping, innumerable songs of the mingled restlessness of the marsh. Every grass-tufted pool was a liquid mirror for oblivion, a smooth glass for the steel-blue herons; the straight reeds and unrippled osiers, the starry water-hyacinths stood softly, along their stems crept black-casqued snails, each with its rosy foot spreading an opal slime. And among them, throughout the lithe tangle, slipped ring-neck plovers with their end-of-summer quicksilver broods of chicks; over them darted the swamp-sparrows, maintaining a garrulous guard in short, swift chirping flight only a yard or so above the ground.

Three choices. Two leading backward, to the known world, to his father's certain wrath and certain love. One leading out to the unknown world, to a world all foreign to the little picture-postcard town of Turtle Run, a brave American world, (so Stephen dreamed) seeing it slantwise and falsely through the gaudy reflections of pulp magazines and comics and B movies. He saw himself in cowboy chaps, red neckerchief and creamy-white sombrero, leading a horse smarter than any human, except, of course his master, a horse named Trigger or Silver, returning loaded with gold coins and pearl-rigged pistols to a tear-stained death-bed reconciliation with his father ... his father would rise up, whole once again, healed by the joy of the prodigal's return ... the gold coins would pay off

the mortgage on the Parthenon Bar and Grill, would buy John his private plane, buy Zoe dresses from New York, stake his old friend, almost his only friend, to a year's beers in the Olympia ... He would ride away gaily into destiny, with his family and all the townsfolk laughing and crying, blessing his gallant name.

All this the outward road leads toward, in Stephen's mind ... all this was possible. But the Parthenon had no mortgage upon it, and never had had, and, though he did not know it, his poet had already died.

Still he lay on the sun-warm hummock, hearing the long and noisy adjournments of summer about him, the crickets in filibuster, and the locusts crowding a fervent congress in the sun. The papery lanterns of the wasps had begun to crumple; new dry powdered-silver globes would people these bushes another spring. The sparrows at impromptu caucus creaked in the grasses, and the flies issued their drowsy bulletins. Autumn and spring, the end of summer and the beginning, are seasons when boys run away from home, but, happily, most of them run with less reason than his.

Yes, he would take the easiest course, escape into the unknown. But first, first he must go back, part of the way at least; he must look down from the hill upon the little town that had been his entire world. He must know, for certain, that the man he had run down had really not been hurt after all; that, after a moment, George Pappas had picked himself up and dusted his threadbare knees and pranced or ambled, according to his mood, toward the Olympia where, surely, after such an exciting experience as being run over, his tale would be worth a free glass. Stephen did not consciously think about why he had to look down at the roads and roofs of Turtle Run before he

escaped, but, having persuaded himself that, aside from smashing in the front of the old red car that nobody used anyhow, he had really done no serious damage to anybody, he had to clear his conscience by one last homeward look. After that, escape was easy enough, from the highway, buses ran north and east and south to freedom. He had money, a little over a hundred dollars, all told, and, of course, all stolen, though now it seemed only provident of him to have taken it. What presents he would come back with, what generous gifts! How he would be greeted and gifted in return!

He was no longer a frightened boy running from a broken window, a crashing platter, a sugar bowl in shards. He was a man now, and a careful one; he made plans, lying on the grassy hummock. He could not look down on the town in broad daylight; he would have to wait for darkness, else those who did not know that he was a man would seize him and drag him back and make him into a boy again. It was twilight; warm and drowsy. He was vaguely hungry, but, being a man now, he must take no notice of hunger pangs and such discomforts. Besides, he found a whole candy bar and part of another one in his pocket. He ate them slowly, making them last a long time, as though they were rationed food in some desert outpost. As he ate, he picked off the scraps of lint and tobacco crumbs; the candy had been in his pocket for some time, and was gummy from heat and the steamy sweat of his headlong flight. After he ate, he lay back and fell asleep, feeling quite completely happy for the first time in a very long while, perhaps for the first time since he had begun to grow up.

And so it was well after dark, with the street lights pricking the night like glowworms, and the lozenges of

light that were the windows of houses calling home whatever and whoever walked abroad, and the neon signs pulsing blue and orange-red, that Stephen crept back from the grassy hummock, now wet with night-chill, and crept through the palmetto scrub, and came down the hill silently, past the hospital, almost into the town, keeping out of the lighted places and in the dark ones, to take one last look before he went out into the wide world. First he thought he'd just look down at the lights and go, and then he wanted to catch sight of the church again, and have one last glimpse of the Parthenon Bar and Grill, and maybe even see his father's shadow moving against the window shade upstairs. First he came creeping, and then walking carefully, and then walking not carefully at all, and then running, running headlong as he had run into the palmetto scrub only a few hours before. For, near the Parthenon was a great knot of townspeople, and his father was among them; Christidos alternately clasped his hands to his head and bent double with grief, and flung himself abruptly tall, head strained back, his muscles standing out in great cords and lumps because of the cramps and strictures, the momentary utter relaxations of his paroxysmal grief, And now and then from his mouth came a dreadful howling cry: "My son . . . my son . . . a murderer . . . my son . . ." And after the cry came silence, while the mouth worked dryly, sucked at the air like a man half-drowned, to get breath so that it might cry again. And the silence was worse than the howling cry, and the cry worse than the silence.

Yes, all about Christidos came his townsmen, some of them bearing him up by the elbows when he seemed about to fall, and some crying with him, and some grimly silent, and toward the rear of the crowd Stephen saw that

four of the men were carrying something on a stretcher, carrying it down the shell road from the hospital, under the street lamps, back to the Parthenon Bar and Grill. Thus they carried this something that-once-was-man, to the only haven that would have him, to the father of the boy who had slain him, to Christidos, who grudged him three meals a day this long year past, and yet told Cimon to give him a plate of soup with at least a bone in it, and a bit of meat on the bone . . . , but no, no not that one, that's good for a paying customer. Give him a bone with gristle and fat and only a small bit of real meat, it's good enough for him, the dog, the beggar, the loafer, the cadger of small change, picker-up of tips from tables, smoker of other people's cigarettes, despoiler of the freshly-folded morning paper. All these things the poet had been, and much else besides, a snapper-up of wine-dregs at funerals and weddings and baptisms, an eater of cracked and staling eggs and soft tomatoes, a nibbler at spoiled fruit, whose poor abandoned carapace had become Christidos' responsibility, to be taken upstairs and laid out in the front room, behind the vine-trellised window. Perhaps they would bring up two small tables from the restaurant and set them end to end to place him on, perhaps they would improvise a trestle of boards resting upon chairs, but it was Christidos who would give him his wake and funeral, and from Christidos' house he would be carried to the church. It was Christidos' responsibility, since the poet was dead, and there was no one else to whom he had turned when living. There is a kind of unhappy justice in the fact that Stephen had killed him, and that such a storm of grieving followed; had the poet died from eating green fruit, or the bite of a poisonous spider, or sunstroke or moonstroke, his death would have provided a few moments' conversation

and no more. But now those who had derided him mourned him, and those who had scorned him beat their breasts and tore their clothing, and the wives of men who would not have given him a nickel for food or beer would sit in the green light of the vine-shaded upstairs room and tear out strands of their hair and keen over his shrunken corpse. Someone would bring out her best linen for a winding-sheet, and someone else would provide blessed oil for the lamps, and someone else, perhaps Christidos himself, would offer his good black suit, the one he was married in, the one he himself expected to be buried in, to go ~~under~~ the cool white linen, because the suit George Pappas wore when he went to his death was his only one, and now was stained and torn so that it ill became the dignity of the occasion.

This Stephen saw and heard, some in his mind, some with his eyes and ears. His father would be chief mourner for the man he himself had killed, and there was no use running to confession now, and no way of brazening it out; no use of crying tears of salt or tears of blood to his father, or begging help or forgiveness, no use of doing anything at all because there was nothing he could do. And, most of all, now that there was most need for help, he could not run away.

Pain blurred in his mind like harsh noise. No way back, now, and no way forward; this was the ultimate guilt, not only to have killed, but to have killed an innocent, and his only friend. To see his father struck down, to fall in whirlwind, like a lightning-shattered tree that crashes with a great shout among the hills, riven with grief that his youngest son, his little golden one, has done this thing! He felt a groan rise from deep within him; he clenched his teeth to stop it from coming out, and felt the surge of it

against his teeth; he tasted the taste of his groan, and the taste was salt, salt and blood.

His skin prickled, burned all over with the acid slime of guilt, just as the small patch of skin at the waistband of his pants, under his money pocket, often burned, as the patch of skin under his shirt pocket burned when he shifted the money there. And at once it became most important for him to tear off this guilty burning sheath, this acid slime of a skin that covered him from head to foot, that poked searing fingers up his nostrils, that rammed a fiery fist against his clenched jaws. If he ran now, he would burn in this acid-slime hell for all time, for the rest of his living days, and what, oh what fires would consume him afterward?

He must cool himself, and quickly; he must strip himself from the tongues of flame, save himself from the noise and the pain of fire, find somewhere to hide himself in cool oblivion, for ah, he burned, he burned . . .

And so it was that Stephen Christidos, who might well have been one beloved of the gods, had he not stirred a kettle of their brewing with his grubby adolescent finger, ripped at his clothing as though the cloth itself was soaked in the acid of guilt; there in the shadows, with the sick-tasting groan thick and fleshy in his mouth, he tore off his clothing, striking and clawing at his skin, for the burning would not come off, and began to run again, naked and white, through the darkness, his brain rocking with the harsh noises of pain. And no one saw him run, and no thing, save the wide-winged moths that blundered and bumbled in the cone of light around the street lamps, breaking their wings, searing their soft bodies against the hot electric bulbs, staggering in air and blundering back again and again until they fell on scorched wings that

could no longer bear them up, to drag and writhe in the dust of the shell road until they, too, died of being burned.

Nowhere to hide himself. Nowhere. No sanctuary now. He flung himself blindly up the steps of the church, scooped hollow by the passage of so many years of reverent feet. He rushed past the nodding old candle-seller, with her wares of holy yellow wax tapers and red glass cups of blessed oil. Into the church . . . ah, there it was cool, cool . . . But in that deep cave of sacred quiet coolness, the candle flames and the flags of fire from the vigil cups seemed to merge in one licking lash of hot light, to swing down at him from the high altar, to leap out at him from the little shrines, to hunt and harry him up and down the aisles. And up and down the aisles he ran, sobbing for breath, with the fire's breath close behind him, and the dim-brained old candle-seller looked in, hearing his running, and, seeing a naked boy dashing up and down, tripping himself up at every turn, slamming himself against the walls, darting into the corners and out again, while the small lights of the candles sent their pure flames straight up in prayer to God, she screamed, thinking that he was a ghost, but, being so old, her scream was thin and weak and went not beyond the portal of the church.

Thus, frantic to hide himself from the searching fingers of the candle flames, Stephen came to the back of the nave, almost under the sanctuary and to one side, and there he wrenched open a small door and came at once upon a flight of steps, a steep and winding stair, and he ran up, upwards into the bell-tower. And still he ran, up and up, coming at last to the small open square platform upon which the black-robed fathers would stand, knee braced to knee, heaving and swinging upon the bell-rope

to make Sunday-music in the town, or, indeed, music for any ceremony of birth or death or baptism or bride-taking, for Christmas and Easter and Epiphany and the multitude of saints' days which crowd the calendar.

There he hung, and clung to the bell-ropes, and swung the great bell clanging in the tower; the great bell which two black-robed fathers, knee-braced and straddle-legged, could only just control. Fever was in him, and the fires of fear and guilt, and an unnatural strength, but he could not toll the bell; even if he had wanted to, he had not the art to feather the stroke of clapper on bronze. No toll of solemn anguish, no ringing singing chime, but a wild cacophony of sound burst from the bell, and below, in the priests' house, the fathers awoke and pulled on their cassocks over their tight black shirts and came forth from the house, rubbing their eyes and tugging at their beards, knowing not whether to believe that vandals were abroad or that a miracle was happening under their noses, or, more accurately, over their heads. But the townsfolk did not come running to the church, for bell-ringing was to be expected when a man was dead, and they assumed that the holy men, anxious upon their duty, were causing it, unmusical and strange though it might be.

For long moments, Stephen strained and swung on the bell-ropes, and with every fierce clang his madness drained out of him. And then he let go, and felt his way very carefully and quietly down the dark narrow winding stair, and let himself out of the little door, and knelt, briefly and awkwardly, before the sanctuary. As he went out of the church, he knelt again and lit one of the waiting vigil cups, conveying the flame to it with steady hand. There in the vestibule was the old candle-seller, peering at him with her rheumy eyes; he walked steadily past her, and all the rest

of her days she knew, for certain, that she had been face to face with a ghost.

Out and down, away from town by a back road, without a glance; out and away, walking now firmly, with a new strength, as a man walks after utter exhaustion when he finally glimpses the lights of home, Stephen skirted the town, went beyond the tar-flower bushes and the pines, beyond the mallow hedges, through the dune grass and the willows down to the all-forgiving sea. The sand in which the sun day-long had nestled was still warm to his naked feet, but the water was cold, cold, healing and cold and clean upon his ankles, his knees, his thighs, his belly, as he strode further and further until at last he could walk no longer, and the undertow whirled him back into the sea's womb where it was useless to struggle longer, even if he had had the will to do so.

And the tide ebbed with a great sound, as if acres of silk were being torn.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

YOUR Greek takes his religion seriously; it is his emotional release from the spiritual gravity which presses upon him; it satisfies his need for drama and color when he cries out against a colorless world. Those many centuries past, when even a common workman might chisel and carve and file a lumbering marble heap down to the fine core of his dream, and when any wandering shepherd could rival the piping of his patron, Pan, such a release as religion was not so much needed to ease heart-weariness, for then his heart had not yet wearied. The gods were young and full of careless vigor, needing only the propitiation of beautiful temples and songs and legends to keep them in happy cooperation with mankind, or, indeed, out of man's way altogether. True, there were the dark Fates and the Minotaurs, the man-destroying Cyclops and certain dread demons of sea and air, but on the whole their gods were good gods, benevolently disposed toward mortals (which, after all, were only flesh made in imitation of their divinity, and rather poorly made, at that, as though a clumsy workman had been set to a task too skilled for him). The gods were not jealous; flowers and bull's blood on an altar, silver crossing palm when oracles were consulted, and an occasional garlanded virgin mortared up, living, in the foundations of a bridge to please the water sprites was about all the attention they demanded.

But today, with beauty and wonder and the world's

dawn-freshness stripped away, the simple old easy-going gods have sighed and passed, and your Greek needs something in his life, something more than bed and board and sponge-reek and sponge-slime, and the wash of the sea and the fear of wind and the feel of money in his hand to keep him even upon the axis of his being. Once he might have cried "All's right with the world!" but now he does not live in a world to which the expression is applicable; if only a little of something is right only some of the time it is the most he can expect. Like other highly emotional peoples, he turns to stylization in religion; church services evolve into a miracle play of great beauty and great formality; so is God propitiated, and so, also, is man's soul, which God demands.

Although Christidos knew well the two priests in residence in Turtle Run, one of them being an old widower, warped with rheumatism, grey-bearded and still strong of voice, and the other young, almost a mere acolyte, unmarried and perhaps destined never to do so, but to go on in the higher and celibate monkish orders unattainable to marrying priests; yes, though Christidos knew these fathers well, and revered them, and gave his tithe without stint and always bowed when he passed them in the street, he was, unlike most of his neighbors, not at all a church-going man. His cousin Spiros took big Sophia and her large brood to services every Sunday and holy day, always once and oftener twice, and sat under the priest's nose as he intoned, as though he expected some sacred manna to drip from the father's beard straight into his lap. But, after the children grew too old for Sunday School, Christidos seldom bothered. Zoe was a frequent communicant; John and Stephen attended with their father on Christmas and Easter and otherwise paid little heed; Stephen did not even

trouble to lift his cap when passing the church, a fact which troubled Christidos, but not unduly, because he put it down to the boy's overall restlessness and rebellion. Indeed, since the fathers had come to the house to sprinkle holy water last Easter, Christidos had seen neither one, to speak to, all these months. He was concerned with his business, his garden, his children; and with his business, his garden and his children he worried. They were his life. God was always there if Christidos needed Him, and therefore, like many of us, he put demands upon Him only in moments of great sorrow or gladness, and also, like many of us, such moments were a mere sprinkling among the days of his life.

Actually, he had not considered his troubles worthy of the personal attention of the Deity since those terrible three days and nights, more than ten years past, when he held Stephen's feverish body in his arms, and wrapped his twitching arms and legs in cool damp cloths, and sobbed himself, hearing the pain-wracked childish sobs. The evil passed, the fever subsided, but prayer remained on Christidos' lips for many weeks while the wan thin little body rested and mended, healed (save for the slight limp which eventually went away altogether), plumped and grew strong again. It was then that people began to remark that Stephen was a spoiled child, but they never said so to his father.

But now Stephen was gone, and Christidos had need to talk with God, but found no words to say. They had gathered up the clothes the boy had torn from his burning body and brought them home with the packet of sweaty, guilty bills still wadded in a pocket; the old candle-seller, nodding her palsied black-shawled head, had told her tale

of a mad and naked ghost. They had followed his track as he skirted the town; here a dog had barked as though at an intruder; there, someone had seen a white figure darting through the long dusk; at another place flowers were trampled by plunging feet; finally, the track led straight into the sea; the merciful tide had not yet surged back to blot it out.

Truly, Christidos had great need of his God.

In the parlor above the Parthenon Bar and Grill the mortals remains of George Pappas lay on an improvised bier supported by two straight-backed chairs. These mortal remains had been cleaned and rubbed with holy oil; they had been dressed in Christidos' good black suit which he had worn at his wedding and had expected to wear for his own funeral rites, and, unaccustomed suit and all, they lay lapped in fine white linen. The eldest of the fathers, wearing his priestly stole of mourning purple, had swung the censer over the body and over the kneeling people; downstairs the Parthenon Bar and Grill was closed; Cimon had helpfully printed a sign "On Account of Death" and stuck it into the corner of the screen. His spelling was not very good, and the letters were drunkenly crooked, but the sign served the purpose of notifying all and sundry of trouble in the house, as though they did not know that already.

Downstairs sat Christidos, quite alone, refusing to lift his head when Zoe came tenderly to put her arm across his drooping shoulders, when Spiros forced a cup of steaming coffee in his hand. He ignored Zoe; perhaps he neither saw nor heard her. He ignored the coffee; the cup rolled and toppled in the saucer; he did not even glance downward when the scalding liquid soaked his leg from knee to ankle but the muscles of his leg twitched, feeling pain

even though the thinking mind was anesthetized. When, on the evening of the second day, John and Spiros came to bring him to the funeral services, he rose dumbly; he had not stirred, since being told of Stephen's drowning. The little black cat with the white vest had begged for attention, sniffing at his shoes, giving up hope for a wadded cellophane from the cigar and tripping off about her own amusement, self-sufficient but puzzled. The shape that hunkered on a chair in the shuttered restaurant, nearly as shadowy-dark as on a moonlight night, was the Boss, still, but since he did not act like the Boss she soon lost interest in him. Occasionally Christidos' nostrils twitched with the sweet-sharp spicy stain of incense that still lingered from the holy censer; otherwise, he sat like stone.

But now it was time to go, and he went with the others; the mortal remains of the poet were taken up and borne down the steps from the upper floor, (the pall-bearers careful to keep the bier level, even while descending the narrow stairs), and thence out into the shell road. The old priest in his stole went ahead, chanting softly through the mist of his beard, and the young priest walked just behind him, still swinging the censer. And out came the waiting people, out of the houses, out of the curio shops and the coffee-houses and the sponge market, even out of the Olympia Bar, where men set down their glasses and wiped their mouths with the backs of their hands and left their drinking and their never-completed card-games to pay respect to George Pappas, whom, living, they scorned. But actually, they came to pay respect to Stephen Christidos and to Stephen's father, walking with bowed head beside the bier. Perhaps a few came out of curiosity, because there is much of drama in all burial customs and

services, and perhaps a few came for the small glasses of sweet wine which they could cadge after the ceremonies were over, but most walked with Christidos as brother with brother, and their hearts were heavy with his grief. And every man and woman who came out on the shell road that evening carried a lighted taper, so that, seen from the hill, the cortege looked like a procession of fireflies.

Mr. Economou, the grey little retired diplomat, walked there with a taper in his hand, and so did the General, and crab-sidling Pete Cockinos hitched along beside him, all the familiars of the Parthenon Bar and Grill, with their women and little ones were in the glowworm file, even Mr. Diamond, his round wet black eyes habitually flicking about him, looking for business prospects; client or woman brought identical expressions to his face. All, all walked with Christidos, and John supported the arm of his father on the one side, and Zoe on the other, until they came to the church.

There on the porch of the church the body of George Pappas was lifted from the bier and laid into its final coffin-bed, and beside that coffin, indeed, identical with it, was another, wreath-ridden as itself, save for this important difference; the second coffin was closed, and therefore was known to be empty, and a cenotaph, mere form and symbol of Stephen awash somewhere on the out-going tides. For this was the funeral of two men, the slayer and the slain, the forgiven and the forgiver, covered all over with these two narrow words: "Hic jacet."

And the congregation cried "Kyrie Eleison" three times, and fell silent, while the venerable old priest said his silent prayer for the dead, and Christidos and all the others saw the movement of his lips through his mist of beard and

knew how and for what he prayed, though, not being men of education, they did not know the words. However, Mr. Economou knew, and Alexis Dragoumis would have known, had he been standing there with the family which was now his family, instead of lying, eyes bandaged, in the hospital on the hill. Economou followed with his lips the moving lips of the old priest, and said the words with him, though in doing so he claimed something of diplomatic immunity in encroaching upon a priestly office.

"O God of spirits, and of all flesh, Who has trampled down Death and overthrown the Devil and given life unto Thy world, do Thou the same, Lord, today, giving rest to the souls of Thy departed servants, Stephen and George, into a place of brightness, a place of verdure, a place of repose, whence all sickness, sorrow and signing have fled away. Pardon every transgression which they hath committed, whether by word or deed or thought, for Thou art a good God, and lovest mankind. O Lord, there is no man who liveth and sinneth not; Thou only art without sin, and Thy righteousness is to all eternity and Thy word is true."

Basil Economou, saying these words with the father, remembered many things: the gay days in the Athens of his boyhood, where the air was crisp as iced champagne as he rode to a cafe with a girl on either arm under the violet-eyed skies; he remembered Cairo and London and Washington and a horrid little post in the Levant where he had once been banished for some diplomatic indiscretion; he remembered a long career of reports and worry and dinner parties and dispatches and mild flirtations, a precarious lifetime of clinging like a small leech to the hide of consulate and embassy through a dozen governmental

shake-ups, and fearing only that he would be noticed and dislodged. And it seemed to him that, since his retirement, he had already begun to enter into that place of brightness, of verdure and repose whereof the father spoke; it took only this hour of reverence paid to a man and a boy he had scarcely noticed when they lived to teach him that, since he had entered the security of his pensioned retirement he had been very, very bored indeed; nothing, nothing at all for months had happened to relieve his boredom even minutely until the matter of Dragoumis' divorce awakened memories of ladylike laughter tittering over old Athenian scandals. All these months, he had rested in a place of brightness and been bored with it; he had lacked even the energy to go back home, as he had planned, but had remained here in Turtle Run, where he had come for a Florida vacation as his physician had advised, before packing the accumulation of years in his Washington flat and taking ship for Athens. Sun and sea-smell and scrub palmetto and palm and rustling wind had lapped him in safety; he had grown quiet and dull and bored, bored, bored. Truly all sickness, sorrow and sighing had fled away from him, but, having fled, they left very little to take their places. Ah, should Heaven be a place of brightness, should he be caught up into another sweet security without ever escaping the first? While his lips moved with the father's, Basil Economou determined to write letters to Athens that very day, to write to his landlord in Washington ordering that his things be packed; he had dreaded the task of packing up, thinking that all must be done himself, but suddenly he saw how easy it would all be. He would not even stop in Washington, but go straight on to New York as soon as passage abroad could be arranged; a week or

two in Paris, and then Athens awaited him, Athens with her violet-eyed evenings, her breath of cool champagne, her balls and intrigues, her dagger-wit and dagger-danger. The blood would stir in his veins again; he had been sluggish so long, and what matter if his things were broken in packing or if the landlord or the movers stole small treasures? The anger of discovering theft and breakage would rattle gladly through his bones; here he felt nothing, nothing at all. For Mr. Economou, and perhaps for him alone, the little picture-postcard town of Turtle Run had been a place of brightness; these two coffins now before him reminded him that perhaps another place of brightness lay not too far ahead, and he must hurry quickly lest it catch him up in an eternal boredom.

Now the young priest spoke, and now the elder, no longer silent but softly chanting; the ritual songs of death rose over the heads of the people and they responded: "Alleluia":

"He shall defend thee under His wings, and thou shalt be safe under His feathers . . . thou shalt not be afraid for any terror by night nor for the arrow that flieth ..."

Yes, thought Zoe, it will be like that for Stephen, and for poor old crazy Lord Byron, too; God shall defend them under His wings, and they shall be safe under His feathers. She thought of Stephen when he was six and seven and eight; how soft and yellow his hair had been under her hands as she combed it, almost like a downy yellow chick; how tender the hollow at the back of his neck as she scrubbed and scolded away the little-boy smells and little-boy dirt from his thin white body; more clearly than the coffins before her she could see Stephen set, naked, on a straight chair and her father on his knees before him, patiently mas-

saging that weak leg in his strong brown hands, though Stephen sometimes cried because the muscles ached so long, so long after his fever. But it did not seem at all real to her that Stephen was dead; somehow she kept thinking that he had only run away for a while, fearing punishment. Oh, she would never scold him again, if he would only come home! And here they were praying him away under the ground, no, not under the ground, that wasn't right. That was what was happening to the other one, to the burdened coffin, but not to the cenotaph. Stephen had got clean free and away from them all. But she and Alexis, yes, she and Alexis and her father, too, might yet creep under God's bright feathered wing, and John might creep there, too, and all the people of the earth, save only little lost Stephen; who would there be left to help him find the way?

And Zoe wept for her lost brother, and tried to hide her weeping, for, though it was the custom of women to make a loud wailing at funerals, she saw her father standing like a weathered stone, or the lopped trunk of a blasted tree, and knew that she must not add to the unbearable burden of his grief with outbursts of her own. If Alexis could have stood beside her she might have broken wholly, but without him she must hold strong against her grief; she must remember that life is for the living, not the dead . . .

"O look Thou upon me and be merciful unto me, as Thou usest to do unto those that love Thy name . . ."

Fat Sophia, standing beside Zoe not only because she was the girl's only woman relative, but because there was more room and better air toward the front of the crowd, said excitedly to herself that, just last week, she was saying

to her Spiros, as she said once a week, or maybe once a day, for that matter, "Nothing ever happens here!" And now everything at once, two dead, a smashed car and a body lost at sea . . . why, maybe this would get written up in the Greek newspapers way up in New York City, and in ten days or so she and her man would sit in their kitchen, she with her coffee and crocheting and he with his *tsipouro* or his wine, and he'd read the item to her, shaping "Tur-tle Run" carefully with his lips as he shaped "Chi-ca-go" or "I-o-wa." Why, here was a story they might read about in the papers and she stood right in the middle of it, as it was happening, in her best skirt and black shawl . . . but oh, the ceremonies took so long, so long; ever since she began the first of their unnumbered children, both living and dead, she had steadily gained weight, and it was hard to stand for hours as she must stand now; the services had hardly begun and she was tired already. With all the excitement, and feeling sad, too, she came queer all over; if she quite fainted, of course, they'd bring her a chair to lean on. One thing that fretted her, her Spiros would eat less and less after this, and drink more and more; he was a thinker, he was, and felt things deeply; it'd be only a night or two before she was pregnant again, because at such times he thought he had to do *that* in order to drive the thoughts out of his head to get to sleep, and even though her numerous pregnancies did her no harm, still they were a nuisance, and after all, she and her man were getting old for such things. It made her ashamed, these past few years; like a couple of goats rutting in a clover patch, that's how they'd acted. And with a son of their own married and well on the way to getting babies himself. To take her mind off the general unpleasantness

of her thoughts she counted heads, even though it meant twisting her plump neck around in a disrespectful way; she would be the one who'd have to get out glasses and cups and serve the funeral wines and cakes. You couldn't expect Zoe to do it, considering the circumstances, and, anyhow, counting passed the time.

"O, yet my soul live; I have gone astray like a sheep that is lost . . ."

That's a hot one, Cimon said to himself. That's a fine phrase to set before a parcel of Greek lamb-eaters. What's the church up to after all, trying to make us convict ourselves out of our own mouths that we're a race of cannibals? Let one sheep stray within sight of any man, woman or child in this town, and it'd be dead mutton in a jiffy, cooked in another, and then down the hatch. Down the little red lane. I oughta know. I've served up enough platters of the stuff. O God, take Stephen and that old fool poet under that feathered wing of yours, and let us go back and drink some wine. I don't mind about the scrounger, though maybe I'd feel easier if I'd been more generous with my cigarettes . . . not after he started hooking my tips, though. I can't say I mind about him at all. But it does seem hard for the kid to go the way he did . . . hard for the old man, that is. O God, take them unto you, and let us go back and drink some wine . . . I want to forget that in the midst of life we are in death . . .

The canticles continued interminably: *"O, a truth all things are vanity, and life is but a shadow and a dream . . ."*

The General nudged his artificial teeth with his tongue; lately he'd come to think that they, most certainly, were a vanity. One sore place on his gums no sooner healed than

another opened up; he, who at the beginning had only taken the teeth out to rinse them after eating, who had even managed an uncomfortable attempt at sleeping with them in his mouth, now put them in the last possible moment before leaving his tidy small barracks of a room, and often hurried home to ease them gingerly out of his aching jaws. Nevertheless, he would wear them, sore places or no. Nothing had come of paying Stephen dimes that he ill could spare for calling his name about in the coffee-house and tie drug-store, nothing at all, save that one or two old spongers, penniless and crippled with the bends so that they could no longer work, had developed the unattractive habit of trying to beg from him. No, he would have to think of some other way to become a man of importance; if the boy had not drowned himself, he might have been put to use . . . but there was no use at all for him now. The General, like many stupid people, had a superstitious fear of the trappings of religion without the faintest understanding of either God or man or the relation between them. At the suggestion of church or prayer, at the mere glimpse of a black-robed priest whisking about his business with no thought for generals whatsoever, he put on a stiff, grim, ceremonial face which made him more dignified and more unapproachable than ever, but inside himself he chilled and quavered like a child whose sins have been found out but whose punishment has not yet been determined. And still, now that he had his teeth, now that he had good new shoes which had never belonged to anyone else, now that he had dreamed his dream . . . He stared haughtily over the coffins, and then lowered his eyes, but, in lowering them, since he stood a little to one side, he looked straight into the eyes of Spiros, and Spiros'

eyes glittered with unshed tears, not for the dead, but for Christidos, his friend, his partner and cousin.

"When we have acquired the world, we then take up our abode in the grave, where kings and beggars lie down together . . ."

That this should happen, the small brown man cried out silently. Was it for this that I came with him, with Christidos, from our home in Symi to a foreign land? That he, who does no wrong, should know such wrong to be done? That his son, whom he loved like gold, ah, more than gold, his golden son, should wash out to sea like the guttings of fish, the shells of crab, the beaks of squid that I slop into the river every day? Was it for this? And, as his eyes met the bleak eyes of the General, shuttered to shield that frightened core of a man, Spiros thought: aye, kings and beggars lie down together, and the grave covers all, but though I am no king, I shall not lie down under the same cover with him. Let him keep out of the Parthenon Bar and Grill from now on, him and his arrogant eyes; I cook good food to put under his high nose no longer. Whatever Christidos says, whether we quarrel over it or not, that big faker stays out of our place!

In his anger with the General, standing there in new shoes and a new suit and shirt while his unpaid chits gathered dust on the hook beside the cash-register back in the Parthenon, Spiros somewhat assuaged his sorrow for his cousin. I shall have indigestion for a week from these past two nights, he said to himself, and could not have helped belching, there in church; he could not have helped it if, in actuality, he had stood at the very feet of God. I shall not be able to touch food for a week, he said, and glared at the General as though he were the cause of it all.

"How dost Thou press milk in abundance from Thy breasts, O Virgin? How dost Thou nourish the Nourisher of Creation?"

Pete Cockinos had edged his crabwise way down the hill, sitting down on the curbstone when he came to the sidewalk and hitching himself over it with his powerful arms, since he lacked the strong arm of Dragoumis to support him. He had come, not because he cared in the least whether George Pappas and Stephen were dead, or whether the people of Turtle Run held services for them or held them (or the one of them who left suitable remains behind him) up by the heels in the middle of the sponge market and salted and dried him and sold him for a new kind of herring. No, Pete Cockinos came for only one reason: to watch what went on and to tell his Major about it. For a long while, he had been Dragoumis' eyes, and, on occasion, when an operation was in progress or the Major was convalescing, his eyes and legs, though he had such a poor excuse of legs for himself. He watched Zoe in particular; Pete thoroughly approved of Zoe, since she seemed to be good for his Major. Probably when they were married and the Major had his little school on the hills of Hymettus, across from Athens, he would be servant and handyman for them, and look after the goats and sweep out and dig up the garden square and keep an eye on the children when they strayed out of sight of the cottage windows. Zoe, he could report, conducted herself well at the services, and Christidos, who was as many notches above Pete in social station as he was below Dragoumis, was truly a father stunned with grief. A father who behaved as a father should, and what was all this of kings and beggars lying down together, and an embarrassing talk of milk

from the breast of a woman, even such a woman ... so far removed from evil thoughts ... as the Virgin? Pete crossed himself a couple of times, remembering a girl or two in Corinth, and a few more in the small towns progressively north to Epirus, with breasts sticking up like ripe plums. If you could take time off from fighting a war to poke them a bit they'd squirt a hot sweet milk! But the breasts of the Virgin were no fit talk for any man, not even for a priest as he spoke the words of the liturgy. Pete hoped he'd been mistaken, because having no learning at all, the educated words of the church came with difficulty from ear to brain. But those were the words he'd heard, and he wouldn't repeat them to his Major, either. Not to say that such a thing wouldn't have come to the Major's notice; he knew everything, but he wouldn't like hearing that they were spoken in his lady's hearing. Pete had automatically elevated Zoe to the status of "Lady," in the snobbish sense, immediately that the Major knew he loved her, as he knew whatever the Major knew, and often knew it sooner, except, of course, the things that came out of books.

He took another long look at Zoe and then sidled out of the crowd, not waiting for the services to finish. He'd seen what he'd come for; he could report that Zoe's brother was accorded an orthodox funeral, in spite of the way he died, and that Zoe and her father behaved themselves. His Major would probably scold him for coming at all, first, because it was almost more than he could do to get down the hill alone, and second, because something of what he'd done bordered upon spying and gossiping. However, he'd done his duty, and by the time he'd edged and jockeyed and hauled his crabshape up the hill, the Major would be quite awake and ready for a bit of a

chat. And, as for mourning the death of Stephen, both he and Dragoumis had seen fine bold flesh die before.

"Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they shall inherit the earth . . ." The Beatitudes had begun; the long chanting approached the final canticles.

Mr. Diamond, like the General, was thoroughly scared by the appurtenances of God, but he lacked the cold countenance to conceal it. He was a Saturday sinner and a Sunday saint; everything inside him shriveled up like a spider on a hot griddle at the bare whisper of death. But it was good business to attend funerals. Not that he got much out of them in a spiritual way, neither the words nor the sense, neither the song nor the meaning. He was there, and he held his taper in hands so moist and hot that the bottom of it melted nearly as fast as the top, and as soon as possible he would go out by himself (since, as in the past, none would care to go with him) and would mop his sweat-beaded face and head, and his sweat-funnelled neck, and go to his home to drink a a Scotch and soda (none of those foreign-type Greek drinks for him) and look at a picture-magazine, hunting out the candid camera shots of bathing girls and poring over them until he felt sleepy. Mr. Diamond slept extremely well, as a rule, and almost never dreamed,

"Come, let us give the last kiss unto the dead, rendering thanks unto God. For he hath vanished from among his kin, and presseth onward to the grave, and vexeth himself no longer."

First the old priest, and then the younger, kissed the cold lips of George Pappas, and then came Christidos, the chief mourner, to the coffin, and bent over but could not

quite kiss the clayey lips; having bent, he stayed over the body a long while, studying the features of the pseudo-poet as though he had never seen them, or indeed had never seen the face of any man, living or dead, before. After a time John urged him upright, and then it was he murmured: "I could have kissed my son." Those were the first words Christidos had spoken these many hours.

"For the spirit hath vanished from its tabernacle; its clay groweth black"

All the congregation sighed as the priest chanted these words, most dreadful of all in the whole ceremony of putting aside mortal flesh; more horrid than threats of hell and torment, since now the actual decomposition of the beloved body was admitted and acknowledged by the mourners.

Yes, the spirit can vanish from its tabernacle; yes, the clay turns black and stinks and rots and slimes away, John thought, and the man that is formed of rotting clay staggers out into the sun and grows whole again, as an onion, buried in the earth rots nearly to the core and then puts up lush green shoots, and the white solid core of the onion feeds on the putrid, collapsing globe of its last year's growth, and fattens into a globe again, and, if it is not dug up and eaten (by someone whose clay, one day, groweth black and vexeth him no longer) it rots to the core again, and sends up green shoots; the whole business of onion dissolving into slime and resolving into flesh keeps on indefinitely. But is not man something more than an onion? Can't he pull himself up out of his own puddle of unpleasantness and replant himself clean and fresh in some new earth? Some blessed earth of the spirit, where, all sins forgiven, all power of sinning forgotten, all touch of evil

washed away, all memories expunged that nag from without and gnaw from within, he may grow whole once more? That must be something like what the Church and the priests meant, what the Word of God was trying to say, if one could only understand; that must be what they all meant by death, first a scourge and then a comforter. But couldn't there be a sanctuary like that for living man, a place where he, John, could go? Where, never again, the red veils of horror would close in upon him, breathing and blowing like curtains in some hot and sulphurous wind, where never again the nightmarish compulsion would come upon him? Where, never more, would he get lost in the backwash of Jacksonville or St. Petersburg or Tampa, to go down to the depths of hell drinking and whoring, and drag himself, sick and sodden, up to the rim again, and walk like a man a little way only to go down once more?

John had been thinking about a withdrawal from the world for a long While, without consciously making plans; when he first came home from overseas there had been nights when he fought suicide, which was one reason why he refused to drive his car when his head ached and he felt that at any moment the world would burst apart from sheer internal pressure. And after he and the thought of suicide had wrestled together, like some unhappy Jacob wrestling with an angel whose wings were dingy and without glory upon them, it seemed that the thought of suicide would win, for somewhere, somehow, he must find sanctuary from living. Then came the sour wasteland of the past year or more, a profitless wasteland life of holding on, of keeping himself unto himself, until the red veils swirled around him and the headaches began and he once

more descended to hell and crawled upwards. All the sweetness and simple security of his boyhood seemed to have gone; the dear good life of the home; now his father seemed only an old and weary and ignorant immigrant speaking broken English, messing about between a stove and a cash register, and all for what? For what? And Zoe, his sister, but female like other females, and like other female creatures not of much use . . . unless he found one in the alley backwash when he ran there to lose himself. And Stephen, the fresh kid, spoiled by the old man and no damn good . . . ah, but Stephen, Stephen his brother, rocking somewhere in the womb of the restless sea . . . Somehow, he was to blame . . .

Of all in the congregation, John wept most openly. And as he wept he knew that only repentance could heal him; that, in one way or another, his father and his sister, and all the people about him had taken upon themselves the garment of deliverance as they stood before the two coffins, one so light, being empty, and one hardly heavier, since the body of the poet weighed not much at all. And, too, he knew what he must do. That queer tale the drunk had told him in the barroom; what was the name of the place? Mount Athos?

That place of gold and of peace, of black-robed peaceful men?

Perhaps that was the life for which he was intended, the life of service and withdrawal. They would take him in; there were sanctuaries for sinners and outsiders; he could work in the fields and groom the olive groves, or labor among the vineyards and clean the wine vats; let it be for others to flavor and savor the wine. In a kind of waking dream he saw himself air-borne; he looked over the side

of the plane and saw its shadow scudding over the sea. The shadow was smaller than his thumbnail; he had gained altitude rapidly . . . over the sun-hammered sea by day, the wine-dark sea at night, under the soft stars, he flew to the mountain of peace. Almost he could hear the monks chanting their matins and evensongs; almost, peace, like an infinitely tender and sorrowing god, opened its arms for him.

But no. This was only another kind of escape. Like suicide. Like turning into "Johnny Mitchell" and getting lost in the back alleys of Jacksonville or Ybor City and waking up sick, in some whore's hot dingy little room. And, all at once, John knew that he no longer needed to escape, and that he was strong enough to refuse a sanctuary, even though it were offered. He had a job to do. He had to stay with his father. His father had been important to him all the time, and he had not known it.

Stephen had been important, too, but John, in his anger at the world, in his cautious cover-up of his own soul-sickness, had failed to see it. Zoe had come through unhurt; of all of them she was the most fortunate. If John had paid more attention to Stephen, if he'd tried to talk to the kid, and helped him with his studies, and helped him get a job, if he'd taken just an hour or two, now and then when he was home, to find out what Stephen was thinking . . . He couldn't remember a single time, since he came back from overseas, when he'd talked with his brother about anything. He would never recover from remorse, now that the long arm of the sea had reached out and gathered Stephen in, as once it had gathered the beautiful youth Hippolytus, son of Theseus and the Amazon queen . . .

Now, his father was the most important of all. Looking down at him, (for, though John was only slightly taller than his father, the older man was stooped as though he had borne a great weight on his back this night) he thought of something he had heard in a lecture when he was at school; he could not remember whether it was in history or some literature class, but the soft monotone of the lecturer's voice droned on clear, clearer than the drone of the priests intoning the liturgy:

"And so, there is wisdom and kindness and courage among ordinary folk, as among the heroes. Socrates, a man of humble stem, but honest enough; of the commonest history; of a personal homeliness so remarkable as to be the cause of wit in others—the rather that his broad good nature and exquisite taste for a joke invited the sally, which was sure to be paid back. The players personated him on the stage; the potters copied his ugly face on their jars and jugs. He was a cool fellow, adding to his humor a perfect temper, and a knowledge of his man, be he who he might whom he talked with, which laid the companion open to certain defeat in any debate. And in debate he immoderately delighted. The young men are prodigiously fond of him, and invite him to their feasts, whither he goes for conversation. He can drink, too; has the strongest head in Athens; and after leaving the whole party under the table goes away, as if nothing had happened, to begin new dialogues with somebody that is sober. In short, he was what our country people call 'an old one,'

"Plain old fellow that he was, the rumor ran that, on one or two occasions in the war with Boeotia, he had shown a determination which had covered the retreat of a troop; and there was some story that, under cover of a joke, he

opposed the popular vote in the city government. He is very poor, but then, he is hardy as a soldier, and can live on a few olives; usually, in the strictest sense, on bread and water . . ."

The lecturer's drone melted into the insistence of the liturgy. John looked again at Christidos. Now why, out of all his memories, had that talk about Socrates come back so clearly? His father was neither as ugly nor as wittily wise as the ancient one, but grief had drawn a reasonable parallel for John. His father, too, had been proffered his bitter dram, nor shrank from it, but took it with both hands and drained it to the dregs—and yet he lived. A plain old fellow, with a plain good mind, with wisdom and kindness and courage. No, John could no longer think of escape; he no longer needed to escape, now that his father needed him. For he was the only one of his father's children to remain. And he was happy, happier than he had been for a very long while, and he put his arm gently through his father's arm, and after a moment Christidos looked into his eyes, and, in spite of the agony of both men, father and son felt each other's loss and loneliness and love.

After the kissing of the corpse, the congregation flowed back together as a wave, as waters no longer divided, and with the chanting of the absolution, John felt himself absolved; absolution was said for him, as well as for the dead:

"If either of these, either George or Stephen, be under the ban of excommunication, or hath incurred the curse of his father or mother, or hath fallen under his own curse, or hath sinned by any oath, or hath been bound, as a man, by any sins whatsoever, but hath repented him thereof,

with contrition of heart, he is now absolved from all these faults and bonds."

The coffin was locked, and once more the pall-bearers took up the remains of George Pappas, now in their final bed (quilted and lined with rayon satin that was frayed only a little at one end, for this coffin was a stock number and imperfect, and doubtless would have been returned to whatever manufacturer of coffins makes the ones ordered by the Greek community of Turtle Run for the interment of their dead, had not George Pappas happened along to beg it in death, as in life he had begged the cracked eggs and spotted fruit that no one else would eat) and the congregation made ready to go forth to the grave. For, what with the psalms and the chants and the canticles, the praying and chanting and kneeling, the dark of the night had passed; some of the people had slipped away to their homes to sleep, and some had gone out to the coffee-houses to drink and think and rest their aching feet; indeed, only John and Zoe and their father had stood continuously during the night, never going out once to rest. Even their old priest and the young one had taken turns, relieving each other at hourly intervals, but Christidos stayed on his feet like a lump of stone, and his son and daughter stayed with him, one on either side. By now the first light began to finger its way westward and the people returned, one by one, for it was time to go forth to the graveyard.

Once more Christidos walked numbly between John and Zoe, following the bier, but he turned his head aside as they went out and looked long at the empty and closed coffin which had served as symbol and cenotaph for Stephen's body. Two men already were moving it along

one of the side aisles; it would be taken down through the back of the church and stored in the basement until another coffin, or another cenotaph, was needed; it was not unusual for a coffin to serve as this one had once or more than once, and then finally be given an occupant and buried in the dry earth of the graveyard, for many are lost in any town where the men follow the sea.

The hands of Christidos are in the world and of the world. They have quieted the feverish forehead; they have straightened and strengthened the racked limbs; they have stroked a cat; they have coaxed thyme and dill and basil into fragrant growth. They have also known hideous happenings. They have witnessed the tragedy and the transformation of death in an ignoble gutter. But it is to his face that we look for light. Nor is that sad serenity, that sweet grave expression in his countenance an Oriental, un-Greek longing for annihilation. It is not the sadhu of India with his knotted, tangled locks; nor the fakir smeared with ashes; nor the wild-haired dervish. It is the face of a man ravaged and laid waste by a burning agony of grief; and it is at the same time the face of a man who has conquered that agony, who transcends all remorse, all questions, all the sordid and meaningless sterilities of dusty regret.

As the people walked to the graveyard they sang that hymn which begins "O Holy God, glory now and ever," and when they reached the open grave they sang "Open, O earth, and receive that which was made from Thee." And after the body was lowered into the grave the old priest strewed the coffin-lid crosswise with common dust from the shell road which he had brought up with him on a little trowel, and he sprinkled it with holy oil from the vigil lamp already in place at the head of the grave, and

sifted over it the fragrant ash from the dying glow in the censer. And the grave was filled, and as it came to earth-level and then mounded, the people sang again "Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit"; thus were the remains buried with thanksgiving and joy, for it was time for the end of all weeping, since the dead had already escaped under the warm wing-feathers of a vast and gentle and vigilant God.

At the song of thanksgiving, Christidos lifted up his head for the first time and looked about him, and he saw the world very clearly; the golden fingers of the sun snuffed out the last pale cold stars of morning and the trees changed from clipped black silhouettes into living things of green, and the numbness slipped from Christidos' heart, and, though he was very tired, he looked at the morning and found it good. Now that he was alive again, and could weep or curse or pray, he no longer felt the need of doing so. For two nights and a day his soul had fled from him; now it was come home, and he made it welcome. Stephen was dead; that he could not change. Stephen had come near death before, when he was born, when the fever took him as a child. But Death was not yet ready for Stephen; Death bided through years of worry and scoldings and boy-sweetness and boy-misdeemeanors until now. And in taking Stephen when He did, Lord Death had in some measure given that boy-sweetness to Christidos forever. Christidos would grow old; indeed, had aged already; John and Zoe would live out their years; but his golden one, his Stephen, inhabited a perpetual springtime set apart. Such was his son, his golden one, who made mistakes upon occasion, but, being innocent, could do no wrong.

Widows magnify the good qualities of their dead hus-

bands, elevating men who are only average providers into wizards of industry, putting haloes around the heads of drunkards and pouring steel down the spines of cowards and snarling like nursing tigers if the towers of sanctity they have erected are threatened. A wife-beater develops a disposition mild as cream a year after he is dead, and a lustful woman-chaser walks the earth with his eyes turned heavenward. And, as it sometimes happens, a father attaches all sorts of lovely attributes to a lost son, and no one is the worse for his believing them to be true.

So it was that Stephen, who, after all, was no better and no worse than any other proud, lazy, undisciplined and beautiful lad, became something more than mortal in his father's eyes. This change was not gradual; it happened all at once, as the people walked back from the graveyard to the town.

As time passed, Christidos rejoiced that Zoe would soon be married, and that the delicate operation performed in the hospital on the hill had given Alexis some percentage of sight. It was not completely successful; the day the Major walked down to the Parthenon Bar and Grill, no longer guided by Pete Cockinos, but only offering his arm to the crab-man to help the other over the curb was blessed to him as it was to Zoe, and he ran to greet Alexis with outstretched hands. Daylight and dark were no longer the same now to the Major, but he saw all objects surrounded with an outline of light like an opalescent fringe. He said that it added strange beauty to the remembered world, and that, seeing Zoe as she appeared to him in a nimbus of softly quivering light, he could never confuse her loveliness with that of other women. He could never read print again, even with the most intricate con-

trivances of the opticians, but the color and glow of the world, and the face of his beloved, were so much more than he had long hoped for that he was gloriously content. Afternoon upon afternoon, he and Zoe made their plans; Basil Economou had managed, through diplomatic channels, to obtain the divorce *in absentia*, quickly and quietly; the laws of both state and church were satisfied. The final confirmation was due any day, and Zoe could be wedded from her father's house after all, instead of having to follow Alexis to Greece and marry him in what, to her, almost amounted to a foreign land. All, all had been arranged, even the school among the olive trees, and the little cottage already bright with geranium and violet-eyed myrtle; Christidos could close his eyes and see it under the sun, with the bright frocks and blouses of his grandchildren bobbing out of the door . . .

But Stephen, that was a different matter. Stephen, who had been his for such a brief while, really, only while he was small and too young for the restlessness that harassed him, was his to keep forever. And he remembered the particular legend of his native island of Symi; the legend of young Glafkos of Anthidoni, who was a great fisherman and sailor and warrior, and the greatest diver of them all; who built the Argo of the Argonauts, which bore Jason on his quest of the Golden Fleece; and who fought the Tyrians and was the only fighter to escape unwounded; who went as far as Sicily to dive for sponges, and was as much at home under the sea as on land. And who, one day, dove from "The Leap of Glafkos," that rock upon which Christidos had himself played as a child, and so was seen no more, and the people, supposing that he chose to return no more, thereafter named him "Ocean

Sailor" and their special god. There does he dream eternally, at the bottom of the sea, feasting with old Oceanus, dreaming in a sea-nymph's arms. There, in an eternal springtime set apart, lives Stephen-Glafkos, who leaped from the beaches beyond Turtle Run as his father once leaped from the rock-point of Symi, that natal sand-grain under Poseidon's finger-nail.

Chapter Thirty

AT NIGHT the shutters are clapped-to over the windows of the Parthenon Bar and Grill, closing out the night thick-salted with stars; at night Cat is queen of the Parthenon. It is a narrow domain, but once she was a small and narrow queen and could imagine no more joy than lay in the ruling of it through the dark hours. She was alone, but never lonely; there was much to interest her when the restaurant was closed and empty. There is still much of interest; there are delicious tidbits to be found here and there under the tables. There are spots of congealed grease under the oven to be sniffed and licked; and her whiskers must be painstakingly licked and paw-scraped afterwards, for cats love the taste of fat on their tongues but dislike the feeling of it on their faces. There are black beetles and big grey woolly spiders to hunt out and toss from paw to paw. There are mysterious sounds to keep Cat alert: the scurry of a mouse, the papery rustle of a cockroach, or the gurgle of pipes when water is drawn upstairs. There are the cellophane balls which the Boss wads up and tosses to her when he lights his cigars, and these balls are a delight indeed, for, though they lack taste, they stay crisp and crackling for a whole night's play, and thus are far more exciting than a black beetle or a fuzzy grey spider, which is a poor toy at best, broken and lifeless after a few strokes of her paw.

Nevertheless, with all these delights and more, Cat is not quite content in her domain. Nor is she quite so small

and narrow a queen as formerly; she carries her tail high now, as befits a female cat not unwilling to be wooed. Her sides are becomingly rounded; a month ago she slipped out the screen door just before the Boss locked up for the night, and spent some riotous hours frisking through the town. Her virgin scent had already aroused numerous prowling toms, and though when she slipped out she meant nothing more than an innocent game of hide-and-seek through the hibiscus hedges, she soon had her pick of suitors. When she returned, happily bedraggled and mew-ing hungrily, the Boss found her on the back steps and let her in, shaking his head over her, because he had no doubts of what had taken place. Yes, now her sides were sweetly rounded, but she could scarcely thread her way among the inverted goblets on the bar; already she brushed the glassy bells with her plumpness, and soon she would not care for leaping from floor to bar, or even from floor to chair-seat; there was a heaviness upon Cat; a bigness in her belly and a restlessness that possessed her, and that, in three weeks or so, would turn into that heightened sense of danger that makes a cat hide in some unreachable and impossible cranny while she births her young.

However, she makes her rounds; out to the cool, urine-rinsed tiles of the rest-rooms where she rolls on the floors, avoiding those evil-smelling spots where the Waiter has slopped soapy disinfectant. Down to the garbage can in the rear pantry, where she cocks her head at the narrow, precarious edge of the can. Once kitten-instinct urged her not to jump, lest she slip inside and be trapped, and her fur fouled with the slops inside; occasionally, over-tempted by the enticing smell of liver-scraps, she essayed the leap, but now she is not coaxed into hazard by any morsel

Nothing short of starvation would drive her to physical jeopardy; such is the cautionary instinct awakened by parturition.

There is a fuzzy grey spider as big as a mouse under the refrigerator; Cat, who once eased smoothly past the flicking fan-belt to toss her prey casually from paw to paw while the fly-wheel of the creaky old machinery whirled and caught and whirled again like the pulse of an uneasy cardiac, ignores that spider completely. There will be another under the juke-box, or, if not, a big black beetle, and whether there is or not, it is no matter. Cat goes often to inspect the clapped-to shutters, the locked doors, and, as she balances on the window-ledge, the light of the neon sign across the street picks out the green moon-glow of her eyes. If you were outside the Parthenon Bar and Grill you would easily know that Cat is there, though you could not tell her shape or color or size. She is Cat-Presence only, to the outsider, but within, she is queen, and she checks the shutters and the doors because she knows well that the delights of that riotous night a month past might be the most dread danger of all now; a tussle with a loving tom could be the death of her.

And so Cat keeps close watch in her narrow realm, and is sole queen, and yet is not quite content. There is more to the world than she had thought, but just now she can neither conquer it nor cope with it.

Cat visits the various tables, nose-nudging rice-grains, snuffing up cigar ash, scorning a bit of gristle and licking daintily at a shrimp-shell to which a bit of succulence still attached. She misses the smell of certain shoes which once scraped under the tables; she investigates, questions and accepts the smell of certain shoes to which she is unaccustomed. Cat can smell out the nature of a man from his

boots; some smell of happiness, and some of sour despair. Activity has one kind of smell to Cat, and inertia another, and upon some few there is the smell of death, even long before the man will lie a-dying. There was the smell of death upon the shoes of one of the pensioners, and he is gone now; there was the smell of death upon the scuffed sneakers worn by the Little Son, and he, too, is gone. At various times Cat has smelled fear on the Big Son's polished shoes, and the hot sweet summer-scent of love about the feet of Zoe after she has walked through the flowering grasses below the piney hill. Cat smells hunger on the shoes of those who come in, and fullness upon them after they have eaten. She knows all about the people of the Parthenon, all that is important to know, that is, but the only person of importance to her is the Boss.

The Boss is a shadowy giant whose particular purpose is to keep this place for her, and to provide her with milk to sup and bones to whet her delicately-needed teeth upon. His smell pleasures the scent-nerves of Cat, and she rewards him by rubbing cosily against his trouser cuffs, or sleeping confidently in his lap when he sits, late at night, working up his accounts. She does not even find it disagreeable when there is a worry-smell upon him, as she does when others worry.

She finds her cellophane ball, tossed near a table where a party of spongers sat earlier that evening; the ichor of the sponge, soaked into their boots, seems to huddle in thick tide-flat smells under that table, drawing to it the ebbing and freshening tide-flat smell that flows, day and night, over Turtle Run. She pounces, over and over, upon the wadded-up cellophane; it springs, satisfactory and resilient, from under her claw-tipped velvet pads. She chases the lively tasteless little ball up and down the res-

taurant, eventually forgets about it, comes back to it, worries it as it wedges in a crack. She sprawls in abandon on the cool floor, sleeps and wakes and pounces again.

Outside, day breaks; the feet of the Boss tread heavily on the stairs. He flings wide the clapped-to shutters; his ubiquitous broom sweeps out the scraps Cat scorned, the cellophane ball and the broken insects which have been her playthings of the night. He pours her milk in the cracked white saucer beside the stove-leg; she laps it with her thorny fastidious tongue. She leaps to the shelf where she sleeps away the day, a lower shelf than she is used to, now that she is big with young. She looks yearningly at the higher ledge with its inviting carton of plump soft rolls of toilet paper; some time must pass before she can safely essay that luxurious bed.

The Daughter hurries down; the Big Son follows; the smell of going-away has been upon their shoes for a long while now. The Waiter bangs the screen door and tramps over to take down his white coat and hang up his black one. Day begins in the Parthenon. Cat sleeps. Outside a fine rain begins falling.

