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The Zeus mystery



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*"Most glorious of the immortals, invoked by many names,
The Lord of Nature, unchangeable, Ever-all-powerful,
You are the Lord of Everything,
We hail you as every mortal:
Hail Zeus!
We are your children..."*

Cleanthes, Hymn to Zeus (free translation)

*"If you open the inside of your soul, you will most probably find a treasury of evil passions."
Democritus*

Prologue

Athens, Greece

Archeologist Patrick Lindsay was in hot water. He arrived in the Greek capital city barely two days ago, but a curly-haired man had been following him since he had left London. The hooked-nosed, always matted and black-haired Lindsay had come to Athens to meet professor Zaglanakis, the curator of the Acropolis Museum. He had already phoned the professor when he was still in London to ask for his permission to examine a special find, which was kept out of people's reach for several decades. Nevertheless, the reason for that was not a fear of some conspiracy; it was simply regarded as something with little intrinsic value, which would not have been worth displaying.

The word "cradle" was the one and only carved in Greek into that piece of stone broken from one of the Acropolis' columns centuries ago. Still, the finding was extremely important for Lindsay. Two months ago he made a major discovery which he shared with his colleagues. However, they blew him off because they found his theory far too bold. He did not give up, though. Having seen the find, he knew that all his ideas were true. He suspected that was the reason why the man was after him, and he already regretted revealing his discovery so carelessly in London. What's more he also published his opinion in a scientific journal. The mistake he made was undoubtedly grave but there was no way back for him now.

Furthermore, the situation turned out even worse, when Zaglanakis was killed in his own flat at night without anything being taken. Patrick was well aware that his theory had something to do with the murder. He was heading for the Acropolis while the man was breathing down his neck. His intention was to find a place where he could mingle with the crowd, but he also wanted to inspect the column which the ominous find was once a part of. Having bought a ticket, he entered at the territory of the Citadel, the magnificence of which could make people forget Athens' concrete jungle at any time of the day. Although, the Parthenon was scaffolded, the beauty of the temple which was raised to honor the goddess Athena was untouched by time.

Despite the fact that the area reminded him of a stonecutter's workshop; he believed that it probably looked similar in the days of Pericles, 144 B.C. Patrick tried to do his best to blend in the crowd of people who stopped to take delight in the sight of the Erechtheion's graceful building. It functioned as an ancient shrine where cults dating back to the Bronze Age had been preserved. The copies of the Caryatides functioning as columns gazed somewhere into the blue in all their splendour. The originals were guarded in the museum so that they were not exposed to the harmful effects of smog.

Glancing back hastily, Patrick noticed that the stranger was getting closer to him with a predator's smile on his face. The archaeologist's forehead was covered with beads of sweat while he was hurrying towards the Parthenon. He got around the building, caught sight of the column, which the certain piece of stone was broken from, and as he counted the pillars it turned out that he was on the right trail. He mingled with a group of Chinese tourists, who stood at the waist-high wall of the Acropolis, while taking photographs of the city, which stretched to the horizon in the shadows of the mountains. The white-painted houses glared in the rays of the sun.

Suddenly, he felt the weight of a hand on his shoulder, and a gentle pressure on his waist as the barrel of a gun was pressed against his ribs.

"Don't do anything stupid, Mr. Lindsay!"

The curly-haired man's gentle voice was in contrast to his threatening behaviour. He led the archeologist to a part of the wall free from tourists.

"What do you want from me?"

"Don't play the fool," hissed the man, while pressing the gun more forcefully against his victim's body. "If you cooperate, we will get through this quickly, and you will not end up like Zaglanakis."

"It was you who killed him?"

"Unfortunately I had no choice."

Patrick swallowed hard and thought over his situation. Finally, he decided to give in and told the man everything he knew.

"Thank you." The stranger smiled and pulled the trigger. The archeologist's body twitched as the bullet penetrated into it. It was only a faint pop which could not get the people's attention because a strong wind was blowing. The murderer put his victim on the wall in a sitting position and left while blowing a whistle.

He was already walking down the row of bazaars, when the scream of the first person who found the body sounded.

Chapter One

Crete, Greece

Three months later

While the ship Poseidon was cutting the waves at a calm speed, Crete emerged in the distance. There were seagulls hovering above the azure sea's surface. Sometimes, they swooped down from air like flying arrows to catch fish. John Morrison and his wife were leaning on the handrail on the deck of the ferry, taking delight in the beauty of the island, which was dominated by snow-covered mountains. They got closer and closer to the harbour – the most significant building of which was the Venesian fort erected in the 16th century – of Heraklion, the capital city.

John was a tall, blonde man in his thirties, and taught history at the Kingston University. His wife, Susan Morrison, was also a teacher, but she was specialized in literature. She was a head shorter than the man, who was literally head over heels for her. He felt physical pain if he could not touch his beloved red, wavy hair — which gently fell on her shoulders — each and every day. They had been married for four years but loved each other just like at the beginning of their relationship. The passion lived on. Completing each other perfectly, the couple did its best to nurture their love. The trip to Crete came in handy, since they had just celebrated their wedding anniversary a week before.

An old friend of the Morrison family, Count Robert Cornwell, who was the owner of an international hotel group, invited them to the island for his 50th birthday. The Count had been planning for several months to create an amazing holiday paradise never seen on Crete before, and he finally got the license to carry it out. As the end of the construction drew near, he decided to inaugurate his work by hosting a celebration, in which friends, business partners and other acquaintances were invited to. Knowing the man, the couple expected a spectacular party.

The ferry came closer and closer to the harbour, the crew got ready to dock, and the crowd of passengers could barely wait to set foot on the island. Finally, the ship docked, and they caught glimpse of a small part of the capital city teeming with life. There were buses waiting for prospective passengers, taxis ready for tourists, who could be an eventual source of money, and dozens of people hurrying to their business in the shadow of the Fort. There were snow-white fishing ships and cruisers moving gently back and forth on the water surface, octopuses hanging from racks set up on the beach so that the hot rays of the sun make them dry. While John and Susan was walking down the ramp, they caught sight of a building standing in the southern end of the harbour. It was the Arsenal, which was erected in the 16th century to help construct and repair the Aegean fleet. Even the illustrious city wall of Heraklion dates back to that time.

A fat, bearded man wearing a shirt with flower pattern showed up suddenly among the group of laughing tourists. He held a board high, with 'CORNWELL TRAVELS' painted on it.

"I think this is meant for us," said Susan, and they both stepped up to the man and introduced themselves.

"Nice to meet you," said the man with enthusiasm in his voice, "My name is Vangelis Papas, and I am your driver. Mr. Cornwell is already waiting for you."

Having seen the signal, more and more people who also came by the ship to the Count's party started to gather around them. When finally everyone arrived in, the driver waved his hand to indicate they should get in the van, which he had parked nearby, and took his seat behind the wheel. As the door closed, he started the engine, stepped on the throttle, and the vehicle began moving. While they were getting into that "labyrinth" of the characteristic, blue and white coloured houses, the peaks of Mount Ida appeared in the distance over and over again.

Ilias Venizelos – who was sitting behind the couple – was gazing through the window at the amazing city; at the streets having a unique atmosphere and at the fancy shops they left behind, giving a faint smile. Even the sight of some restored buildings could not escape from his attention. Many of the houses in Heraklion were damaged during World War II, and the people who adapted to the changes, modernised a lot of them, their unrivalled beauty proved to attract tourists during the decades. Heraklion was a progressive, but still typical Greek city, in general. Dozens of scooters were fishtailing around the cars on the busy routes because their drivers had the audacity to do that.

Ilias had been working as a detective in Athens for almost five years. His colleagues mentioned him only by the name *Hawk*. He deserved his nickname by picking his victims — these were criminals in his case – and swooping down on them as fast as possible, leaving them no chance to escape. The man was barely over thirty. He was sharp-faced with kind, constantly smiling eyes, which often deceived people, making them believe he could not even count up to three. Ilias gradually became a reasonably cunning detective. Besides, he nearly got killed in action two years ago. The bullet just barely missed his heart, and the white scar reminded him not to be careless, again, like an unexperienced rookie.

He lived alone in Gylfada in his flat, which he inherited from his parents, who moved to Parga, a picturesque small town, where they

opened a tavern. His mother was born in Parga and always desired to go at the holiday paradise on the mountainside, under the shadow of olive trees. He visited them as often as he could, and each time he visited them, he promised them that he would get a girlfriend. He was not attracted to anyone since his wife abandoned him. They lived together for almost one year, and he would have done anything for her. Despite this, the woman made love with another man, so the detective took the decision to live a solitary life.

He immersed himself in work for several months, already. Only his friends could persuade him to travel to Crete, after he had received Cornwell's message that he would invite him to the opening celebration for a few days. As the bus got out of the traffic, and they left the capital city behind, Ilias began to consider if it was worthing to come here, far from the drab monotony of everyday life.

He had got acquainted with Count Cornwell back when he had worked on the Roxton case. No sooner had his beloved woman abandoned him than finish it, Ronald Roxton's, an English bank manager's yacht was blown up in the port of Pireus. Unfortunately, Mr. Roxton was on the deck during the attempt, therefore the authorities could find his remains only. Ilias was committed to find the perpetrator. Count Cornwell, a close friend of Roxton, did his best to support the Greek man, who was cunning enough to identify the culprit, who was nobody else but the bank manager's jealous and greedy wife.

They spoke only once by phone since he had solved the case, but the count did not seem to have forgotten him. Ilias hoped they would meet under more pleasant circumstances this time, and there would be no corpses like mushrooms on the forest soil in autumn.

He did not suspect that the Moiras had something different in store for him.

Chapter Two

The bus was heading for Rethymnon county, west of Heraklion. The Count's holiday centre was situated on the Nida Plateau, which is a part of the area. Natural beauties, archaeological sites, temples and cloisters made Rethymnon county unique. Tourists were provided outing facilities, which offered them the golden opportunity to meet the unique atmosphere of such traditional villages as Anogia, a centre of weaving and handicraft. Many of the villagers wear traditional costume even today to show their respect about their own past and habits. The village was completely ruined in 1944, because the inhabitants were famous for being the bravest warriors on the island. That's why defiance was part of their nature.

Carlotta Ricci was totally amazed and kept clicking her camera while the vehicle was passing through the mountain village. The simple beauty of the place literally enchanted the young botanist. The flowers which were climbing up the walls and the landscape reminded her of her childhood home. She was born in Viganella, Italy. The settlement is situated near the Swiss border, in a valley surrounded by extremely precipitous mountains, often without sunlight in winter. The sunlit village of Anogia was completely different from that. Nevertheless, the special atmosphere made the woman recall memories of her family. She was raised by her grandparents until she turned 18, because her mother died in childbirth. Her father lived in Rome, and did not even know his ex-wife gave birth to a child. When her coming of age was approaching and she applied to a university in Rome, she decided to visit her father. The grandparents were a bit reluctant but finally told her the address. She could not forget how shocked her father was back when she rang his doorbell and introduced herself. Actually, she thought the man would immediately send her away. In spite of that, he decided to support her and even allowed her to live in his house instead of renting a flat which would be equal to huge expenditures.

Her father was a painter, and the owner of his own gallery. He told Carlotta that her mother was not patient enough to wait for her husband's career to start. She had enough of the poverty, and filed for divorce. The man did not blame her of that, since he had promised to give her everything she wanted. However, he could not keep his promise at the early stage of their marriage, so he accepted the woman's decision and left. Looking at Carlotta, he realized how wrong he was. The fire burning in his daughter's emerald eyes and her long, black hair reminded him of her mother. Consequently, Carlotta stayed in Rome, where she easily graduated from the university and devoted her life to botany. Plants — this amazing melting pot of colours and shapes full of secrets and surprises even today — always amazed her. It was one of her reasons to travel to Crete, which is known to be the paradise for botanists. Two thousand plant species inhabit and make the landscape of Rethymnon amazingly beautiful from the beach to the mountains. Lilies, Cretan date palms; different sorts of mediterranean plants, fragrant bushes, wild flowers like oleanders, ligarias, camomiles, mints were waiting for botany enthusiasts. The landscape adorned with poppies, cyclamens and ebonies was, undoubtedly, a fascinating sight. Carlotta could not wish for more. It was just the icing on the cake that Count Cornwell decided to invite her as well. She had met the man on a conference where the lecture she had given wholly amazed him. The Count had a passion for flowers, too. Therefore, he was greatly affected by Carlotta, whom he offered support to any kind of botanical research.

Carlotta thought she had to accept the invitation and travel to the island to return the man's favour. While they were going up the serpentine, she cast furtive glances at the detective a few times, who was sitting on the other side of the bus and was gazing out of the window as if he was daydreaming. Carlotta found him very attractive. She always waited for the men to take the initiative, she did not belong to the type of woman picking up fellows. However, Ilias gave him courage enough, in order to take this fact into consideration. Finally, she rejected the idea and just wished their eyes to be met. Ilias, as if he mysteriously sensed that, turned his head toward the woman and looked at her. She could not take her eyes off him. The man blinked rapidly, as if woke up from a dream, and gave an unintentional smile. It made Carlotta blush and show her shiny, snow white teeth.

Having seen that the girl beckoned him to sit next to her, Ilias hesitated for a few seconds. Finally, he stood up to comply with the request. There was something in this woman that got his attention. Her glittering green eyes were the mark of an honest person. Carlotta was the only one who had any effect on him for quite a long time.

Meanwhile, the bus reached the Nida Plateau twenty-four kilometres from Anogia. The plains on Mount Psiloritis (Ida) truly fascinated the passengers with its wild but romantic landscape. The scene of the uninhabited land bordered by mountains burned into their heads. Lambs showed up in the distance like white spots among bushes, flowers and grasses. Shepherds, who often led their livestock here since the roads were passable, could easily make a living on the plateau.

The archeologist Alexandros Hanas was sitting in the back of the bus with his colleagues, Rebecca Engel and Brian Atkinson. They were watching the varied landscape with interest but still could think only about one thing — the ruins which Cornwell's workers detected during the construction. It took quite a long time for the Count to assure the Greek government they would do everything to keep the finds from the site intact. To prove his intention he looked for experts, who suggested that these three archeologists should examine the site. Fortunately, Alexandros, Rebecca and Brian were all staying on Crete, so they grabbed the chance immediately. Cornwell gave them only a short account of what they had found. He claimed that while digging out the swimming pool they had found a wall, a large part of which they had already excavated. That's why they thought it would be more appropriate to build the swimming pool a few meters further from the place. To protect the remains from the effects of weather, they covered them, leaving the archeologists the lion's share of the work. Alexandros and his colleagues were ready. They brought the equipment which they thought to be necessary to conduct a comprehensive investigation. However, there was a catch. If the territory had turned out to be an important archaeological site, all the Count's plans of establishing a holiday paradise would have gone up in smoke. Rebecca could hear the anxiety in the man's voice when he phoned them.

The three of them had been working together for several years. Conducting excavations on all significant areas of the Mediterranean made them acknowledged in professional circles. They had become a team at the university — their friendship was strong enough to

keep them together. Although, they had the same passion, their character could not be more different. Alexandros was a thin, hook-nosed man, who wore his long, black hair in a pigtail. He was always dressed in checked shirts, and none could recognize him in a few seconds because of this unique appearance. Being a rebel spirit, he often opposed to the generally accepted views, earning some other people's disapproval, but he never cared. Practically, everything just rolled off him like water off a duck's back. A lot of people had the impression that he was selfish. Except for his girlfriend. Rebecca knew him better and was aware of the man's consideration for his friends and loved ones. The reason why he sometimes seemed to be an egoist was that after he had lost his parents early, he was raised in Thessaloniki by people who did not really love him. He soon ran away from home, looking for a job that did not hinder him in completing his studies.

Rebecca Engel was born into a wealthy family in Saarbrücken. Her father worked as a teacher, her mother was a well-known and acknowledged doctor. The girl's attraction to archaeology became obvious at a very young age. When she was a child, she used to gather things when she went outdoors, for example, pebbles, digging holes into the ground and bring various, seemingly interesting objects back home. Her parents could not stop gazing at the junk she collected. Being wealthy, they could afford to travel a lot, and Rebecca became acquainted (among others) with the pyramids in Egypt, the megaliths of Stonehenge in southern England, and several monuments in Greece as well. She found history amazing. Thus, she could easily decide which profession she would choose. She was a tall, blonde-haired woman, pretty like a model, and many men turned round after her. There was a constant sense of purpose in her eyes, and she was "endowed" with an almost obstinate character.

Brian Atkinson, on the other hand, was rather reserved. People he knew trusted him because of his humble, silent behaviour. Despite his spectacles with black frames and his clumsiness, he was remarkably clever, therefore everyone respected his knowledge. He started turning bald quite early, and his appearance — which was further emphasized by his grey shirt and brown suit — made the impression he was a university professor, always reading and never leaving his lodge. He grew up in Dover, England, in a happy family and his parents gave their only child everything they could. His twin brother died at birth, leaving Brian to be the family's only pride and joy. Perhaps his parents fostered him too much, and that caused his reserved and shy character to develop. When he went to the university in London and could experience the ecstasy of freedom, he felt he got a huge load off his mind. He was not generally adored by women. However, many girls found him cute. Therefore, he had quite a lot of experiences with them.