

*Montquale Presents*

ANNE  
HAMFSON

hills of kalamata



# **HILLS OF KALAMATA**

**Anne Hampson**

Kidnap Greek businessman Charon Drakos? The outrageous plan was basically weak Sarah Gilmore thought, but she felt obliged to help her girlfriend.

As with so many well-laid plans, it backfired. It was Sarah who was kidnapped, and whisked off to Charon's grim, fortresslike home in a remote and primitive part of Greece.

Her spirited resistance seemed only to amuse him. "Whether you like my kisses or not," he informed her arrogantly, "you're going to accept them. You are my wife, Sarah; and in Greece marriage is permanent."

## CHAPTER ONE

SARAH GILMORE stared, wide-eyed, at the tall fair girl standing on the other side of the room. Through the open window drifted the shrill, incessant whirr of cicadas, the only sound breaking the astonished silence which followed Miranda's incredible suggestion.

'Kidnap the man!' exclaimed Sarah at last. 'Are you crazy? How on earth do you propose to do a thing like that?'

Pale but resolute, Miranda answered her friend.

'He's determined to ruin my sister; I've just explained this to you.' Miranda looked into Sarah's deep blue eyes, then at her features, noting the classical lines and wondering from where they came, noting the high-bred and delicate contours of her face, the prominent cheekbones, the wide generous mouth and firm yet pointed chin. 'The only way to prevent Pam from running off with this Greek is to put him out of the way for a while. Iscarte Island's uninhabited, and that's where I propose to put Charon Drakos; he can cool his courage there until someone finds him, which should be a fairly long while, seeing that the island's way off the normal shipping routes.'

Sarah's high forehead creased in a frown.

'The man could die, Miranda!'

'Men like him don't die,' rejoined Miranda with icy contempt. 'In time, he'll be spotted from the air, and rescued. Meanwhile, Pam'll conclude he's proved false and gone off with someone else.'

'What gave you the idea of kidnapping the man?' inquired Sarah curiously after a small pause.

'It's an original one, and no mistake.'

'It seems to be the only way of getting him away from Pam.'

Sarah fell silent, recalling how she and Miranda had first met. They had both been appointed to the same school on leaving their respective colleges of education. Two years later, having become firm friends, they applied for teaching posts abroad, and now they were at the English school in Athens, but living outside the city, in a villa they rented, a villa surrounded by flowers and trees, and situated away from the nerve-wearing bustle of Athens itself. Miranda's widowed mother also lived near Athens, in a flat not far from the office in which she worked. A month ago Pam, Mrs Maddison's younger daughter, had come over from England for a five-week holiday, had met and fallen wildly in love with a Greek, Charon Drakos, and was intending to run away with him.

'When did you learn about this intention of Pam's?' inquired Sarah, her glance travelling past her friend, caught by the figure of the old man who attended their garden for them. He was working quite cheerfully under the fierce sun, and on catching Sarah's eye he grinned expansively, disclosing widely-spaced, discoloured teeth, and a couple of gold fillings.

'Two days ago, but I didn't mention it to you because I felt certain Mother would be able to make Pam see reason. As you know, Pam has a marvellous job with those London dress designers—in fact, she was expecting to become their top model within the next few months. It's terrible that her whole life is in danger!' Miranda spoke fiercely, her hands clenched at her sides. 'I shan't allow it to happen! Mother asked me to do something—anything—to save Pam, and I *shall* save her!'

Sarah became thoughtful, anger against Pam, and pity for her friend's mother, mingling with a certain curiosity as to what this Greek was like. Pam had never even mentioned him in Sarah's presence, and she knew of the affair only because Mrs Maddison had said, about a fortnight ago,

'Pam's going about with a Greek she's met. I do hope nothing serious develops; I wouldn't care to see either of my girls married to a Greek.'

'Pam's never bothered much about men,' commented Sarah slowly, glancing at her friend and noting the pale face, the tightly-clenched fists. 'Is there something special about this Greek? I mean, is he particularly handsome?'

'Mother says he's anything but handsome, but then she's against him in every way. I expect he must be something more than average, for otherwise Pam wouldn't be so infatuated with him.'

A sigh escaped her friend.

'If, as you say, persuasion's failed, I don't know what can be done, Miranda. After all, Pam's twenty-two, only two years younger than we are, so she's not going to allow anyone to tell her what she must or must not do.' Sarah spoke with resignation, but there was an edge of deep concern to her voice for all that. She did not know Pam very well at all, but she did know her mother and naturally all her sympathies were with her at this time.

'She isn't going off with him!' declared Miranda, and her tone was suddenly aggressive, just as if she were fighting a battle with Sarah. 'I'm going to kidnap that rogue—and I'm expecting you to help me!' Another sigh escaped Sarah.

'What you have in mind is quite impossible,' she said with conviction. 'What I'd suggest is that you go and see this man and talk to him. Try to make him see reason--'

'He'll not listen! Why should he? Pam's willing to go off with him; she's beautiful and obviously desirable to him--' Miranda shook her head.

'He'll be gloating over his victory—these philanderers always do—and so it's merely wishful thinking on our part if we even consider appealing to him.'

Impatiently Sarah said, 'Then there doesn't seem to be anything you can do.' She stopped, her eyes clouding as Miranda burst into tears.

'I can't let Mother be hurt like this, Sarah! Nor would I be a good sister if I didn't try to save Pam from her folly. She'll thank me later; I know she will!' Miranda sought unsuccessfully for a handkerchief; Sarah, frowning heavily, handed her one, watching as she dried her eyes. 'When Mother came here she was so happy, looking forward to a new life, having got the super job with the boss of an English firm. She's close to us and everything was fine

until this happened. Now, she's becoming ill, and if this elopement comes off she wouldn't be able to carry on with her work, she would be so worried about Pam. So what sort of a future has she? If she returns to England she'll have neither home nor job...'

'Miranda,' broke in Sarah, wishing she could be more patient over this situation, 'you're way ahead of yourself! If this elopement does take place your mother will get over it eventually. Besides, the man might decide to marry Pam.'

'Never! He merely wants a short affair and then —goodbye, Pam!' Miranda's tears came again, and Sarah found herself becoming so deeply distressed by her friend's unhappiness that she actually allowed the possibility of a kidnapping to intrude into her mind. Immediately upon this came some words which her father had once spoken to her, when she was just a child,

'You're a wild one, Sarah; it's the blood of your mother's people running in your veins. I can foresee, as you grow older, that you're going to do outrageous things, that you'll be a menace to anyone who happens to be foolish enough to arouse your anger or indignation. And another thing, you're far too proud! In fact, your teacher's told me several times that you have haughty ways which, if practised on someone possessing similar arrogance, will land you in real trouble!'

Well, she mused, up till now she had done nothing particularly outrageous, nor had she displayed undue hauteur towards anyone. She was liked, and admired, by most people with whom she came into contact, but the hard and realistic fact was that she did possess this proud streak of which her father had spoken. She herself owned to it and she knew from where it came, although the times when she would dwell on this inheritance were very rare indeed. However, she was proud of her Greek blood, small though its quantity must be, having come to her from three generations back. It was no ordinary Greek blood, her father had once said—and this in criticism, not in praise. It was the blood of the infamous Gorakis Pavromichalis, a one-time feudal ruler who had lived in one of the remotest parts of Greece, the Deep Mani. This ruler, a despot like the other rulers, had been continually engaged in the blood-feuds—the *vendetta*, as it was called today. And the atrocities perpetrated were far too horrible to relate.

Yet in appearance there was nothing of the Greek about Sarah, with her hair of gold so pale that in certain lights it looked more like silver, with her high unlined forehead, her dark blue eyes, slanting most attractively at the outer corners. Her figure too was perfect—slender and alluringly proportioned—with a tiny waist and shapely legs and ankles.

'Does this Greek live in Athens?' queried Sarah, her thoughts reverting to the possibility of carrying out her friend's incredible plan.

'No, he comes from some weird and remote place called the Deep Mani.'

'The--!' Sarah's eyes widened. 'Then what's he doing in Athens?' The Deep Mani... Something tingled along Sarah's spine; she could not have explained her feelings if her life depended upon it.

'I believe he's here on business.' Miranda looked questioningly at her friend, waiting as if for some explanation of Sarah's surprised ejaculation. However, when presently she saw that no comment was forthcoming she went on to say that this place called the Deep Mani was certainly no tourist attraction. 'No one goes there unless they have to, because the Maniots have a reputation for being a terrible lot. Even Greeks will avoid going there. It would seem that these people are a law unto themselves, that they're a wild, treacherous race who'd think nothing of throwing a knife at you or shooting at you from behind a rock. It's said they still indulge in the blood-feuds—reprisal killings. I don't think Pam knows what she's in for,' ended Miranda heatedly.

Sarah said nothing; she was deep in thought, recalling many things her father had told her about the people of the Deep Mani. However, she was not so naive as to believe that the same pattern of behaviour existed today; for one thing, utter disregard for law and order would not be tolerated by the government. Nevertheless, it was an accepted fact that the *vendetta* survived, and that grim reprisals were still carried out if some member of one family were insulted by a member of another family.

And Pam was intending to go to this place, this region so often described as a dread, planetary domain and 'habitat for dragons'. It was the zone of eagles, the one-time haunt of wild tribes who had invaded this gaunt and



mountainous region, tribes who practised every kind of hideous custom except cannibalism. Here, on wild and lonely roads, they would lie in wait for the unwary traveller and then, after robbing and torturing him, they would toss him from the crag of some high cliff, sending him to his death on the rocks far below. As for the scenery—Sarah had learned a great deal from her father, who had been there once and once only, having no desire to visit such a place again. He would fall into a pensive mood when describing the area, declaring it to be as dark and formidable as the barbarians who inhabited it. Terrible gorges and ominous ravines, wild heights of ragged rocks and scree. And a primeval silence over it all, intense and awe-inspiring, broken now and then by the spine-chilling cry of an owl, or the swish of an eagle's wing. A grim and desolate region of Greece, with unclothed hills and witch-haunted valleys.

Sarah had shuddered as she listened to her father, as he would darkly quote from a poem he had once read, telling of the ancient peoples of the Deep Mani who feared neither man nor God; they were a raw, beast-like race who, being so far removed from what is human, sullied the very earth upon which they trod. Their only companion other than their own vicious tribes was Satan himself, whose shadow was said always to hang over the valleys, darkening their sides, polluting their rivers.

'What few rivers there are,' Sarah's father would say. 'The place is in fact nothing more nor less than a wilderness.' He had told her of the savage customs of the peoples of the Deep Mani, continuing to quote from this poem of ancient times, a poem written by a man who, having managed to pass through the region and escape with his life, wrote down for posterity all he had seen and heard. Even to sit down to eat with these people would result in a curse being put on one's soul, he wrote.

And this was the place from where came the man with whom Pam wanted to run away ... and it was also the region from which Sarah's own ancestors had come.

Somehow, Sarah wanted to visit this witch-haunted domain; she was curious to know what the people were like today, those people who still kept up the *vendetta*, taking the law into their own hands. It was woe betide anyone who was unwise enough to cross them, thought Sarah with a grimace, half

inclined to suspect that she herself might be in danger, should she ever visit the Deep Mani.

For it was an undeniable fact that her own ancestor, the dreaded despot from whom she was descended on her mother's side, had made so many enemies that even today there were descendants of other tribes who would not hesitate to swoop down in revenge upon one of the scions of the family of Pavromichalis.

Well, she had decided long ago that if ever she did visit the Deep Mani, she would take good care to ensure that no one could connect her, even remotely, Avith the infamous Gorakis Pavromichalis, that cruel dictator whose blood—though greatly diluted—ran in her veins, the blood which, so her father had always maintained, was responsible for her pride and, at times, a rather high degree of hauteur.

It was only the following day when Mrs Maddison called at the villa occupied by the girls. She had been crying and Sarah immediately felt uncomfortable, especially as Miranda was out, having gone to do some shopping. It was the first week of the long summer vacation and Sarah had planned to have a couple of weeks in England, then to spend the rest of the holiday exploring some of the Greek islands. However, she had not made any firm arrangements to do anything, and, strangely, she found herself being relieved about this. It did seem that something drastic must be done in an attempt to put an end once and for all to this love affair of Pam's. It would be bad enough if the man had offered her marriage, but for him merely to desire an affair... No, Pam must not be allowed to ruin her life; and as it was obvious that the girl was unable to think for herself, then it was incumbent on others to think for her.

'I'm sorry, but Miranda isn't in.' Sarah looked apologetically at Mrs Maddison. 'Can I get you a drink of coffee?' she inquired after inviting her to sit down.

Mrs Maddison frowned, as if the offer of a drink annoyed her, being too trivial even to be considered.

'All I want at this moment is to speak to Miranda,' was the brusque rejoinder. 'I've had a morning off work especially to see her. How long will she be, do you think?' She was guarded; Sarah realized this at once, and after a small hesitation she ventured to inform her visitor that she knew all about Pam's affair.

'Miranda told me about it, and we discussed a plan which she hoped to carry out.' Watching her closely as she spoke Sarah was left in no doubts as to Mrs Maddison's conviction that the plan could be operated.

'I see,' after a short silence. 'Well, what do you think of it, Sarah? Isn't it a dreadful situation for us all to be in—and all because of a foreigner?'

'It's certainly unfortunate,' agreed Sarah mildly. But she added that as Pam was of an age to know what she wanted any interference from her relatives would not be very graciously received.

'This is true, Sarah, but when a girl's as infatuated as my daughter she doesn't stop to think of the consequences; she can't see ahead to the disaster which must inevitably result from so headlong an act. Therefore, she needs help.'

Sarah nodded, unable to argue this point, especially as she had already come to the same conclusion herself. She found her nerves were slightly tensed, as if something had caught at them; she was alert, tingling with the deep desire to wash her hands of this affair, yet at the same time she was conscious of drifting irrevocably to a point where her actions could become automatic, forced upon her—not against her will, since it was far too strong a will to be bent to anyone else's authority or decree—but against all her own ideas of common sense and logic.

'The plan to kidnap this man is rather fantastic, I think you'll agree?' Sarah spoke at last, a troubled frown between her eyes. She fought to discard the idea of becoming involved, tried to listen to the inner warning. She must withdraw, before it was too late! 'I don't see how it can be carried out,' she began, then stopped, aware of a dart of cowardice, of weakness. She wanted to say, quite firmly, that she was not intending to have anything to do with so criminal an act... and yet she remained silent...

'This talk of the plan being impossible--' Mrs Maddison's eyes glittered with sudden anger. 'This is an occasion where desperate measures must be employed.'

Tactfully Sarah made no comment, but she sighed inwardly, aware of becoming resigned to her own involvement in the attempt to kidnap the Greek. For how could she refuse her help? Miranda was her friend, and as such she could expect some sort of assistance.

'What a predicament I'm in!' This was said later, and to herself as, on Miranda's return, Sarah had thankfully left mother and daughter together and gone to the sanctuary of her bedroom where she wandered back and forth, unable to relax her seething brain. 'Why should I see disaster, and forme only? Not for Miranda, nor Pam, but for me.' She turned towards the door on hearing a gentle knock. 'What is it?'

Miranda entered, her face like chalk.

'Pam's leaving, with this Greek, in four days' time.'

'Four days?' Sarah looked at her. 'But that gives you no time at all. I understood you to say that Pam hadn't yet given you a definite date?'

'She told Mother this morning, quite early, before Mother was even ready to leave for work. She came straight here after Pam had gone out.' Miranda's voice was husky, betraying the strain within her. 'This Charon Drakos has told her he's leaving Athens next Friday, and that if she wants to come with him then she'd better begin making arrangements. He won't be in Athens again for over six months.'

'He doesn't appear to be an affectionate lover,' frowned Sarah. 'Did he actually talk like that to Pam?'

'He certainly gave her the four days in which to make up her mind. If she doesn't happen to be ready then he'll go without her.'

'If only you could talk some sense into her,' sighed Sarah, thoughtfully going over this new and unexpected development. 'It sounds almost like a thread,'

she observed at length. 'Not at all the attitude one would expect from a man who, by rights, ought to be adopting a persuasive manner towards Pam.' An arrogant, domineering type, obviously, concluded Sarah. Who did he think he was—a god, or something? For no apparent reason her mind captured the scene of the ancient pagan gods as with arrogance and complete mastery, they swayed the fate of humans, bending them to their own wills. Frowningly she attempted to reject the overwhelming conviction that her own actions were being planned for her, influenced by some hidden dictator whose power was leading her into something she would bitterly regret. It was almost as if she was the plaything of the gods, that they were laughing as they propelled her along on the road of *their* choosing.

'And I'm powerless to combat the influence!' Anger rose within her as she confessed this to herself, forgetting altogether the presence of her friend. 'Why can't I be practical, and level-headed, as I usually am?'

'I'm not just sitting back and allowing Mother to fall into a decline,' Miranda was saying determinedly, breaking into Sarah's wrathful musings. 'It's my duty to save her from such heartache.'

Although Sarah could not visualise Mrs Maddison's going into a decline she naturally made no attempt to argue the point, it being of no value to do so. Instead, she found herself listening, with growing interest, to her friend's unfolding of the plan for the abduction of the Greek.

'You've certainly been working hard on the \* plan, Miranda, but can you pull it off in the time you have? After all, four days...?'

'It can be done. I've promised Mother it'll be done.'

Sarah shook her head at this.

'A rather rash promise, don't you think?'

'No, I don't.' A pause and then, 'I can understand your not wanting to become involved, Sarah, but it's something I can't do alone, so I must beg of you to assist. I did warn you that I'd expect you to help me.'

Still fighting to throw off the force that was steadily enfolding her in its grip, Sarah strove to find some major fault with the plan, but instead she heard herself say,

'You've got the promise of the boat, so that's no problem, but how are you going to get him from the boat on to the island?' Miranda had not yet found a way of getting him on to the boat, but Sarah had no real doubts about her thinking of something, and before very long. 'You're not intending to drug him, I hope, because I shall have no hand in anything like that.'

'You remember last Christmas—that wine Mother made...?'

Tingles ran all along Sarah's spine.

'That was a killer!' she gasped, without thinking how much of an exaggeration her words were. 'Everyone who took it was laid out for hours!'

'I shall never know what went wrong with it,' Mrs Maddison had several times been heard to say, amid laughter from the girls. 'I followed the recipe given me by the old Greek lady—who did admit that the wine was strong. I can only think I got the quantities a little mixed up.'

'There was one bottle left,' Miranda was saying quietly, and significantly. 'It's been around since Christmas, with Mother saying, every time she happens to see it lying there at the back of the cupboard, that she must get rid of it, throw it down the sink.'

While she had been talking Sarah's thoughts had wandered back to the Christmas party in question. What a fiasco it had turned out to be, for those who had drunk the wine which Mrs Maddison had so proudly produced had been unconscious until the early hours of the morning. After taking one sip Sarah had made her apologies to her hostess, explaining that she did not care for that particular kind of wine. Miranda had no problems either, since she did not drink anything stronger than lemonade. Mrs Maddison, being busy passing food round to her guests, and moving between the kitchen and the sitting-room, had left her wine on a side table, intending to drink it when the opportunity arose. So it transpired that the only three people left to enjoy the party were Mrs Maddison and the two girls.

'I remember how funny they all looked,' Sarah could not help commenting, her blue eyes twinkling with laughter. 'Eleven people—including eight strong men—all fast asleep either on the couch and chairs, or on the rug on the floor.'

'Not merely asleep,' put in Miranda without catching even a modicum of her friend's amusement, 'but quite literally out for the count.' She paused a moment, reflectively. 'That's why I've so much faith in what this bottle can do.'

Sarah became quiet. She had been of the opinion that the wine had been tampered with while Mrs Maddison was making it, and that something had been added, most likely for a joke. What had been added was probably some herb of whose potent qualities only the Greeks knew.

'I believe I can get the Greek to drink the wine,' Miranda was saying thoughtfully. 'But as you've implied, it's getting him off the boat that's going to prove difficult. So I need your help, as we'll probably have to drag him most of the time, for I'm sure we can't carry him far.'

'What about getting him to board the boat? Has anything occurred to you yet?'

'I can think of only one course, and that's to send him a note implying that there's something he should know about Pam, something that's just happened.' Miranda paused, her brow furrowed and her top lip caught between her teeth. 'The idea's only just come to me, a few minutes ago--' She trailed off on noting Sarah's expression. 'You don't believe it'll work?'

'The man's no fool; he's going to suspect something.'

'Why should he?'

'Simply because he knows that both you and your mother are against the elopement. He'd be a complete fool to board a boat--'

'With only me aboard? At least, that's what I shall lead him to believe.'

'And you think he'll take that as gospel?' Sarah shook her head. 'Were I in his place, Miranda, I'd be more than a little suspicious that you had some thugs aboard, and that I was going to be beaten up or something.'

'You would?'

'I'd certainly not be foolish enough to come on to the boat.'

Miranda gave a deep sigh, but within seconds she was shaking off her dejection.

'It's the only way! I'll not write, but telephone him instead, at his hotel. I'll say that, if he doesn't agree to meet me, then he will live to regret it.'

'He'll be sure to ask you what it's all about--'

'I shall say it's too terrible to speak of on the phone!' Miranda was becoming excited, confident of success.

'He might agree to see you,' conceded Sarah after some reflection. 'But I rather think he'll prefer somewhere different from a boat.'

'I shall insist on his coming to the boat. I'll sound so troubled that he'll be curious to discover what's amiss. Yes, I'm sure I can manage to get him aboard!'

Sarah still had her doubts as to the possibility of ensnaring the man on to the boat. However, she just had to leave it to Miranda, seeing that it was her affair, after all. But it was her personal opinion that the Greek would be far too wary to take the kind of risk which Miranda was expecting him to take.

'What's he like to look at?' she questioned, suddenly curious to know.

'Extraordinarily tall and very slim,' was the immediate response. 'Sun-bitten to gipsy darkness, with an angular face that reminds you of a hawk. He's got the fiercest eyes imaginable—black and luminous.'



Sarah had to smile, for he seemed eminently fitted to be an inhabitant of the Deep Mani.

He had jet black hair, Miranda went on to say, and then, grudgingly,

'Apparently he's always immaculately dressed, and spotlessly clean, with his hair gleaming. Pam says he's wealthy, and lives in a tower.'

'There are numerous towers in the Mani; they were built for defence in the days of continual warfare and the blood-feuds they always seemed to be indulging in.' It was a strange circumstance, but Sarah had no desire to confide to her friend that she herself had Maniot blood in her veins.. 'Some of the towers have been tastefully renovated to make attractive homes. At least, that is what I've heard.'

'Well, I still don't want Pam to go there! It would be like a prison.' Suddenly there were tears in Miranda's eyes, and her mouth quivered. Sarah, strong of character as she was, had never been able to understand lack of strength in others. For herself, she would never dream of seeking relief in tears; they were a mark of weakness and she hoped she would never resort to them. Certainly she would never let a man reduce her to tears! 'You're going to help me, aren't you, Sarah?' Miranda's voice had a distinct catch to it and Sarah nodded immediately. Yet within her there was rebellion, for she was being carried along as if on a tidal wave ... carried helplessly into deep waters, below which there was nothing but darkness...

## CHAPTER TWO

THE boat which Miranda proposed using belonged to a friend of hers, Morris Hailsham, who was also a schoolteacher in Athens. He was now on holiday in England, and had told Miranda that she could borrow the boat if she wanted to take a sail to one or two of the islands.

'I'll be back in a fortnight's time and shall need it then,' he had said. 'Meanwhile, though, have it, with pleasure!'

It was moored at Piraeus, and to Sarah's utter amazement the Greek agreed to meet Miranda on board.

'He must be a complete fool!' she said, but Miranda, flushed as she was with the success of the first part of her plan, merely shrugged and admitted that he *was* rather trusting. And there the matter ended as far as she was concerned, but for Sarah there existed a strange unfathomable anxiety, as if all was not as transparent as it appeared to be.

The man stepped aboard the *Halcyone* with total unconcern—so Miranda later told Sarah, who was in the galley, keeping out of the way until she was needed.

'I've given him the wine,' continued Miranda in an excited whisper. 'So be ready to get moving within the next quarter of an hour or so.'

The galley door closed as Miranda left; Sarah stared thoughtfully at it, acutely conscious of disturbing tingles along her spine. Something seemed to be wrong and she felt uneasy because she could not put her finger on it. She wished she could see this man, read his expression, draw some conclusions which would help her to assess his intelligence. For it did seem to her that no man of even average intelligence would accept an invitation like this.

A quarter of an hour or so, Miranda had said. Would the man drink the wine? Perhaps, like Sarah, he would find on tasting it that it did not suit his palate, in which case he would leave it. What then? Impatiently Sarah moved, unwilling to waste time asking herself questions which she was unable to

answer. She poured herself a glass of milk, her eyes going to the large array of packages and boxes stacked up in one corner of the galley. The provisions which would be left on Iscarte Island with the lone prisoner.

Sipping her milk, Sarah went over the conversation she had had with her friend after she, Sarah, had promised to help in the abduction.

'He'll contact the police immediately he's rescued,' Sarah had stated, but Miranda shook her head.

'Pride,' she rejoined briefly. And then, I'm leaving him a note of explanation, and it'll include the order not to get in touch with my sister again.'

Sarah had made no comment on this. She and Miranda were in the villa; the Acropolis, visible through the window, shone in the brilliant sunshine, a jewel of rare quality, with the Parthenon standing supreme, the most glorious building in the world. Sarah had stood for a while, musing on the holiday she was to have taken—a holiday of island-hopping. She had wanted to visit Rhodes, then Cos. Crete was a must, for there they practised the *vendetta*, and Sarah was quite naturally interested in this.

'Although I have agreed to help you,' Sarah had said over her shoulder as she stood by the window staring out at the Acropolis, 'I'm not at all happy at what we're doing. No matter what you say to the contrary, I still feel we could find ourselves in serious trouble.' She frowned to herself, aware again of the strange and disturbing feeling that she alone was going to suffer for the action they were taking.

'I've told you,' muttered her friend impatiently, 'he'll be far too proud to contact the police. I myself am not in the least concerned over any adverse consequences affecting ourselves. Can you imagine any man admitting to having been kidnapped by two females?' A laugh escaped Miranda and her eyes lost their brooding expression for a space. 'I'm absolutely sure that a Greek wouldn't admit it.'

'Especially one from the Deep Mani.' Sarah spoke very softly, almost to herself. 'They have an obsession about pride.' Her frown appeared again as for a fleeting moment she tried to visualise what the Greek would do if ever

he found himself in a position to pay the two girls back for the humiliation they had caused him.

'Exactly—especially one from the Deep Mani,' agreed Miranda. 'So you see, Sarah, we've really nothing at all to worry about.'

It was to be hoped, mused Sarah, her mind returning to the present situation, that Miranda had been right when she so confidently asserted that they had nothing to worry about. Sipping her milk, she tried to visualise what was going on in the saloon. Obviously the man had not drunk the wine, as otherwise Miranda would be here, gloating over her success—

Her thoughts cut abruptly by the noisy opening of the door, she stared disbelievingly on hearing Miranda say, her voice high-pitched with triumph and excitement,

'He's drunk it! Sarah—he's drunk it! And he's already slumped against the cushions on the couch!'

Glancing down at her bare arms, Sarah noticed, the fine golden hairs standing up. She shivered involuntarily, then wondered why.

Miranda was urging her to come to the saloon, which she did, following her friend as Miranda eagerly led the way.

'There! He's almost out! What luck. As you implied, Sarah, the man's a complete fool!'

Silence, as Sarah focused her eyes upon the slumped figure of the Greek. He had a hand pressed to his temple, and his breathing was uneven. Her eyes wandered to the table, where lay the empty glass, on its side. It fascinated her and for a long moment she could not take her eyes from it. At that she said, turning to her friend,

'How long did it take the others to go out?'

Miranda shrugged unconcernedly.

'Does it matter?'

'I have a feeling that it took them longer--'

'He'd drunk the wine when I came back from speaking to you in the galley,' interrupted Miranda swiftly, her whole manner one of urgency. 'I've been watching him for the past five minutes or so.'

The man moved, and gave a slight exclamation of anger. But no words left his lips, and even while the girls watched, he settled down more comfortably on the couch, drew a deep breath, and fell asleep.

'Well,' exclaimed Miranda a trifle smugly, 'what have you to say now! Your fears were unfounded after all!'

'Yes, I suppose I must own that they were,' returned Sarah, her eyes still fixed on the man lying there. She was fascinated by what she saw—the features, harsh and satanic, with the mouth thin and cruel even though its owner was in a state of repose. The nostrils were thin, the brown cheeks hollowed beneath the prominent side bones. His jet black hair grew low, but it shone with cleanness. The shirt he wore was spotless, white against his throat. She looked at his hands ... and for some reason she shuddered. Slender hands, brown and strong; she knew that they could inflict pain if their owner should desire them to do so. There was no doubt in her mind that the man was totally ruthless, a perfect example of the people from the Deep Mani.

The island appeared at last, dark and half blotted out in the mist which had fallen suddenly, a mist that swirled against the ragged heights, that writhed all along the sides of the little valley. The island, inhabited by birds only, was merely the top of a sunken mountain range which spread far beneath the sea. The vegetation was sparse, being for the most part coarse grass and sedge; a few stunted trees could be discerned as the boat drew closer, running along a dry watercourse, while on the shore itself could be seen what appeared to be a few isolated clumps of marram grass, binding the sand together. For the most part, though, the naked rocks swung right down to the edge of the sea in a series of precipices, awesome and treacherous.

'What a place!' exclaimed Sarah. She glanced around; one or two other uninhabited islands lay scattered on the sea. 'I wouldn't wish my worst enemy to spend any length of time here!'

Miranda said nothing; she was expertly bringing the boat inshore and Sarah watched with admiration. Miranda had learned from her brother how to handle boats of this type, whereas Sarah, with no relatives at all, had not been afforded the same advantage.

The boat was soon brought in; so far so good, thought Sarah, wondering how heavy the man would be. As Miranda had said, they might have to drag him ashore.

'We must come back to see how he is,' she said suddenly. 'We mustn't risk anything serious happening to him. We can take a look without actually landing. He'll hear us if we call out to him.'

'I'm not coming back,' declared Miranda emphatically. 'He could last for two or three months on what I've put in those boxes.'

'Clothes...?' Why was she so troubled about the man? He deserved all that was coming to him. 'He'll need lots of changes.'

'I've put a few things in. He can keep on washing them. It'll give him something to do!'

Sarah went quiet, determined to find some way of returning. She must make Miranda see sense, and agree to come back in a few days' time, for Sarah knew she could not rest until she had assured herself that the man was managing all right, and that he had recovered from the effects of the wine.

'I feel dreadfully uneasy,' she said presently when both- she and Miranda were ashore, having decided to unload the provisions before getting the Greek off the boat. 'We're crazy to do a thing like this!'

'It isn't like you to panic, Sarah.'

'I'm not panicking! Nevertheless, I'm troubled. This is a criminal act--'

'Rubbish! It's revenge—and who should appreciate that more than a man who himself would not hesitate to be revenged on someone who intended injuring one of his family?'

'I must agree,' replied Sarah, but in a flat voice. Never in her life had she felt like this—as if nemesis was at her shoulder, ready to strike, in retributive justice. 'Have we got everything out now?' She glanced around, at the array of provisions. 'The cooking-stove's in that blue box, you said?'

'That's right. Don't worry, Sarah, he'll manage very well; I haven't forgotten anything.'

'I think we'd better take a look around the island—as far as we can look round,' amended Sarah with a grim glance at the jagged rock faces coming directly down to the sea. 'This little valley here; we can explore this.'

'What for? I don't intend he shall have five-star accommodation!'

'I'd like to make sure there's some place where he can sleep with reasonable comfort.' Mentally, she was checking the provisions. Tins of meat and vegetables; dried fruits, packets of biscuits and breakfast cereals. Powdered milk, eggs, tinned butter. A butane stove, a good supply of water. If the man had any sense he would use sea water whenever he could, saving the fresh water for drinking. It would rain, of course, so there was no danger of his running out of water.

'I do think we should look around,' Sarah again suggested, and this time with a definite note of firmness in her voice. 'We can't just dump him, unconscious, on the shore here and leave him to take pot luck.'

'But that's the idea! He has to be punished.'

Sarah shook her head.

'I'm not being a party to that. My conscience would not allow me to leave him here without first making sure he can survive in reasonable comfort. After all, your aim is, chiefly, to keep him from taking Pam away.'

'He'll be all right,' carelessly from Miranda. However, she did allow herself to be persuaded and the girls went farther along the shore. This was merely a sandy shelf, with the core of the island rising steeply from it. So formidable was the aspect, thought Sarah. And the solitude, the deep silence. She felt almost inclined to throw up the whole scheme and insist on taking the Greek back to Piraeus.

'It's so desolate, Miranda. A person could go mad in such a place!' No comment as Miranda sent a frowning glance towards her friend. 'How would you like to find yourself alone in such a place?'

'As there's no danger of finding myself alone here I don't see any point in thinking about it.'

They were walking along the tiny valley; Miranda suddenly suggested one of them return to the boat, just to make sure their prisoner was still asleep.

'We don't want him to wake before we can get him off,' she added.

'The others slept for several hours. However, I'll go back. You carry on, Miranda; I'll catch you up in a few minutes.'

Sarah stepped on to the deck, then went from there to the saloon, turning the door handle softly, so as not to disturb the man. He lay prone, his face to the back of the couch. So he had moved, she thought, stepping closer and bending over him. His breathing was even; she straightened up, satisfied that he would not waken for at least a couple of hours. Which afforded her and Miranda ample time to get him ashore.

'He won't give us any trouble,' murmured Sarah aloud as she turned from the couch. 'Unless, of course it's with his weight. His appearance could be deceiving--' She stopped, an incredulous gasp escaping her as, having almost reached the door, she twisted around again, every nerve in her body tingling; for with the stealth of a jungle beast the man had risen from the couch and come behind her. She was face to face with him, her heart pounding against her ribs, her mouth opening as she made to cry out to Miranda for help. But no sound came; his hand was clapped over her mouth and she was being forced back from the door. The arm encircling her body



was like a steel hawser, and although she kicked out at his shins it was to no avail. She was lifted bodily and dumped on the couch. With the same stealth as that with which he had surprised her, and with a lightning speed to match it, he was out of the saloon and the key was turned in the lock. Breathless, and experiencing fear for the first time in her life, she got to her feet and went to the window. Miranda could be seen, wandering along the dry valley.

Sarah was just about to shout when to her horror she heard the engine start. The chug-chug caused Miranda to turn swiftly and, startled, she flung up her hands in a gesture of bewildered protest. She started to run, shouting out almost hysterically as she realised what had happened, for she could plainly see that Charon Drakos was at the wheel.

'Don't leave me here!' she screamed in a terrified voice. 'Sarah, for heaven's sake, do something! '

With this cry ringing in her ears Sarah made for the saloon door and began hammering on the thick wooden panels, frustration mingling with self-fury as she dwelt on her stupidity. She ought to have been on her guard against a surprise attack, should have thought of the eventuality of the man's waking up before he was expected to.

Suddenly she caught her breath as a wave of suspicion swept over her. She recalled with vivid clarity her previous uneasiness at the simplicity with which the first part of the plan had been carried out. Not a hitch...

The Greek accepting the invitation, then his taking the wine--

'He didn't drink it!' she exclaimed. 'Miranda said he took it while she was talking to me in the galley, but he threw it away.'

So he had never been unconscious at all! Sarah shivered in spite of herself, for there was something almost unnatural about the kind of behaviour practised by the Greek. What was his objective? And now, what were his immediate plans? The boat was heading for the open sea; Sarah tried to collect her thoughts into some sort of order, but in vain. They pivoted here and there, bringing into focus the plight of her friend, left stranded on the island, then her own plight as prisoner of a man who would obviously inflict

some kind of punishment upon her. Twisting around in desperation at her own helplessness, she sought for some form of escape. But there was none. The door was locked, the window useless as a means of escape. With every moment that passed the island was receding. Sarah bit her lip till it hurt, still furious with herself for her stupidity in failing to be on the alert, furious with Miranda for having formulated the plan in the first place, and she was also furious with the Greek for his trickery. What game he was up to she could not even begin to conceive, and although her heart began to thud unevenly when at length she heard the key turn in the lock, she welcomed the return of the man, hoping to gain some information from him. Was he intending to hand her over to the police?

The door opened; she saw the amused sneer wiped from his lips as he looked at her. She sensed at once that her appearance had arrested his entire attention.

'Well, well, what have we here? A real beauty!' His firm, aristocratic voice carried a trace of an accent. 'I'm quite taken by surprise.' Nonchalantly he leant against the jamb of the door, arms folded, his black eyes fixed upon her face. 'I gather you're an accomplice in this absurd attempt to dump me on Iscarte Island?' She said nothing, words being too difficult owing to the dryness of her throat. For although the Greek's expression was still mainly one of surprise, there was something else lurking there which sent tingles of apprehension darting along her spine. She recalled the many occasions when the eyes of some Greek male, having examined her lovely curves, would darken with desire. And now this was again happening; Charon Drakos's eyes roved her figure with both insolence and appreciation. Quietly he asked her her name, which she supplied after the merest hesitation, since it occurred to her that she could hardly keep it from him indefinitely. And then she added, in a taut yet steady voice,

'What are your intentions, Mr Drakos?' at which the hint of a sardonic smile touched those hard thin lips, and the black brows were raised a fraction.

'Afraid, are you? The police, you're thinking, and probably you're seeing yourself languishing in a Greek jail?' He paused and laughed. 'At this juncture I think I ought to point out that our jails aren't the comfortable home from home places you have in your country.'

Sarah was pale, but determined not to allow her innate courage to fail her.

'Miranda--' she began, when he interrupted her, dismissing the subject of her friend.

'I don't think I ought to hand you over to the police, Sarah, as I'm sure your beauty would suffer if you were to languish in jail...' He tailed off, his brows lifting in arrogance. 'You don't approve of my use of your given name, obviously—not judging by your expression?'

'I'd prefer you to address me as Miss Gilmore,' was her acid response.

Ignoring this, he continued with what he had been saying. 'Yes, your beauty would suffer were you to spend five or ten years in jail—which of course you would do if convicted for attempted murder.'

'Attempted murder? It was no such thing!'

'You said yourself that a person could die on that island.'

'You heard?' she said, eyeing him curiously.

'I heard everything. True, you and your confederate were on the shore, but the saloon window was open. Yes, I heard a great deal, Sarah. Enough to send you to prison for a very long time. However, as I've said, prison is not for you—not a State prison, that is,' he added, and waited for her response. She made none, determined to remain calm. But she was acutely conscious of his origin, that he came from that dark region of Greece where the law was taken into the people's own hands\* A curious note edged his voice when next he spoke. 'You're a cool one,' he commented. 'By rights you should be trembling at the idea of being in my power, or crying out for mercy as you dwell on your ultimate fate.'

Her head lifted proudly.

'I would never cry out for mercy!'

His eyes took on a curious expression.

'I don't believe you would,' he said unexpectedly.

Bypassing this, Sarah reverted to the plight of her friend, determinedly avoiding any discussion on her own possible fate. She herself was strong; she could fight if necessary, whereas Miranda was of a far different mettle and, left alone on that island for any length of time, she would abandon all hope, in which case her nerves could suffer a complete breakdown. It wasn't as if her mother knew which island Miranda was intending using in her plan. Mrs Maddison had merely been told that Charon Drakos was being dumped on an uninhabited island.

'You can't leave Miranda on that island——'

'Why not?' An indifferent shrug of his shoulders accompanied the brief response to her words.

'She'll be terrified, all alone.'

'Serve her right. She'll have time to regret her action.'

'You'll be in trouble,' Sarah warned him. 'You don't suppose her mother's going to ignore the disappearance of her daughter, do you?'

Diverted for a space, Charon inquired curiously,

'What about your mother? Isn't she also going to be troubled over your disappearance?'

'I have no parents,' she informed him, forced to tell the truth even though a lie might have served her better. 'My mother died when I was very young, and my father four years ago.'

The black eyes kindled.

'So you yourself will not be missed?'

'Certainly I'll be missed! Mrs Maddison knows I went with Miranda.' Charon made no comment on this and after a moment Sarah continued, 'Mrs

Maddison will very soon be informing the police of Miranda's disappearance.'

A slight frown of puzzlement appeared on her companion's brow.

'Surely Mrs Maddison will hire a boat and send someone to Iscarte Island. After all, that's where you were headed for, so it's the obvious place to look for her daughter. Miranda will then be rescued.' He paused, observing Sarah in some amusement. 'You, on the other hand, will not be rescued.'

Ignoring this latter remark, she said, her voice low and deeply troubled, 'Mrs Maddison doesn't know which island we were taking you to.'

'She doesn't?' He stared at her. 'How is that?'

'We didn't mention the particular island. She merely knows we were taking you to an uninhabited island.'

'In that case,' commented Charon indifferently, 'it's going to be quite a task finding her. Did you know there are hundreds of uninhabited Greek islands?'

Sarah drew a deep breath.

'It's hardly to be expected that Mrs Maddison's going to have someone searching around,' she retorted. 'She'll just go to the police.' Even before she had finished speaking Charon was shaking his head.

'She'll be in real trouble if she does.'

Sarah bit her lip.

'Because of what Miranda intended doing?'

Charon nodded his head. Clearly he was amused by the situation.

'Mrs Maddison herself will be charged too. Accessory after the fact, as you in England call it. In other words, aiding and abetting. If Mrs Maddison

thinks to seek legal advice before acting she'll be warned of the danger which hangs over both her daughter and herself.'

'She can't just ignore the fact that Miranda hasn't returned home!' Deep distress caused Sarah's voice to lift; it seemed to grate on Charon's ears and he frowned heavily down at her. 'Please have her rescued, Mr Drakos.' She looked at him through grave and shadowed eyes and her expression so caught his interest that he seemed quite unable to take his eyes from her face.

'You don't appear to be in the least concerned about your own fate,' he commented, a strange note to his voice. 'All your concern is for your friend, apparently?'

Was there a hint of admiration in his tone? wondered Sarah. She could not be sure, but it certainly had seemed like it.

'It isn't only Miranda, but her mother as well.' Sarah paused a moment. 'I can understand how you feel, Mr Drakos,' she said quietly. 'I expect I myself should attempt some kind of revenge if the same thing happened to me. But I would ask that—with Miranda—you will be lenient...' Her voice trailed away as he began to shake his head. She ought to have known better than to expect mercy from him, she thought, and yet she could not give in, leaving Miranda to her fate.

'*She* was intending to leave *me* there, and for a long period, judging by the amount of provisions you both took ashore. She'll be glad of those, because it now seems she's to be some considerable time on the island.'

'She could die!' For the first time he detected a note of fear in Sarah's voice. 'Her mother—she's a widow. Even you couldn't make an innocent woman suffer!'

'Even you?' he repeated, eyeing her with an odd expression. 'That's a strange thing to say, isn't it?'

She looked directly at him.

'I'm under no illusions about the people from the Deep Mani,' she told him quietly, and his laugh rang out, echoing round the small saloon.

'So you know about us? Good! I don't have to explain, then. You'll not be surprised when learning of your fate.'

'Miranda,' she said again, pale but composed despite the threat contained in his voice. 'As you've remarked I consider her fate to be more important than mine at present. Can I ask you to have her rescued?' she said again.

'Your request is refused,' he returned implacably. And he added, just as if he had to, 'Even if you went down on your knees and pleaded for her the request would still be refused.'

She knew he meant it and anger and frustration rose within her. However, any display of temper would, she felt sure, be treated with nothing more than contempt and so she held herself calm. What could she do to help her friend? This man's refusal made it even more imperative that she herself escape, since Miranda must be rescued, and without too much delay. Sarah did not dare dwell on Mrs Maddison's state of mind when the two girls failed to return. After a small hesitation she managed to ask,

'What are your intentions regarding me? You say you're not handing me over to the police?'

'No, certainly not that,' he mused, his eyes roving her lovely body, in the same way as they had roved it previously. She felt as if she were being stripped; her colour rose delicately and she averted her head. 'You're even more beautiful when you blush like that,' he murmured almost gently. 'I must admit I had at first intended handing you over to the police, but that was before I had the opportunity of taking a good look at you--'

Without warning he stepped forward and, with all the arrogance of the victor, he took her chin in his hand and turned her face up again. Furious at the gesture, she twisted away, but this served only to impel him to further mastery and before she knew it she was brought roughly into his arms and his hard demanding mouth was pressed to hers. Stunned, both by the

swiftness and unexpectedness of his action, she had no chance to struggle, with the result that, on releasing her, he said in some amusement,

'So you liked that, eh? Women usually do--'

'You arrogant, pompous ass!' The words were almost hissed out at him and her dark blue eyes moved with contempt from his face to his feet and back again. 'Like it! It was vile!' and to give added strength to this statement Sarah brought out a handkerchief and rubbed vigorously at her lips.

Strangely, this demonstration left him unmoved, the flicker of a smile merely hovering about the thin and ruthless mouth.

'As I was saying before our romantic little interlude,' he began, 'I did initially intend letting the police deal with you, but not now, my Sarah--'

'I'm *not* your Sarah!'

'You soon will be,' was the confident response. 'You see, my dear, I have decided to have you instead of Pamela. I believe I've managed to get myself a better bargain, since that stupid girl has not the spirit which you display. I've never had a pillow-friend who had any desire to engage me in combat. The experience will be both novel and instructive.'

Although every drop of blood drained from her face, Sarah still contrived to retain her calm. She was not the offshoot of the fearless Gorakis Pavromichalis for nothing. Inherent in her were traits of bravery and optimism. Never could she have given up hope at this stage; she did not even consider defeat at the hands of this man, and, therefore, putting aside her own danger, she changed the subject, endeavouring to clear up one of the several circumstances that had been puzzling her. She asked what had made him suspicious of the wine.

'You didn't drink it,' she added unnecessarily.

'Only a fool would have done so,' he returned with a derisive laugh. 'One had only to smell it to know what it contained.'



'Was it some herb?' she inquired, for the moment diverted.

Charon Drakos mentioned the herb, adding that she had obviously never heard of it.

'No, I haven't.'

'I was, of course, suspicious long before the wine was handed to me,' he said, half expecting this to surprise her, but she merely looked at him and returned, without much expression,

'You were?'

'Naturally. I was more than a little intrigued by the invitation given me by Pamela's sister. Something was afoot; it was the easiest thing in the world to deduce that.'

'How?'

The flippant lift of a hand and then,

'The very idea of arranging a meeting on a boat aroused both my interest and my suspicions. Miranda was either indulging in the melodramatic or plotting something unpleasant for me. I naturally judged it to be the latter.'

'So the plan *was* weak, after all.' murmured Sarah pensively.

'Am I to take it that you yourself considered it to be weak?'

She nodded and said quite frankly that she had considered it to be weak.

'I was amazed when I learned of your acceptance of the invitation.'

'Amazed but not warned?' Charon raised one straight black brow. 'It would appear you're no brighter than your stupid friend.'

'Miranda is not stupid!' flashed Sarah indignantly. And then, 'Please continue, Mr Drakos. I'm naturally curious to know the whole.'

'And to learn just how your plans misfired?' he added with a laugh. 'Well, after boarding the boat I became even more alert. I heard your friend whispering to someone, although I could not catch her words. I expect she was informing you that I had come aboard like—like...' He paused a moment, frowning in thought. 'Like a lamb to the slaughter, I believe you English say?' She merely nodded abruptly, waiting for him to continue. 'And she probably gloated over the fact that I had accepted her noxious brew?' A sneer curved his lips. 'I threw it out of the window.'

Sarah drew a breath, inwardly seething at the man's obvious amusement. It was plain that he considered the whole plan to be childish, thought up by two amateurs—and not very intelligent ones at that. For a long moment she stared into his eyes, where undisguised humour was lurking.

'Your criminal desire to take Pam away necessitated some strong action,' she began, then stopped, as now he actually burst out laughing.

'*Strong* action?' The black eyes raked her with a mingling of amusement and contempt. 'Two females—actually believing they could abduct a man!' Again he laughed, and again she seethed with anger. However, the acid retort which rose to her lips was cut as, turning away, Charon Drakos left the saloon, locking the door behind him.

## CHAPTER THREE

It was over three hours before he returned; the boat had been travelling at full speed for the whole of that time. Fuming, Sarah had hammered furiously on the door, shouting for him to come back. She was frantic about her friend, appalled at the idea of her spending the night alone on the island. But Charon was not intending to take the slightest notice of Sarah's wrathful exhibition. He probably considered it beneath his interest, she thought, gritting her teeth and wishing she could think of some way of turning the tables on him, in the same manner he had turned them on Miranda and herself.

The boat's engine stopped suddenly and a moment later the door was once again opened. Through the window she saw land.

'We're changing over to another vessel,' he informed her brusquely. 'Come along!'

She stood her ground.

'Where are you taking me?' She swallowed, angry at the knowledge that a little ball of fear had lodged within her throat. She must not weaken, must never for one moment despair of escaping from this man's clutches.

'To my—home.'

'Your home? Why did you hesitate?'

His eyes glittered, hard and dangerous.

'You're not here to ask questions! I meant what I said about taking you instead of Pamela--No, do not interrupt me! You've asked for it, as Miranda has asked for what she's received. You're coming with me to my home in the Deep Mani, where you'll remain, my prisoner, until I tire of you...'

'No! You can't do this! It's criminal; you'll be prosecuted.'

'In the Mani,' he told her with a soft, invidious note to his voice, 'we are *never* prosecuted. It's known that we're a law unto ourselves; no one interferes with us simply because they know they would do so at their peril.'

'I don't believe you're totally lawless. It wouldn't be tolerated today as it was in times gone by.'

'Who are you trying to convince?' he asked in some amusement. 'Yourself or me?'

'I hate you!' she flashed, regardless of the dangerous glint that entered his eyes. 'I can't believe you want me instead of Pam!'

'No?' with a raising of his brows, a gesture which was beginning to infuriate her. 'I hoped my intentions had been made perfectly clear to you, Sarah. I've lost Pamela, but as I remarked earlier, I have acquired a better bargain.' Amusement looked out from those black eyes as they swept over her. She suddenly recalled having heard that the Greeks were the most amorous race in the world. 'And how do you feel at the tables being turned on you like this?' He was taunting her, yet there was the hint of a snarl to his voice which told her quite plainly that he was by no means flattered by the girls' low opinion of his intelligence. 'It amazes me that you could have been in any way confident of carrying out so feeble a plan. Even an idiot could have seen through it.' He glanced somewhat impatiently at his wrist watch. 'Come,' he ordered curtly. 'My own vessel will take us as far as Leonidian, where we will tie up for the night. Tomorrow morning we shall continue by car.'

'You appear to have it all arranged.' She spoke slowly, watching his face. 'You couldn't have known--'

'I'm not omniscient, if that's what you mean. No, my- yacht just happens to be moored at Hydra, where I intended to take Pamela first, then on to my home—just as I'm doing with you. My plans haven't changed,' he added with a trace of sardonic amusement. 'The time, and the female, are different, that is all.'

Her fists clenched; through the angry chaos of her mind ran the desperate desire to turn the tables on him, in the same way he had turned them on Miranda and herself.

'You're despicable!' was all she could think of saying, and as this brought forth a laugh she found herself seething with fury. 'I wish I were a man!' she flashed at him. 'I'd kill you!'

'You talk like a true Maniot,' he returned mildly. 'I wonder if I should marry you--'

'Marry! *You!*' All the arrogance and contempt she could muster went into her voice as she added, 'I wouldn't defile myself...' She stopped, slowly, and instinctively backed away. Never had she seen a face so starkly evil! Charon Drakos did not move one small step towards her. Instead, he pointed with his finger to a spot in front of him.

'Come here,' he murmured softly.

'Why should I?' Her head was flung back, her expression fearless. Charon stared, as if unable to believe in her defiance.

'Come here,' he repeated at length, and his black eyes held hers, held them as a stoat might hold its prey. 'I said ... come ... here...' Softer still the tone, but the danger in it would have daunted many a strong man. 'If you don't obey me, Sarah, then I can assure you you'll be bitterly regretting it in about ten seconds from now.'

He mouth went dry yet her whole attitude remained one of challenge. This man was not going to intimidate her! She was no inferior Greek woman conditioned to bend to the near celestial power of the male! No, he could do his worst, but she would never afford him the satisfaction of being able to subdue her in any way other than by using physical force. For some reason she could not even begin to explain, she felt convinced that the use of his superior physical strength would not in any way be acceptable to his ego.

She stood her ground as he came close, remained stiff when his hands encircled her throat; she closed her eyes, wondering if this was the end. But

she made no sound, not even when his fingers pressed, making bruises on her neck. And suddenly she was free, with the Greek standing over her, staring down into her face.

'My God, but you're different from the rest! I admire your courage, girl. Tell me, where did you get it?'

'The history of my inherent traits can scarcely be of interest to you,' she returned haughtily. 'So shall we talk of important things? This intention of taking me to your home is absurd! I have already admitted to being able to appreciate your wish for revenge, but on the other hand, if you have any idea of justice at all you'll agree that you asked for what Miranda had in store for you?'

His eyes, still fixed on her face, held an unmistakable gleam of admiration and, noticing it, Sarah swiftly reached the conclusion that this man was intrigued by her innate strength of character, and the intrepid manner with which she had stood up to him.

'What made you decide Pamela was worth the risk you were willing to take?' he queried with interest.

'She's the sister of a great friend of mine. It was my duty to assist Miranda.'

'Nonsense! Even Miranda ought not to have taken so great a risk. The girl's not worth it,' he added with an edge of contempt to his voice. 'She threw herself at me! I told her there was no chance of marriage—ever. Yet she continued to play with the flame. Well, I decided at last to take what was being so readily offered. She was to have come with me to my home for as long as I wanted her to stay,

and then--' A contemptuous snap of his fingers spoke far more revealingly than any words could have done, and again Sarah blushed, but this time it was for Pam, who, she knew without a doubt, had acted exactly as the Greek had described. For there was a ring of truth to his voice despite its derision and callous indifference.

So it had all been for nothing. Pam had been at fault. With this galling knowledge taking full possession of her she looked wearily at her captor. His eyes were narrowed, as if he were attempting to read her thoughts.

'Is that your handbag?' Charon pointed to the couch. Sarah shook her head.

'It's Miranda's,' she told him, the sight of the bag sending her thoughts darting to her friend, alone on that barren island, alone with darkness already beginning to fall. Sarah shivered involuntarily. What a mess they were both in! Was it possible that they would come out unharmed? She thought of all those warnings, those premonitions, which she had ignored, determined as she was to help her friend.

Charon was speaking, ordering her to precede him from the saloon; he added the warning that she was not to make a sound as she stepped from one vessel to the other.

'I'll strangle you if you so much as open your mouth,' he added threateningly. But Sarah was not intimidated by this. She meant to escape and here seemed an opportune place to try.

The air was cool on her face as she came on deck, the rising moon a friendly crescent in the swiftly darkening sky. Her heart sank as she looked around for the two vessels were some considerable distance from the shore. She saw two men moving on the deck of the luxurious yacht, which was alongside *Halcyone*. So Charon Drakos had a crew on board. Biting her lip in frustration, she had to admit that no escape could be effected yet.

'Move quicker,' snapped Charon. And he added amusedly, 'If you're thinking of throwing yourself overboard and choosing death before dishonour then you can save yourself the trouble. I shall only bring you out again.'

She swallowed, turning a white face towards him. How formidable he looked in this half-light! More like a devil than a human. His hand under her elbow was detestable, but she endured it, feeling the need for support as she stepped from one swaying vessel to the other.

'The *Halcyone*,' she began as the thought occurred to her, 'it belongs to a friend of Miranda's. You can't leave it here.'

'Why not?' with careless arrogance. 'It isn't my business to restore people's lost property to them!'

Sarah stood in the cabin which Charon had given her and looked around, able to appreciate the evidences of luxury and good taste even while fixed in her brain with stark reality was the sure knowledge that she was now completely in the power of this man, this pagan from the blackest region of Greece. For a fleeting moment her thoughts darted once again to her friend, alone on that jagged piece of rock jutting out from the dark and lonely sea. But soon Sarah dismissed Miranda from her mind, deciding that she was by no means in so dire a situation as Sarah herself.

Sarah turned, startled as, without even knocking, Charon entered the cabin. Her eyes widened, brittle and arrogant.

'What do you want?' she demanded.

His brows lifted a fraction.

'Don't adopt that manner with me, Sarah,' he advised softly. 'It seems you have a great deal to learn, my girl!'

She said, ignoring this,

'How long do you think you can keep me prisoner?'

'Until I tire of you; I've already told you.' The black eyes raked her insolently. 'You'll find all you require in the way of toilet requisites in the bathroom cabinet--' He indicated the door leading off from the lovely blue and white cabin. 'And clothes in the wardrobe. The—er—more intimate garments will be found in the drawers.'



Her eyes raking him with a similar insolence to his own, she said contemptuously, 'So this is where you bring these pillow-friends you spoke of?'

'I give them a treat of a cruise now and then, yes,' he replied blandly.

Nothing would have afforded her greater satisfaction than to tell him to keep his fripperies, but she was sensible enough to admit to requiring a change of clothes.

Watching her, Charon said quietly,

'You intrigue me, Sarah. Aren't you afraid?' He stared intently at her, obviously puzzled by her manner. 'I've never met a woman quite like you.' She made no immediate reply and Charon repeated softly, 'Aren't you afraid?'

Her lovely blue eyes met his unflinchingly.

'Would it afford you satisfaction if I were?' she countered, unwilling to answer his question, as she was honest enough to admit to the presence of a tinge of fear, because the more she dwelt on her situation the less clear became any possible way of escape.

'I don't know,' was his surprising admission. 'I admire bravery above anything else, especially in a woman.'

'Am I supposed to be flattered, Mr Drakos?'

'Charon's the name.' He stopped and laughed suddenly. 'Named after the chap who ferried the shades of the dead across the Styx,' he added, watching her intently as he spoke.

'I've heard of the name,' she said.

'So you read Greek mythology?'

'I've read a little, yes.'

'And you've also read about the Deep Mani, you say?'

To this Sarah made no answer. Unwilling to lie, she was also unwilling to inform him that her knowledge of the region in which he lived had been acquired through her father.

'Those eyes of yours,' he said slowly, his gaze fixed intently upon them. 'They interest me exceedingly. It's an unusual combination—very dark blue eyes, which are also slanting up at the corners. They are not often seen in English girls, I think?'

She shrugged carelessly.

'How should I know?' she said, and his glance became brittle.

'That arrogant manner, Sarah,' he rejoined severely. 'It's something I do not intend to tolerate! '

She looked away, escaping those hard metallic eyes.

'Why are you here?' she wanted to know.

'I came to tell you where everything is. Dinner will be served by my men in about an hour's time. You--'

'I don't want anything to eat!' What did he think she was made of, to be able to concentrate on food at a time like this?

'You will eat with me, nevertheless,' he told her, and strode from the room.

For a long while she stood by the window, watching the lights of Hydra twinkling up the hillsides. What a peaceful scene! And what chaos in her mind! What would be Charon Drakos's next move? If only the yacht were anchored closer to the shore she could have made some attempt at escape, for she was a very strong swimmer. As it was, she knew she would have to wait ... and a lot could happen during the waiting time. Yes, indeed it could, she mused grimly, under no illusions about this man's character. What he desired he would take, with that same ruthless unconcern shown by those

ancients who first settled in the Deep Mani, the darkest of Greeks with their russet skins and lean, hard-hewn faces, their thrusting jowls and rebellious chins. An offshoot of such tribes, he could scarcely be expected to show mercy. And yet, flashing across her mind like a picture appearing on a screen, was the profile of her own character. Courage and steadfastness, arrogance and a certain degree of superiority—these she had inherited through her mother, but none of the cruelty of the Pavromichalis clan had come down to her. Practicality, yes, and the ability to view a situation objectively, but at the roots there lay compassion—in fact, a truly feminine softness which often seemed at total variance with her hauteur.

However, she was convinced that no such diversions of character existed within the heart and mind of her captor. His face told all; there was not only something sinister about it, but all the revealing Signs of pitilessness and cruelty.

What would he say were he ever to learn that she too had similar ancestors to his? Suddenly she was frowning, as into her thought stream came those remarks he had made about her eyes. They interested him, he had said, and she realized now that when he declared the combination was not often seen in England, he had actually been stressing his words. It was as if he were inviting her to make some comment of her own ... perhaps inviting her to own to being a descendant of the Pavromichalis clan. However, her silence on the subject of her eyes appeared to satisfy him that she had no connection with that notorious family.

Sarah's meditations were cut eventually by the sound of a footfall outside the door.

'Are you ready, Sarah?' inquired Charon in his finely-timbred voice. 'I expected you to have come out long before now.'

'Ready for what?' she snapped, and the door was flung open immediately and she found herself looking at the immaculately-attired figure of her captor.

'Why haven't you washed and changed?' he demanded, his eyes sweeping over her. 'I told you to prepare for dinner!'

Despite the danger which she was in Sarah drew herself up to her full height and replied haughtily,

'And I told you I didn't want any dinner.'

There was a sudden glint in those piercing black eyes.

'When I give an order,' he murmured with dangerous quiet, 'I expect it to be obeyed.'

Sarah's eyes flashed; she made no attempt to quell the fury which rose within her. Perilous though her position was she could not be spoken to like this.

'I am not having any dinner! And even if I were intending to eat, I would never sit at the same table as you!'

Silence, intense like the awful hush of doom. Yet Sarah faced him, as she would face any dangerous adversary, her blue eyes wide and showing not one atom of fear. But within her her heart was thudding with wild uncontrol.

'You wouldn't?' So soft the tone, and softer still the footfall on the carpet as he approached the spot where she was standing. Sarah swallowed hard, for it was no use pretending that this man was not dangerous, nor that, in any physical encounter, his strength would make her own seem puny.

'You are mistaken, you *will* sit at the same table as I—and within the next fifteen minutes!' He was above her now, toweringly aggressive and superior. 'There's a black evening dress in that wardrobe; it's about your size. Put it on.'

'I shall never wear the clothes of your— your--' She stopped, choking with fury.

'My other pillow-friends?' with an amused lift of his brows. 'Don't worry, the black dress has never been worn. The woman I bought it for couldn't get into it—I never did fathom how I had come to make a mistake like that. However, it'll fit you all right...'

'It's immaterial whether it fits me or not. I have no intention of wearing it.'

'You mean that?'

'I don't waste time saying things I don't mean.'

'Nor do I, Sarah.' The softness of his voice warned and she stepped back. His hand came out, taking her wrist in a grip that made her wince. 'You *will* wear that dress, my girl.' Charon was pale with anger, and a muscle twitched at the corner of his mouth. 'Or else...'

She shook her head, suddenly aware that it was beginning to ache.

'You can't expect me to dress up--'

'I have never yet been called upon to act as valet to a female; nevertheless, I feel sure I can make a reasonable success of it. Allow me to assist you--'

The next second he had seized both wrists and, holding them in one of his hands, he made to unzip the back of her dress.

'No!' She twisted round, struggling to free her hands. 'Let go of me!' Black fury blazed from her eyes—and quite without warning Charon brought her to him and kissed her fiercely on the lips.

'It's going to be entertaining, taming you, my girl! Every other affair will seem tepid by comparison.' She was still firmly held, but she struggled fiercely, every nerve in her body outraged.

'Let me go!' she seethed. 'You'll pay for this! I'll have you prosecuted even though I put my own freedom in jeopardy!'

He threw back his head and laughed. 'First, my dear, you've to effect an escape. Once I get you to my home you'll leave it only if and when I allow you to. And,' he added, towering above her and looking down into her eyes with all the flame of desire in his eyes, 'I have a feeling that it'll be a very long while before I tire of you. Mind,' he thought to add, 'if I subdue you

entirely, until you become no more than my slave, then maybe I *shall* weary of you, for then you'll be no different from all the others.'

He left her, drained of all energy, and with both her wrists showing deep purple marks made by the pressure of his fingers. She went into the bathroom and took off her dress to wash her face and hands.

The black dress could have been made for her, so perfect was the fit. And it flattered her pale colouring. Its length too was right. She brushed her hair, unable now to think clearly, for it did seem that she must face defeat, must in the end be forced to surrender to the man's pagan demands. A shudder passed through her at the idea of his hands on her body, treating her as his plaything.

'I could kill him!' she breathed, wondering what sort of a sentence she would receive if she did do him an injury.

The dining-saloon revealed even more evidence of wealth than her bedroom, but she could not appreciate anything, not even the delicious food which was put before her by the stolid-faced Greek in the black trousers and white jacket. The other man came in with the wine, and served it, his face as expressionless as that of his colleague.

Total silence reigned for the first fifteen minutes, then Charon, deciding it should end, spoke to Sarah, saying in a conversational manner,

'Tomorrow morning at daybreak we shall be sailing for home. I can't say I hope you will like the place to which I'm taking you, because I feel sure you won't—'

'You're perfectly right,' she broke in angrily. 'I wouldn't like any place to which you took me!'

A rather pained frown settled on his low and noble forehead.

'Must you continue with this pettishness, Sarah? If you do you'll weary me or, alternatively, anger me. If the latter I might just resort to chastisement.'

The blood rushed to her cheeks, and she glared at him with black fury in her eyes.

'You can cut out the threats!' she flashed. 'I'm English—not one of your servile, subjugated Greek women with no backbone! I'm made of very different stuff!'

To her amazement no angry outburst answered hers. On the contrary, the only expression in his eyes was one of admiration.

'Undoubtedly you are,' he agreed, pausing in the act of transferring a piece of meat from his fork to his mouth. 'I feel, my Sarah, that you and I shall deal famously together.'

'Don't be ridiculous!' .

He noticed her food on her plate, untouched.

'Eat,' he ordered curtly.

'Is this the way you usually treat people?' she asked, still leaving her food untouched.

'We of the Mani are not renowned for our courtesy.'

'It doesn't appear to trouble you overmuch.'

'It doesn't trouble me at all.' He looked at her plate again. 'If you don't eat something, madam, I shall be forced to make you. I find no pleasure in being watched when I dine.'

Glancing up as the servant brought the wine bottle to the table, Sarah cast Charon an inquiring glance.

'No,' he said in answer to her silent question, 'Neither Glavcos nor Petrakis speak English.'

'Where did you learn it?' she asked curiously, admitting to his accent being a rather attractive adjunct to his beautifully-spoken English.

Her question obviously amused him, for he sent her a swift spontaneous smile.

'You didn't expect a Maniot to be educated, then?'

'I'd never even thought about that side of it.'

'That side?'

'The educational system.'

'We do have schools,' he laughed. And, when she made no response, 'Did you imagine us still living the troglodytic life?'

She sent him a speaking glance.

'Might I say that I find your sarcasm childish? No, I did not imagine you all to be living in caves!'

'We were once. I could tell you some bloodcurdling tales of the wild ways of the Mani.' He paused. 'I see you're eating your dinner now. I'm rather glad I didn't have to coerce you.' He was taunting her and she felt her cheeks stain crimson, with fury. 'Yes,' he went on, obviously anxious to keep up a conversation with her, 'I could relate some gruesome stories about the Mani. You've probably never heard of the feud which existed between the great feudal ruler, Nyklia Drakos, and the Pavromichalis family?'

Sarah's nerves sharpened. She said, trying to sound casual,

'These were two of the powerful families who formed the feudal oligarchy?'

'My, you have been doing your homework! What else do you know about these two families?'



'Not very much,' replied Sarah, and now she did begin seriously to concentrate on her food. For she had no desire to be drawn into a discussion about the family whose offshoot she was. 'I do know, though, that there were several other families just as powerful.'

Charon shook his head.

'These two were the rulers. Everyone else bowed to their laws.'

'Laws?' Sarah could not help saying with some degree of sarcasm. 'I've always understood that the Deep Maniots have invariably been a lawless race.'

'True, to some extent,' he agreed. 'But there must always be laws.' He paused to help himself to salad from a side plate. 'The feud was the grimmest in all the land,' he continued presently. 'Murder was an everyday occurrence.'

'I believe so.' Sarah would have changed the subject, could she have thought of something to introduce.

'At this time of the year,' continued Charon, 'the ghosts of the vile Pavromichalis clan are supposed to roam the Deep Mani; in winter they roam at night, during the darkest hour, wailing for revenge. Their ghosts are said to haunt graveyards too, and ruined churches. Their haunts are also the towers, many of which have fallen into decay.'

'Only the Pavromichalis clan? Don't the others have ghosts roaming about all over the place?'

His face lit with amusement; Sarah stared, unable to accept that the transformation was real. Never before had she seen this kind of expression on his face, an expression which erased all the harsh lines, all the cruelty. Perhaps, she thought, the man was human after all, and if so he might just treat her with some sort of consideration, might listen to reason and let her go. In view of this new and optimistic idea, Sarah decided not to say or do anything that would antagonise him. His own attitude at this particular time being one of amiability, she decided to reciprocate.

'The ghosts of the Drakos clan roam, yes, of course they do, but not as often as those of the Pavromichali. We killed more of them than they of us.' Amusement still remained on his face, and the black eyes actually twinkled. She said, watching him with a fascinated stare,

'You don't believe in ghosts, though, do you?'

'No, as a matter of fact, I don't.'

'But the other Maniots do?'

He nodded his head.

'Many of them believe in ghosts, yes.'

'It's a primitive land,' she said, daintily taking up a piece of meat on her fork. 'I've heard that the Maniots have a very strange death fixation?'

Again he nodded his head.

'It's quite true, they do. They believe that if a person dies by violence his blood remains wet, staining the ground until someone erects a cross over it.'

'It's difficult for me to conceive that superstition can be so strong.' She spoke softly and, somehow, a little compassionately. Charon paused in his eating, to stare strangely at her; she tried to read his thoughts, for it seemed once again that somewhere within that look a hint of admiration gleamed.

Unexpectedly he said,

'Tell me about yourself, Sarah. If we're to be lovers we should know something about each other...'

'Lovers!' Contemptuously she stared at him, her appetite gone as disgust rose within her. 'Are you mad?'

'There's no escape for you,' he told her quietly. 'I meant what I said: I'm taking you instead of Pamela.'

'Will it afford you any satisfaction? After all, Pam was coming to you willingly.'

'You, my dear,' he returned with an amused smile, 'will afford me far greater satisfaction than Pamela ever could have done. Simpering female that she was,' he added contemptuously, 'she could not see that I had no real interest in her, that I would tire of her within a month.'

'A month...?' Sarah looked at him with acute disdain. 'Then why offer to take her at all?— causing all this trouble to everyone!'

He merely said, that flicker of amusement still hovering about his thin mouth,

'I'm exceedingly glad I did offer to take her, Sarah, because, if I hadn't, I'd never have met you.'

She glowered at him across the table.

'You're going to live to regret this,' she cried. 'I shan't allow you to go unpunished!'

'I shall never regret it,' was his calm response. 'Nor will you. I pay well, and if you continue to please me, and behave yourself, you could make quite a lot of money for yourself--' He got no further, nor did he swing aside in time. The contents of her plate which Sarah threw at him went all over the front of his white shirt before falling on to his lap.

'You ... vixen!' Instantly waving the servant out of the saloon, he rose, came round to Sarah's side of the table and, dragging her to her feet, shook her so violently that he himself was breathless when at last he let her go. 'Do a thing like that again in front of one of my servants and, by God, girl, you'll be sore for a month!' Dark crimson had crept into his face; his thin cruel lips were drawn tightly away from his mouth. Sarah, white as death, and her whole body trembling, thought she had never seen anything so evil as the man before her, a man whose unbridled fury was even now revealed in the convulsive opening and closing of his hands at his sides. He seemed as if he was considering doing her a further physical injury. Stout-hearted though

she was, Sarah at last admitted to experiencing fear. But he would never see it! No, never would she allow this Charon Drakos to see her, one of the clan whose sworn enemy his own clan had been, cringing or displaying any other form of fear! He could do his worst, could exhibit his superior male strength over and over again, but he would never gloat over having subjugated her. She managed to say, in a voice husky and low,

'I'm going to my room--'

'Oh, no, you're not, madam!' Imperiously he flicked a hand towards her chair. 'Sit down and finish your meal!'

Her dark blue eyes glinted with a light almost as savage as the light in his.

'Do you expect us to sit down and finish the meal after what's happened? You're absurd--' This time it was Sarah's words which were cut as, without more ado, Charon picked her up bodily and dumped her on the chair. His hand on her shoulder kept her there.

'And now,' he said between his teeth, 'we'll act like civilised human beings!'

'Human beings? You call yourself human? You're a fiend!'

'You've seen nothing yet,' he rasped, fury still raging within him at being humiliated before his servant. 'Either you'll learn to respect my authority or you'll find yourself continually nursing bruises.'

At last he withdrew his hand, but stood over her, a giant of a man whose whole attitude was one of arrogant superiority. Sarah sat very still, conscious of a searing pain in her head. Never could she have visualised finding herself in a position like this. She was in the man's power and she now knew that whatever he desired to do to her he would most certainly do; she had not the strength to combat him. Suddenly her heart sank, and it did seem that all her innate courage would desert her, for what good was it to her now? Tears gathered in her eyes despite her desperate attempts to suppress them. What a crazy fool she had been to embark on that scheme in face of her own inner warnings! Looking back now she failed utterly to comprehend

her foolishness. What had happened to her common sense, her cool assessment as to the practicality of the plan?

'My servant will bring in the sweet in a moment, and you'll please me by eating it.' Charon's voice, very soft now, broke into her unhappy reflections and she looked up. His shrewd eyes took in all she would have liked to hide. A sneer curved his mouth. 'So surrender is not too far away,' he said. 'However, my Sarah, don't capitulate too soon, for in that case you are likely to bore me—as all the others have bored me.' He stopped, clapped his hands imperiously to bring back the servant, then ordered him to bring in the sweet course. The man inclined his head in a gesture of respect, sent a surreptitious glance in Sarah's direction, then left the room.

An hour later Sarah was in the bedroom, sitting on the bed, staring at the wall and wondering if she would be lucky and manage to see the light of dawn without any intrusion from the man whose prisoner she was. No... Her heart gave a great lurch as the door was swung inwards and Charon stood there, clad in a black dressing-gown. Satan himself, she thought, putting a hand to her breast to ease the wild throbbing of her heart. The sardonic amusement in Charon's eyes served to bring her anger to the fore and she said, managing to inject an arrogant note into her voice in spite of the danger which faced her at his hands,

'I am warning you, Charon Drakos, that if you molest me you'll pay dear for it. I shall most certainly have you thrown in jail.'

'Your bravery is quite remarkable,' was all the comment he made to this as, closing the door with an ominous click, he came forward into the room. All was silent without; she wondered if the two men were still aboard, or if they had gone by dinghy to the island. What difference did it make, though? Even if they were still aboard she could expect no results from any cries she might make for help. Charon was their undisputed master and his orders would always be obeyed. 'Come here, Sarah,' commanded Charon softly. And he pointed to a spot near his feet. 'I did expect you to have disrobed, but no matter. I shall derive much pleasure from doing it for you.'

White to the lips, she made no move to obey his order, but instead she glanced around, half wishing she could jump through the window and find herself in the sea.

Should she plead for mercy? The idea brought a heavy frown to her forehead, and as she frowned the pain she had noticed before increased in intensity. No, she could not plead! Which meant she must endure whatever he meant to do to her. Her mouth was parched, her tongue so rough that she found the greatest difficulty in articulating words. Charon spoke again, commanding her to obey him, at once.

'I—I--' She put a hand to her head, for the pain was becoming almost unbearable. 'Please go away; I don't feel at all well.'

A heartless laugh rang out.

'It's not to be expected that you'll be feeling full of joy, Sarah,' he said in a tone of satirical mockery. 'You've landed yourself in a nasty situation—nasty as far as you are concerned, that is. And now you're using the weakest of excuses to gain time.' He stopped and looked directly at her. 'In your mind you have hopes of escape, which is natural; this I will not deny. But, my Sarah, there is no escape for you. This yacht will pull in at Leonidian where my car will be waiting. You'll step on to the shore and into the car, which will be driven by my man. It's a lonely place where I moor, a little way from the bay where others moor. I shall be at your side, so you see, my dear, your case is hopeless, as I have already told you. And now, my reward for bringing you here--'

'No!' She rose, but stayed where she was. 'You shall not do this to me! I shall fight you—and I warn you, I'm no weakling!'

Another ruthless laugh, and then, coming towards her,

'Already you've accepted your fate, Sarah; I saw it in your face just now, when I entered and you looked up at me. However, if you fight it'll add spice; the victory will be even more gratifying, the pleasure even more delectable.'

She looked into those taunting black eyes, and all the contempt she felt for him was revealed in her own.

'I hate you!' she said in a low voice.

'You'll probably learn to love me,' he remarked coolly. 'They all do in time.'

'You arrogant, self-opinionated creature! Haven't you ever taken a good look at yourself?—made an assessment of your character?'

He shrugged his shoulders.

'Our characters are what we are given.' His black eyes swung from her face to her breasts, then to her tiny waist. A flicker in his glance and then, very softly, 'What a ravishingly attractive girl you are! Sarah, I am not intending to waste any more time.'

She backed as he came close, her legs touching the edge of the bed. Desperately she flashed a glance around the room, as if even now she might by some miracle find a means of escape. Suddenly her eyes lit on a heavy cut-glass vase which had been pushed behind the drapes. If she could get her hands on that... But this was simpler of idea than accomplishment, for, just as she was about to spring towards the window, Charon caught her to him, his arm encircling her like a steel rope, bringing her protesting body close to his. The next moment she was valiantly struggling with him, twisting herself about in a desperate endeavour to reach out and grab the vase. A low laugh escaped him, the laugh of the devil, she thought, squirming and struggling to prevent his lips from taking hers. But it was a vain endeavour; his strength overcame hers without the slightest effort and she was brought completely under his domination as, with the lack of respect he would have shown to any woman he might have picked up on the streets of Athens, he took her face in his hand and, jerking it up, pressed his lips to hers.

'Let me go—oh, let me go!' The words were silent, for his demanding mouth crushed hers, forcing her lips apart. She felt the searing pain in her head increase to a fearful depth, causing her to experience an actual physical sickness. A little moan went unheard in the heat of Charon's passion. His hand came round the back to unzip her dress even while his mouth still held

hers, captured and submissive, for there was no fight left in her. The zip was drawn smoothly to her waist; she felt his cool hand on her bare flesh, and then she went limp in his arms and would have fallen had he not been supporting her.

'My—my head,' she gasped when, realizing something was wrong, Charon released her. 'It's excruciating...' Darkness came across her eyes; vaguely she remembered lifting a feeble hand to push Charon away from her so that she could lie down on the bed. And then she remembered no more until, opening her eyes to the unfamiliar objects around her, she muttered to herself, 'Where am I?'

Charon! She saw his silent figure and full memory returned with devastating impact.

'What ... I mean...' She knew she was naked beneath the covers and hot colour stained her cheeks. 'How—how long have I been unconscious?'

'About an hour.' He looked at her in a clinical all-examining way. 'Don't worry,' came the quiet assurance, 'I merely made you more comfortable.'

She turned from his gaze, trying not to picture him undressing her. Only one hour--

'Why didn't I stay out longer?' she cried in tones which might have come from a fractious child.

'Don't fret,' he said in some amusement. 'I'm no longer in the mood for romance. You're quite safe—for a while.'

So there might yet be an opportunity of escape!

'What happened?' she asked, trying to pinpoint a time when first the headache had come to her. 'I've never felt like that before in my life.'

'Nerves,' he told her briefly, and ill as she was her eyes flashed at this.

'I've never suffered from nerves!'



'How are you now?' he inquired, ignoring this spurt of anger. 'I didn't send for a doctor because I knew it wasn't anything really serious.'

She said perceptively, 'Too risky for you to send for a doctor, wasn't it?'

'No such thing. I happen to be a great friend of the doctor here.'

'So he knows of your reputation?'

Charon gave a slight exclamation of impatience. Sarah looked up into his face and wondered that he showed no sign of disappointment or frustration at being thwarted, after all.

'I've asked how you are feeling now,' he reminded her brusquely. 'Is the head any better?'

'Much, although I can still feel it.'

'Soreness. I believed you were trying to hood-wink me when you talked of not feeling well.'

'Is that supposed to be an apology?' she could not help saying, and he immediately shook his head.

'I never apologise to anyone.'

'That's nothing to brag about!'

He drew a breath, glancing at her with censure in his eyes.

'Would you like a drink?' he asked.

'Yes, please. Water, if you don't mind?'

He went out, returning a few moments later carrying a glass.

'There are some tablets here; they'll take away the slight pains you have.'

Sarah, eyed them suspiciously.

'I'll be all right without them,' she said, trying to hold the cover to her body as she sat up.

'You can swallow them with an easy mind,' he assured her with a hint of mockery. 'I wouldn't give you a love potion, or anything like that. I've no need to,' he added, just as if he could not resist it. 'My persuasive powers have never failed me yet.'

Sarah gritted her teeth.

'I've called you pompous--'

'Twice—three times now. It's becoming monotonous.' He held out the glass, his eyes moving from her face to her neck, and then to the delicate shape beneath the thin cover she was holding up. 'Here's your drink. And here are the tablets.'

She took the glass, but of course could not take the tablets without leaving go of the cover.

'I--'

'Open your mouth.' An order. Sarah kept her mouth firmly closed. Charon said, in a dangerously soft voice, 'I do advise you to obey me, Sarah. Your position's rather precarious, I think you'll agree?'

She coloured again—and opened her mouth. Never had she thought to be meekly obeying orders like this! She allowed her mind to wander to Miranda—and she would willingly have changed places with her! But yet, even now, Sarah could find time to think of her friend, and to own that, in this particular position, she would have undergone a complete collapse, and even if she had escaped unharmed, she would never have been the same again. Miranda was like that. Adverse circumstances troubled her greatly and, unlike Sarah who was ready to fight back, Miranda would succumb to pessimism and deep depression.

The tablets were swallowed, and half of the water. Sarah lay back and closed her eyes.

'What time is it?' she asked, and was told it was almost one o'clock.

'You feel much better now?' Charon amazed her by the hint of anxiety carried in his voice. 'You'll be able to go to sleep?'

'I think so.' Her mind was confused, not so much by the cause of her blackout, but by Charon's attitude. The way he was at this moment she felt perfectly safe! 'Thank you for the water—and the tablets.'

Another surprise as she felt him tuck the cover into her shoulder.

'Good night, Sarah. I hope you'll be your usual fighting self in the morning.'

Catching his mood, she replied,

'I'm sure I shall, Mr Drakos.'

'Charon,' he murmured, but as he was now going from the room no argument resulted from his words.

## CHAPTER FOUR

BY the following morning Sarah was completely recovered; she did not know whether she was glad or sorry. It would seem that while she was off colour Charon would not trouble her, but once she was—as he himself had termed it—her usual fighting self, she could expect him to resume his amorous pursuits. However, she was optimistic of effecting an escape before the end of the day, and so when he knocked and entered the bedroom she was up and dressed and looking her normal healthy self.

'Ready for anything,' he observed, and she gave a small start, for it did seem that he could read her thoughts.

'What time do we arrive at this place?' she asked, acutely aware that already his appreciative eyes were roving her face, and her neck, and then her lovely slender figure.

'This afternoon,' he answered briefly. 'Only another few hours and you'll be in the home you'll occupy for some time to come,' he added, just as if to remind her that although she had escaped temporarily, she must be prepared for what was to come to her. 'I know you're still considering the possibility of escaping from me, Sarah, but I assure you you're wasting your time. I've found a woman who intrigues me, who appeals as much to my intellect as to my desires. I firmly believe we shall deal famously together, once you have accepted me as your master, that is.' His eyes glimmered with sardonic amusement as he noted her changing expression. 'How very lovely you are when in a temper. Those eyes ... so dark a blue, and yet it is fire they flash when your anger is aroused.' He paused a moment. 'Very unusual eyes, my dear,' he said, and naturally she was reminded of his previous strange reference to them. 'However,' he added, becoming coolly efficient, 'I didn't come here to talk about your eyes. I came to see if you are ready for some breakfast. It's after nine o'clock, you'll probably have noticed?'

She nodded.

'The bacon and toast smells appetising,' she had to admit, and this appeared to please him.

'Come, then, we'll partake of bacon and toast together.'

The same man waited on the table, with his companion merely putting in the odd appearance, as he had the previous evening.

'Pam seems to have gained the right impression,' murmured Sarah, not really meaning that her companion should hear. But of course he did, and his eyebrows lifted a fraction in a gesture of inquiry.

'What impression is that?' he wanted to know.

Resignedly Sarah realized she must answer him and she said that Pam had believed he was a wealthy man.

'This yacht,' added Sarah, 'it appears to be a very expensive model—although I must admit I don't know anything about boats at all.'

'But your friend Miranda does, apparently,' he rejoined, turning the subject from himself. 'I've been thinking—when she's been on that island long enough to regret her wicked ways, I might have someone take the *Halcyone* to her, and let her get back in it to the Piraeus.'

'You will,' eagerly and almost gratefully.

'When?'

Charon passed her the toast, his brow thoughtful.

'Once again it is your friend's situation that takes precedence over your own. You do realize, my Sarah, that you are in the direst situation possible?'

'I'm not likely to forget it,' she retorted, accepting a piece of toast from the rack and placing it before her. 'Yet it is Miranda you are thinking of?'

'And her mother. You forget that there are two people who are at this moment out of their minds. And even Pam might be worried--'

'Not she!' came the derisive interruption. 'That girl's concerned with Number One only—and always will be.'

'Counting her out, then, there are still Mrs Madison and her other daughter.'

'Both of whom deserve to suffer,' he returned indifferently. 'I shall not make you any promises as to when I'll send the *Halcyone* back—or even say for certain that I will send it back. I might decide to let your friend stay on Jscarte until someone rescues her.'

'That might be months!'

'So it might.' Charon eyed his toast with maddening deliberation before adding, 'Now what would I have done in those circumstances? I believe I'd lhave lighted a fire up on the highest point—yes, that would be the most practical thing to do, and if she's any sense she'll do it without delay.'

'The highest point? How can she get up there?'

'Climb,' he said briefly.

Sarah gave a small sigh.

'You know as well as I that no woman could get up to the top of one of those rugged heights.'

'What about you?' And without affording her the chance of replying he added, a confident ring to his voice, 'You'd manage it without too much difficulty.'

'I don't wish for your flattery, Mr Drakos!' she snapped.

'Charon,' he said quietly. 'Let me hear you say it, Sarah.'

'I can't!'

'Nonsense! Say it.'

She shook her head.

'You have no right to expect me to call you ... anything other than Mr Drakos.'

The glimmer of an amused smile caught his lips.

'You almost said it, didn't you? As to rights—I have the rights of a lover, Sarah,' he told her with a firm implacable tone to his voice. 'You're my property now.'

She looked down at her plate, her appetite gone. But she ate the meal, knowing he would once again assert his authority and make her eat it. He spoke, softly, ordering her to use his Christian name. She could have screamed with frustration at her helplessness as, forced to obey him, she did as she was told.

'That's better,' he applauded. 'After all, when you're lying in my arms you can scarcely say "good night, Mr Drakos", can you?' he added with a laugh.

'I shall not be saying good night at all!'

The black eyes kindled.

'You'll do as I bid you. If I wish you to say good night to me then you will do just that.'

'I've finished my breakfast,' she snapped. 'Do you mind if I go to my bedroom?'

'Not at all. I might join you in a few minutes.'

'Join?' she faltered, her face losing its colour. 'The--the yacht. Won't you b-be needed—to— help sail it?'

Charon's mouth twitched.

'My men are making a most satisfactory job of sailing it at the moment, don't you think?'

Sarah moistened her lips.

'Er ... yes ... yes.' She had been on the verge of rising from her chair, but she settled down again. 'I think I'll have another piece of toast,' she decided, and Charon obligingly held out the rack to her, a trace of mocking amusement in his glance.

'Afraid- of my company, eh? Sarah, my girl, you're going to have to get used to it.' He paused in order to allow her to speak, but she remained silent. 'Last night you were saved, but I shouldn't think that could happen again.'

The yacht was moving smoothly over the water; islands came and went, some of them recognised by Sarah although she had never visited them. And the morning moved on too, with Charon spending some of his time in a small saloon which, he informed Sarah, was private. She could use the main saloon, or sunbathe on deck. At other times Charon would be seen talking in Greek to one or both of his men. Watching him, seeing him in profile sometimes, Sarah found herself wondering what kind of man he really was; she speculated on his business, on his home, his leisure. She had already guessed his age at about thirty-three or four, and it surprised her that he was not married, since Greeks liked to boast of their children, especially their sons. Females were of secondary importance; in the poorer families they often lived fetched lives, tending the sheep, working in the fields or orchards, toiling in the home. And in between all this, they often bore a child each year. In the Deep Mani life in the past was overshadowed—for both men and women—by the blood-feuds, traces of which still remained, evidence of the pagan way in which the people lived.

It suddenly occurred to Sarah, for no particular reason that she could see, that the Deep Mani was a strange place for Charon Drakos to reside. With his wealth, and the sophistication of which his yacht afforded ample evidence, he could choose any place he liked. Hydra, for example, where his yacht had been so conveniently moored, that was a beautiful island—although from the sea its long rocky slopes appeared almost uninhabited. However, on arrival at the fascinating little harbour it could be



seen that the town was rather like an ancient Greek amphitheatre, as it rose all about the semi-circular waterfront. Whitewashed steps led up to the gleaming blue and white cubic houses, while here and there a tall white campanile rose, majestically, into the clear blue sky.

Yes, mused Sarah, Hydra would be far preferable to that semi-wilderness of the Deep Mani, that region of dark superstition and the *vendetta*, of bare bleached fields and lonely, abandoned Nyklian peel-towers. Sarah's father had mentioned ghost villages where the bare shells of primitive houses could be seen among the struggling vegetation— stubble and thistle and the inevitable cacti. Weird- looking clusters of bare rocks reminded one of menhirs and cromlechs; there were also numerous tiny churches—strange objects to find in a land where—it was often said—the devil walked abroad at noontide.

Why did Charon live there, in a renovated peel- tower? Intrigued by this time, Sarah rather thought she would have found a curious kind of interest in the place to where she was going—if only the circumstances attached to her visit were different, of course!

At last the yacht was being moored; Sarah looked out on to a lonely shore, with standing on it a solitary car. Had Charon sent a radio message, telling someone to be waiting? She supposed he had, for otherwise the car would not have been there at all.

'We've arrived.' Charon's voice at her elbow made her swing round. How silently he came upon her! This was the third time he had done so today, and because he had made her jump she flashed him a venomous glance and snapped,

'Need you creep about like that! You scared me!'

Charon's black eyes narrowed ominously.

'You'll be scared even more if you continue to speak like that to me. I'll have your respect—or you'll suffer!'

She swallowed hard and looked away. Charon in his arrogance seized her chin and forced her to meet his gaze.

'Let go of me!' she seethed. 'You speak of respect! What respect are you showing to me?' She tried to free herself, but his hand shot out to grasp her wrist. And so she had to stand there before him, held prisoner while he subjected her to one of his imperious stares. His lips were tight, his jaw flexed, his grip on her chin firm and masterful.

'Let me give you some good advice. Sarah. Don't try my patience too far. We're almost home now; I shall have you entirely in my power, to do what I like with. I warn you, I shall resort to physical chastisement if necessary. Perhaps you do not know it, but the Drakos clan have always beaten their women into submission—so beware!' He released her, but ordered her to precede him from the boat. This she did, setting her teeth in fury as she admitted that any hope of escape she had cherished must die, since there could not possibly be an opportunity here, in this abandoned place, with four men to come after her even should she manage to separate herself from Charon. He was at her elbow; she walked like a prisoner—which of course she was. Her head was held high, her face was white; she knew her lips also had lost their colour.

To her doom-- She glanced around, scarcely able to refrain from giving way to fear. Surely all must be lost now. What hope had she of getting away once Charon had her in that tower?

All this because of her loyalty to her friend! All because she had considered it her duty to assist. She had had those warnings—mental premonitions, and yet she had gone blindly forward, down into waters which held only darkness. She had those very words run through her mind ... deep, dark waters...

Charon— The name given to the ferryman who rowed the shades of the dead across the Styx. Charon himself had told her this piece of mythology, but Sarah had known about the Styx, that 'hateful' river which, after rising in the mountains of northern Arcadia, fell over six hundred feet into a terrible ravine, from where it was supposed to flow round the Underworld. To mortals its waters were sometimes said to be poisonous. And it was across

this river that Charon would take all the malevolent shades; the benevolent shades would be taken by a chariot driven by Vanth.

'Come!' The imperious voice of her captor broke into Sarah's musings. She felt his hand under her elbow; his touch was hateful and as she did not need it she pushed him away with a vicious thrust of her hand. 'Move more quickly,' he snarled, 'unless you want some help from me!'

Within seconds she was being bundled into the car; Charon sat next to her, leaving his man to drive. The man had looked curiously at Sarah, but otherwise he remained stolidly immobile while waiting for them to get into the vehicle.

'How—how far is it?' she was asking about a quarter of an hour later. Tears were very close, and her heart seemed as if it would burst, so wildly did it throb. Her nerves were so tensed up she could have cried out. She just had to break the awful silence that had reigned since they entered the car. It seemed to Sarah, in her present state, that the entire world was holding its breath.

'Not too far now. About half an hour.'

Half an hour... and what then? She turned to him and said,

'Aren't you afraid of this thing you are doing— abducting me, I mean?'

His profile was to her; he did not trouble to turn his head.

'Were you afraid—when you were planning to abduct me?'

What answer was there to this?

'It was merely an abduction,' she pointed out, not realizing she gave him an opening to come in with something which amused him.

'Naturally. The sexes, you see, were different. A man could not be ravished.'

The blood came rushing to her face, and Charon did turn then, because he knew she would blush, and because he wanted to reveal his expression of sardonic amusement—just to add to her embarrassment.

'You're detestable!' she flared. 'Oh, but I only hope that the day will come when I can pay you out!'

'It never will, my dear.'

'You can't be so sure!'

'You'd never go to the police—even if you were to escape, which you will not.'

'Again you can't be sure.'

'If you try, only once, then I shall keep you under lock and key.'

She stared, this eventuality not having occurred to her. True, she had known that a careful watch would be put on her, probably by one or two of Charon's servants—that was, when he himself was not able to keep an eye on her. But she had vaguely seen some chance coming eventually. Perhaps in the far future, but some time.

She said, 'I shall most certainly try to escape.'

'I don't advise it, Sarah. You're not the girl to be kept in total confinement.'

Her eyes widened.

'I don't understand?'

'Well, I can perhaps best illustrate my meaning by relating a story to you. It's about a lovely girl who belonged to the Pavromichalis clan. A Drakos wanted her for his wife, but in her arrogance she told him he was not good enough for her. His family immediately wanted to engage the Pavromichalis clan in battle—the notorious *vendetta*—when the girl's father and brothers would be slain. However, the young man, unable to resign himself to life

without her, overruled his family and continued to woo the girl. She was extraordinarily beautiful...'

Charon paused a moment, and Sarah saw him look at her eyes for a long moment before he resumed his story, saying that there was a deep-rooted legend that the incredible physical beauty of the Pavromichalis clan sprang from the marriage of Gorakis Pavromichalis with a mermaid-like creature, a certain nereid shaped like a human but who haunted water. 'What the less gullible people said was that Gorakis' bride was a deaf and dumb Venetian princess of the House of Morosini. She was found by Gorakis sitting on the seashore.' Charon went on to say that, in the end, the young man of the Drakos clan abducted the girl who had so insolently refused him, and, for her arrogance and contempt, he kept her in total confinement for twenty-five years. 'When at last he let her out she was wizened and unable to walk...' Charon's voice trailed away as Sarah shivered violently.

'I don't believe that, in these modern times, a girl could be kept prisoner in the way you are describing.'

'You haven't yet seen my tower.'

Again she shivered. Something made her say,

'You have a grudge against the Pavromichalis family?'

'We hate one another. The *vendetta* still exists.'

She said curiously, 'Why didn't the Pavromichali seek revenge for the loss of one of their daughters?'

'They did, and for years bloody raids and battles took place between the two clans. Then, by some mischance, one of the Drakos daughters, left unguarded, was carried off by Stephanos Pavromichalis. She was imprisoned, but tortured as well. When, horribly disfigured and crippled, she was returned to her people, she committed suicide.' Suddenly Charon's face was twisted and the most evil light glittered in his black eyes. 'From that time on it has been the ambition of the Drakos family to get their hands on one of the Pavromichalis women, but today it is more difficult. Most of the

Pavromichalis family have left the Mani and gone to live elsewhere. After all, this is not a very attractive region in which to live.'

'Yet you choose to live here?' Automatically she glanced around as she spoke. The car was passing through a stony wilderness, pervaded by an aura of solitude and remoteness. It was undoubtedly a pagan world and, being in the midst of it like this, Sarah could more easily understand the superstitions and strange beliefs of its inhabitants, could appreciate their fear of that fiendish creature, Makrynas, the devil who haunted the lonely places at the hour of noon.

'Yes,' murmured Charon in an odd tone, 'I choose to live here.'

'You have the means, so why not choose some place more congenial?'

'Because my ancestors have always lived here.' He paused a moment and something in his expression changed. She had the odd impression that he himself would not inflict any physical harm on one of the Pavromichalis women even if she did happen to fall into his clutches. Yet, conversely, she found herself believing he could inflict harm on someone ... someone else...What an odd impression to have, she thought, and because of it she ventured to say,

'If someone you hated did come into your power, what would you do? I mean—you wouldn't torture them...?' Swiftly she turned away, her heart thudding unevenly against her ribs. For the evil on his face was terrible to see as the features twisted into satanic lines.

'I could inflict torture! I could have my victim screaming at my feet for mercy--'

'Stop!' The one brief word of protest was out before Sarah could prevent it and she added with a shiver, 'I can't bear to think of anyone being subjected to such barbaric treatment. Please let us talk of something else.'

'I shouldn't have thought you'd have been queasy about such things,' he said, then added after a small pause, 'You obviously wouldn't have liked to witness the beheading of thirty-five of the Pavromichali when, after they had

been besieged in one of their towers by Christopholos Drakos, they were speedily put to death by the sword.'

'No,' she owned readily, 'I would not!' Anger brought a glitter to her lovely eyes. How she would like to bring this arrogant man to the dust! So full of the prowess of his own tribe, he was! So contemptuous of the family of Pavromichalis. But she must remain forever silent about her origin, for it were bad enough that he desired her body; she dared not dwell upon what she would be made to suffer should he ever come to desire her blood.

Daylight was fading when at last the car turned into the rough, boulder-strewn track leading up to the tall peel-tower which was now to be Sarah's home. She gave a great shuddering sigh, for although her courage remained strong, the sight of that grim dark fortress was enough to discourage the stoutest heart. And the surrounding landscape, harsh and forbidding as it was, seemed akin to Hades itself, clothed as it was in the deep shadows of twilight. Gaunt ravines, and desolate jagged rocks looming above them inspired speculations about the barbaric practices of throwing one's enemies headlong to their deaths, and with thoughts of death there followed in Sarah's mind all that she and Charon had been talking about—the severed heads piled high, the raids, the plunder. There would have been burning too, and the violation of innocent women. Sarah recalled her father's saying that the terrain matched the untamed men whose home it was.

How could she hold on to her courage in face of all this? But suddenly she seemed to have before her a clear picture of the Pavromichali—those brave strong people whose blood ran in her veins. She would never be subdued or even daunted by one of the Drakos tribe!

## CHAPTER FIVE

To her surprise the tower had not been restored to anything like the extent she had expected. She had visualised a luxurious establishment surrounded by fine lawns and immaculately-kept gardens. But no such refinements met her eyes as she alighted from the car. Even without entering the building itself she knew it was austere—unkempt like the grounds. Its exterior was forbidding, to say the least, with its bare stone walls unrelieved by any growing creeper or pretty flower-draped trellis, its tall, ugly chimneys and strange, peculiarly shaped roof. The windows were tall and very narrow, suggesting a dimness within; the woodwork around them appeared to be rotting in places, and it badly needed a coat of paint. The wide steps leading up to the heavy front door were broken, with weeds creeping between the cracks or all along the sides. The pillars were also broken, as were the ornamental bowls flanking the steps, bowls in which weeds abounded, with one forlorn geranium making a valiant attempt to keep its head from being smothered, but it was losing the battle, for its flowers were drooping from lack of water.

The whole aspect was gaunt, as was the evil-faced Maniot who, after opening the door, stood to attention, inclining his head as Charon approached him. His eyes flickered to Sarah but, like the driver of the car, his face held no expression whatsoever. Sarah swallowed hard, trying to speak. It took her some time to clear the strange lump which had settled in her throat and they were in the hall before she could manage to articulate words.

'Are—are your servants all men?'

'They are.' He clapped his hands imperiously and another man came running from somewhere in the dim rear regions of the hall. Short sharp words were spoken in Greek, and even though Sarah did not know very much of the language she did know enough to grasp the fact that the man was receiving an admonition for not being on the spot when his master had entered the house. The man retreated, but the first man went out to the car to bring in the clothes Charon had insisted she bring with her from the yacht. The first man re-entered the hall and stood, silent, the suitcase in his hand, waiting instructions from Charon. Meanwhile, Sarah glanced around her. Bare walls



of rough- hewn stone; a floor covered with rush matting. From the high ceiling hung a chandelier— strangely out of place but very beautiful. Charon reached out and the light came on, flooding the hall and causing Sarah to lift a hand to shade her eyes.

'Elias is the name of the man who has your luggage.' Charon's voice, though soft, made her jump. The man had not shown any expression at all at the mention of his name, and Sarah merely looked at him and nodded her head. 'I myself will take you to our room.' Charon moved towards the stairs, but Sarah found that her legs were suddenly like jelly. The discovery infuriated her and she forced herself to follow Charon up the stairs. But she felt weak and very tired and dispirited. To be forced to offer him only meekness and obedience like this! Never had she felt so frustratingly helpless. Yft what sort of a fight could she put up, with two strong men here and another somewhere just around the corner?

The room was more comfortable than she had expected after seeing the austerity of the hall. But it was by no means luxurious. Its furniture was heavy and dark; its curtains of velvet appeared to be faded, as did the linen covering on the walls. The bed alone was bright, with a spotless cover and two mauve cushions to match it.

She stood by the door; Charon, having pushed it open for her to enter, gave her a little push from behind and she went forward. The door closed, causing her heart to jerk painfully.

'So at last we are alone in our bedroom.' So soft the tone, and carrying the unmistakable warning that she was completely within his power. 'Come here, Sarah.'

She shook her head and stepped away from him.

'You will have no satisfaction at all from making love to a stone!' she cried as he advanced towards her. 'If you've any sense you'll let me go!'

A quiet laugh was all the response she received to this. Charon was close to her, and he came closer. She struggled even as his arms were extended, but her wrists were caught and firmly held.

'Struggle away,' he laughed. 'I shall enjoy it immensely.' But he gave her no opportunity of struggling as, sweeping her passionately into his arms, he claimed her lips, crushing them ruthlessly under his own. 'How delightful you are!' he said when for a brief moment his lips came from hers. 'A stone, you say? My dear Sarah, you underrate my capabilities,' he chided. 'Do you really believe you can remain unresponsive?'

'I'm sure I can!' Twisting vigorously, she almost freed herself, but Charon's steel-like arms caught her to him again and once more she was compelled to endure the hot passionate kisses he rained on her lips, and her throat before, roughly removing the narrow strap forming the shoulder of her dress, he sought to explore the tender curves of her breast. But Sarah, outraged at the idea, renewed her struggles, praying for some miracle that would save her. And suddenly, as if in answer to this prayer, there was heard from below a feminine voice calling Charon's name.

'Where are you?' the voice added in Greek. 'I know you're back——'

'What the devil--!' Releasing Sarah, Charon strode to the door and wrenched it open, dark fury on his face. 'Why in the name of Hades did she have to come here?' The last words were muttered to himself, but Sarah caught them, and she understood them perfectly even though they were spoken in Greek.

Charon went out; Sarah heard the click of the lock as the key turned in it. Breathless, and quite unable to believe she had escaped for the second time—although only temporarily, if Charon should have his way—she turned to another door which she had noticed on first entering the bedroom. She had assumed it to be either a bathroom or a dressing-room. It proved to be the latter, but an examination of the window revealed the same sheer drop outside as she had already noted in the bedroom. Another door! It actually looked like one of the wall panels but was in fact a small door. She tried it and, to her amazement, it gave beneath her hand. Her heart pounding with excitement and hope, she stood, concentrating on what was the best thing to do. Surely she could escape! Should she wait until Charon returned? Would he pass this door on his way to the bedroom? Yes, she realised he would have to do so. And while he was entering one room she could be leaving the other. But, she thought, she would be limited to a lead of seconds only, a

lead which could be lost even before she left the house, for she did not know how to open the front door.

'I wouldn't have time for fumbling with it, that's for sure!' How, then, could she use this situation to her own advantage?

Taking a chance, she drew the door inwards, hoping that the two downstairs would not happen to glance upwards. They were in the hall; she could hear their voices quite plainly, although, as they were speaking rather quickly, she could not catch all of what was being said. However, she soon realised there were three people—two women, not one.

'Elena has been given a house,' Charon was saying, and this, suspected Sarah, was a repetition of a previous statement. 'She knew right from the start that our relationship was not permanent--'

'Charon,' interrupted the voice which Sarah had heard at first, 'you have been long enough philandering ! I believed you would marry Elena I'

'Then, Grandmother, you made a mistake!' Brisk the tone, but amazingly respectful. Sarah recalled having heard it said that the Greeks revere their grandparents, respecting their wishes and very rarely going against their advice. It was said that a Greek woman had to be old before she came into her own. 'Elena was not deceived by me in any way at all; she accepted the situation, with the promise of a house when the time arrived for us to say goodbye.'

'But--but, Charon, I came afterwards to believe you loved me.' The younger voice was harsh and grating to Sarah's ears, yet, conversely, it had a tone of childish pleading which undoubtedly caught the attention of the older woman, for she instantly began to upbraid her grandson who, with what Sarah guessed was a tremendous effort at control, listened without interruption, speaking only when the old lady had stopped.

'I have known, Grandmother, that for some time now you have wished to see me married and settled down. This is not my intention at the present time. I am sorry to keep on disappointing you, my love, but after all, my life is my own, and I shall live it as suits me best.'

He spoke calmly. Sarah, interested as she naturally was by what she heard, almost forgot her own danger, or that here before her was a positive means of escape. However, as the conversation once again became too difficult for her to catch anything, she stepped out, closing the door behind her with a deliberate bang, so that the three below glanced up. Sarah's eyes met those of her captor; she smiled serenely while he, on the other hand, glowered, appearing stunned by her presence as, with her head proudly held, she came down the wide oak staircase. Charon's eyes moved; she knew he was looking with puzzlement at the protruding key which he had turned in the bedroom door as he left it, with Sarah inside, a prisoner—or so he believed! Then she saw his eyes wander to the other door, and a perceptive light take the place of his puzzlement. He frowned darkly, plainly furious at his omission in making sure the small door was locked.

'Who--' The old lady, dressed from head to foot in black, had been staring dumbfoundedly as Sarah descended the stairs, as had the girl at her side. As Sarah drew nearer she gave a start, appearing to be fascinated by Sarah's eyes. Sarah had swiftly taken in the appearances of both women—the girl, tall and dark with big brown eyes and a flawless complexion. Sarah thought her beautiful, but disliked the hard mouth and the glitter in her eyes. The older woman was stout, with a lined face which, like that of her grandson, was sun-tanned to gipsy duskiness. 'Who,' demanded the woman, still staring at Sarah's eyes, 'is this?'

Sarah, opening her mouth with the intention of speaking in answer to this, closed it again, deciding to pretend that she had no understanding of the language.

'A friend,' began Charon in Greek, and then, to Sarah, in English, 'I expect you're congratulating yourself?'

Her serene smile became evident again.

'But of course. I trust you will be a good sport and accept defeat without rancour.' Amusement looked from her eyes, and for a few seconds his own eyes glittered. And then, quite surprisingly, he gave a short laugh. But he had no time to speak; his grandmother, after subjecting Sarah to a most searching scrutiny, said in good but broken English,

'Who are you, girl? Or need I ask? You're his latest light o' love, I expect?'

She coloured delicately, aware of the scowl which spread over the younger woman's face.

'No,' replied Sarah. 'I am an Englishwoman whom he thought fit to abduct, and to bring here, where he hoped to hold me prisoner. When you arrived just now he was attempting to force his attentions on me. I know, madam, that you, as a Greek lady, will be horrified by this, and save me.'

To her surprise the hint of a smile touched the woman's dry, cracked lips.

'I am never horrified by what my grandson does,' responded the woman calmly. 'We are of the Mani, you see, and crimes come naturally to us. However, Charon has never abducted a female before, and so I am interested to know more.' Her eyes, almost as black as those of Charon, subjected Sarah's body to the same kind of arrogant examination as that employed by her grandson on more than one occasion. 'Your taste, as always, is excellent,' she added, this time speaking to Charon, and in Greek.

'It so happens,' he returned with a curve of sardonic humour to his lips, 'that fate threw her in my way. I had chosen another--' He stopped and gave a careless shrug of his broad shoulders. 'No matter; it all fell through. I found myself with this one on my hands--'

'On your hands, Charon?' His grandmother, plainly intrigued, did not wait for an answer, but suggested they all go into the sitting-room and have some refreshment. 'And while we eat and drink you shall tell me the whole story,' she said in English, looking at Sarah. 'I think my grandson might be tempted to leave out the more spicy ingredients, and this will not please me at all. I enjoy an unabridged story best.' A slight pause and then, 'I take it my grandson has—so far—failed to seduce you?'

'Madam!' exclaimed Sarah, going hot all over. 'That kind of talk surprises me. I've lived in Athens for some time and never have I heard a Greek woman speak as you do--' Her voice trailed off as both Charon and his grandmother burst out laughing. 'You obviously have not met Greeks from the Deep Mani, my girl,' continued the old woman. 'We are vastly different

from the rest—in fact, they have little or nothing to do with us! We're a wicked, untamed people, you see, and both men and women act outrageously.' Again she laughed. Charon had moved; opening the door of the sitting-room, he invited Sarah and his grandmother to enter.

'Elena will not be interested to hear the story,' he said coolly, turning towards her. 'You can occupy yourself with a book in the other room.' So abrupt the tone, and commanding. The girl flashed him a furious glance, meeting the challenge in his eyes, and would have stepped in front of him, in order to enter the room into which Sarah and the old lady had gone, but Charon put out a hand and took the girl's arm. 'That way!' he said between his teeth, and this time Elena offered no resistance.

Sarah, standing just inside the sitting-room, saw all this, and it amazed her that the girl should be desirous of marrying so arrogant and formidable a man. As far as Sarah herself was concerned, he was a person to be avoided like the plague, since no happiness could result from a union with him. It was clear that he was of a savage disposition, a man who would always domineer over those with whom he came in contact. Looking at him now as he turned to enter the room, Sarah gave a small shudder and sent up a prayer of thankfulness for the timely appearance of his grandmother.

Although the old lady took possession of the most comfortable chair in the room, she derived no advantage from that comfort, but sat erect, like a statue, her face expressionless, her bony hands resting on her knees.

'And now,' she invited when Charon had ordered the refreshments to be brought in, 'you can let me have your story.'

Charon, reclining with a sort of languid casualness against the cushions of the couch, caught Sarah's attention and she saw the flicker of sardonic amusement in his eyes, the faint curve of his fine lips. That he was intending to enjoy her narrative was certain.

Sarah began to talk, watching the old woman all the time. She seemed absorbed by what Sarah was saying, but much of her attention was arrested by Sarah's eyes. Yet nothing moved on the old woman's face, not a muscle, nor did her eyes blink. She might have been lifeless, thought Sarah,

strangely affected by her presence. The woman's calm acceptance of her grandson's behaviour was something which Sarah could not at first understand, but it was slowly dawning upon her that this woman, product of the Deep Mani that she was, could be just as ruthless, just as cruel, as any of its men. She was tough and hard, unemotional in face of something so serious as an abduction. The woman could have been living in the past, almost, when abductions of females was the rule rather than the exception.

When at length Sarah stopped speaking there was a moment's silence before the old woman, speaking in a leisurely way, and with an impersonal formality, told Sarah outright that she and her friend had been absurdly venturesome in even considering the abduction of a man like Charon Drakos.

'Perhaps if you'd known my grandson you'd have thought twice before embarking on so crude a scheme as that?'

'I must certainly would!' returned Sarah with unhesitating honesty. 'In fact, I did think at the time that it was risky.'

'But you agreed to help your friend, nevertheless?'

Sarah nodded her head. Suddenly becoming troubled by doubts as to the certainty of enlisting the woman's assistance, she said anxiously,

'You're going to help me to get away from here?'

No answer. Instead, the woman spoke to her grandson, in Greek.

'Those eyes—they're uncannily typical of the Pavromichalis tribe. But you must have noticed?'

Sarah held her breath, finding the greatest difficulty in not giving away the fact that she understood the language.

'I've noticed, yes. One could scarcely miss anything like that. However, it's merely coincidence. The girl's wholly English.'

'I'm not so sure....' A thoughtful silence followed. 'No, I'm not so sure,' repeated the old woman, her eyes narrowing almost to slits. 'You'll recall that a Pavromichali girl once ran off with an Englishman?'

'So she did,' agreed Charon musingly. Sarah saw his eyes narrow as they looked into hers and she was reminded of his previous reference to her eyes and the impression she had gained of his waiting to see if she would make any comment. Was it possible that, at the time, the trace of an idea had come to him that she might be descended from the tribe he so hated?

'It's by no means impossible.' The woman paused. 'You'll not deny this?'

'No. On the contrary, I agree with you.' Charon paused; his black eyes became piercingly intense as he looked into Sarah's face. She managed to remain outwardly calm, but her heart was thudding unevenly. For both on his face and that of his grandmother there was clearly written their hatred of the Pavromichalis family.

'The eyes give it away, Charon. I believe we have one of that vile tribe in our hands at last.'

Sarah's heart jerked. She suddenly realised that this old woman could be even more dangerous than her grandson. She managed to ask, with a calmness that amazed her,

'What are you saying? Are you telling Mr Drakos that you're intending to help me get back to Athens?'

Charon was shaking his head.

'We're discussing something private, Sarah. So just be quiet for a few minutes.'

Although anger rose at his manner of speaking to her, Sarah, acutely aware of the danger confronting her, guardedly held her anger in check. She wanted to mention Miranda, to ask this old woman if she could persuade her grandson to send help to the island, but the woman was speaking, rather rapidly and excitedly. It was with the greatest difficulty that Sarah caught



the gist of what was being said. She felt suffocated with apprehension as she realized that these two were becoming more and more certain of her connection with the family of Pavromichalis. Many times, as they conversed, the two sent strange, searching glances at her and when at last Charon spoke to her she was too flustered to think clearly.

'Your father was obviously English,' said Charon brusquely. 'What about your mother?'

'My—my mother?' she quivered. 'I d-don't understand?' Both Charon and his grandmother stared directly at her; she felt the colour rise in her cheeks, found it difficult to lie in face of these piercing stares which seemed to be aimed at penetrating her very soul.

'What nationality was she?'

'Er—English--'

'Wholly English?' interrupted the old woman harshly.

'No—I mean, y-yes...'

'Was she or wasn't she?' demanded Charon's grandmother in the same harsh tones. 'Speak up, girl! And don't lie!' The deadly tone matched to perfection the glitter of hatred in the woman's gaze.

Sarah's eyes flashed.

'Don't speak to me like that,' she snapped. 'What is it to you if my mother wasn't wholly English?' Foolish to show her temper, but this was all too much for Sarah. She supposed—on thinking about it afterwards—that she could have made a fairly successful job of lying had she not been keyed up initially by hearing all that was being said in Greek by Charon and his evil old grandmother.

'She wasn't wholly English.' The old woman's eyes were now on her grandson's face. 'This girl's given it away.' Charon was nodding in agreement. He said slowly,

'You're of the Pavromichali. You managed to keep it from me most successfully. I see now why it is you know so much about the Deep Mani, and the blood-feuds. Your mother told you?'

'It was Father,' she replied huskily. 'My mother died when I was very young. I mentioned this, if you remember?' She knew she was white, but hoped no trace of fear was revealed on her face.

'So,' said the woman on a great sigh of satisfaction, 'at last we can be revenged!' A consuming fire seemed to blaze in the woman's eyes and in spite of her determination to hold fast to her courage, Sarah once again felt her nerves tingle with apprehension. For undoubtedly this woman was as savage as her grandson, and even more primitive.

Averting her head in order to break the hold which the woman seemed able to exert over her, Sarah once again found herself listening in to their conversation.

'She must pay for that crime, Charon!'

'I agree.'

'Death alone will satisfy me,' said the old woman, and Sarah had the greatest difficulty in not uttering some exclamation. She chose a suitable moment to glance up, into the eyes of Charon, black eyes which glittered with the same intensity as those of his grandmother. Swallowing convulsively to dislodge the lump that had settled in her throat, Sarah wondered if she were actually facing death.

'Fool that I've been!' she cried to herself, feeling she could scream with frustration at her own helplessness. If only she had some weapon!—something with which to defend herself against these two savage pagans who desired to use her as an instrument of revenge for a wrong done several generations ago. They were mad! They ought to be put away—and in her country they would have been put away, she thought.

Charon remained strangely unmoved by the demand of his grandmother and, watching him closely, Sarah was unable to determine whether or not he

was in total agreement with her. She spoke again, asking that Sarah be handed over to her, going on to say that she would know better even than Charon how to deal with her.

'Torture first,' grated the old woman, 'and then death—a slow death!—lingering and painful! That's what I want, Charon, and you shall grant me this wish!'

## CHAPTER SIX

FOR a long moment there was silence in the room, but at last Charon spoke, and his hated words had to be accepted by Sarah as a straw to be grasped at all costs.

'She happens to be my prisoner, and it so happens that I would rather have her alive than dead.'

Viciously the old woman's teeth snapped together.

'You desire her body? Pah!' The word was spat out and for a space deep contempt was portrayed in the glance she threw at Charon. 'She'll pollute you! Give her to me, I say! I'll keep her alive for a while—until I've disfigured her and crushed her like our own dear child was treated! She must pay, Charon!'

'She'll pay, have no fear of that,' agreed Charon, an unpleasant gleam in his eye as for a moment he turned his attention to Sarah. She looked down at her hands, clasped tightly in her lap, the palms wet with perspiration. Should she reveal her knowledge of the language? she wondered. It would not do her any good that she could see, and so she held her tongue, continuing to listen in to what was being said. 'Yes,' repeated Charon, 'she'll pay. But for the time being I claim the right to keep her. She's mine, not yours, and it is I who shall mete out the punishment—when I have decided to have done with her--'

'She must die!' almost screamed the woman, in a frenzied voice. 'I want to see her dead!'

Charon shook his head. Fascinated, Sarah sat there, silent witness of the struggle going on between these two. The old woman, declaring that, as the oldest member of the family, she alone had the right to say what must be done with the girl. Charon on the other hand, pointed out that, being the eldest male in the family, it was his prerogative to decide the girl's ultimate fate.

'As an offshoot of the hated tribe of the Pavromichali,' he went on, 'she must obviously pay. But as I've already said, she's mine, and for the time being I want her alive.'

'You don't believe in murder—that's what it is!' shouted his grandmother furiously. 'Your generation sickens me! Are you afraid of the police?'

'If I were she wouldn't be here now,' pointed out Charon reasonably.

'That's not the same! Abduction's child's play! Murder is man's work—and you are shirking it! You're afraid of being caught—but if you were half as clever as your great-grandfather you'd be able to get away with a killing every day of your life!'

Sarah shuddered ... and knew that Charon had noticed. He stared, holding her gaze with his, but she did not make another slip and after a while he looked away, returning his attention to his grandmother, who was glowering evilly at him.

'I think it best that you leave,' said Charon coolly at length. 'Take Elena with you and please do not trouble me with her again,' he added frowningly. 'The affair is over, and she has known this for some time.'

'I'm no longer interested in Elena! It's this Pavromichalis scum that I want!'

'You'll not get her.'

The old woman's nostrils flared.

'I demand that you hand her over!'

'The girl's mine and I intend keeping her until I tire of her.'

'And then?'

'We shall see.'

'No! I want a firm promise that she'll be handed over to me!'

'I can give you no such promise,' he returned slowly. 'Let us leave her ultimate fate in abeyance for the time being.'

Sarah, sitting very still, her whole body wet with perspiration, felt suddenly as if this were a dreadful nightmare from which she would eventually awake. For it seemed so unreal, so utterly impossible in these modern times. Tales she had been told of the Deep Man and its peoples had at the time of telling seemed rather like fairytales—gruesome, it was true, but fairytales for all that.

Charon's grandmother was speaking again, so quickly and excitedly that Sarah was unable to catch more than the odd word now and then. She made no sense of these few words she heard but she was in no doubt that what the woman was saying annoyed her grandson exceedingly. At last he said, his tone unpleasantly hard and derisive,

'You've gone quite far enough, Grandmother. I've said my last word about who shall have her. I keep her—get that!'

She glowered at him, and for a space it seemed that a serious quarrel would ensue. But quite unexpectedly the old woman seemed to accept her grandson's authority and when at length she spoke again it was to reintroduce the matter of Elena. Charon broke in, reminding her of what he had just said—that he did not want to be troubled with the girl again.

'Perhaps you don't, Charon, but she's the most suitable girl you've had up till now. I feel she'll make you a tolerably good wife.'

'No doubt you do,' returned Charon stiffly, 'but it so happens that I do not feel she'll make me a tolerably good wife.'

'How annoying you are! Marriage is imperative for you!'

'Nonsense!'

His grandmother drew a deep breath and rose from her chair. Sarah also rose and spoke, saying what she knew they would expect her to say.

'Madam—are you going to help me get back to Athens?'

The woman's mouth twisted into evil lines.

'No, miss, I am not! My grandson wants you for his toy—and it is not for me to spoil his pleasure!' She swept from the room, leaving Sarah standing there, every nerve in her body affected by the fury that engulfed her. The woman stopped outside the door and spoke to Charon, who had accompanied her.

'Elena will have a very valuable dowry. You've probably overlooked this?'

'I haven't overlooked anything. When the time comes for me to marry—if ever it does come—I believe I shall be quite capable of making my own choice.'

'Bah!' retorted his grandmother disgustedly.

'You seem to forget that Elena's been my pillow- friend,' Charon reminded her. 'I'd never respect a wife who'd given herself as freely as she.' He looked over his grandmother's shoulder, and met Sarah's gaze. She lowered her head, certain that if she met his eyes for any length of time he must surely learn that she understood what was being said. 'This one, now, will fight me until she has no strength left in her body.'

'Respect?' repeated his grandmother, ignoring his reference to Sarah. 'Am I to understand you're wanting to respect the woman who'll one day be your wife?'

Faintly he smiled.

'Unbelievable as it might seem to you, yes, I do want to respect the woman who becomes my wife.'

'How very odd.' The woman turned her head to glance at Sarah.

'You sound as if you already have respect for this one!'

'Strange as it might seem to you, Grandmother, I do have a certain amount of respect for her.'

'A Pavromichalis brat?'

'Don't worry,' laughed Charon, 'I'm not likely to forget who she is. Respect her I might, but give quarter I shall not.'

'I'm glad to hear it,' snapped his grandmother. 'We want no English women in our family!'

Another laugh, a harsh and grating laugh that caused a sudden frown to cross Sarah's forehead.

'A Pavromichali woman is the last I'd think of marrying!'

Sarah, white with anger, almost retaliated. But she preserved her caution, again seeing no gain in letting them know she had understood everything.

However, as she made this decision, she felt she had better approach the old lady once again, for already Charon was staring oddly at her, as if unable to believe she was accepting defeat so easily.

'I cannot think you are refusing to help me, madam. I'm English, and have been abducted--

'I've told you, my grandson wants you. You're his woman for the present.'

'No! You *must* take me with you!'

'Must!' snarled the old woman. 'Whom are you ordering? You inferior scum! Take her, Charon, take the Pavromichalis wench and show her what it's like to be the slave of a Drakos!' With this she swept towards the front door, calling to Elena as she went. The girl came at once, emerging from another room on the opposite side of the massive hall. 'Come,' snapped the old woman, 'I've had enough of this unhealthy place! It's rank from the filth which Charon keeps in it!'



A few minutes later Sarah once again found herself alone with Charon.

She said, feigning puzzlement, 'What were you and your grandmother talking about? I felt, somehow, that you were discussing me.' She glanced away as she spoke, preferring to avoid his all-examining gaze while she was practising this deceit.

'I should think you'd have been lacking in intelligence if you hadn't suspected we were discussing you,' returned Charon coolly. 'It might interest you to know that my grandmother desired nothing more than to torture you, disfigure you, and then kill you.'

Assuming an expression of horror, Sarah asked if this kind of barbarism was usual in the women of the Mani.

'Greek women in other parts of Greece are so gentle,' she added.

'They are, yes. But those of the Deep Mani are, quite naturally, hard, toughened characters who've learned from their menfolk just how an enemy should be treated.'

'And you...?' Sarah looked up at him, looked into those hard basaltic eyes. 'Do you believe in torture for your enemies?'

'I believe in an eye for an eye,' he replied unemotionally.

'You have no compassion at all?'

'None that I know of,' he returned with a short laugh.

'Shall you let your grandmother have her way with me?'

'I want you for myself.'

'For now, yes. But later. What happens then?'

He looked at her with a strange expression. She sensed his perplexity as to her apparent acceptance of her lot.

'I might just hand you over to her. It'll be an easy way of getting rid of you.'

She coloured hotly. But she was determined not to give him the satisfaction of deriving amusement from her embarrassment.

'So eventually I'm to die?' she said, and to her amazement a swift frown crossed his forehead.

'You seem quite unperturbed by the idea?' He looked curiously at her as he spoke. 'If I do decide to hand you over to her she'll put you through the hottest fires of hell.'

In spite of herself Sarah went pale. Charon, noting this, seemed to frown again, but Sarah could not be absolutely sure of it.

'She'll torture me in reprisal for what some ancestor of mine has done,' returned Sarah contemptuously. 'What a system! You're all barbarians !'

'We own to it,' was Charon's cool agreement. 'There's no pretence about the people of the Deep Mani.'

'You appear to be proud of your barbaric ways!'

'We accept them as custom, not as law.'

'Custom appears to be stronger than law!'

'It often is, Sarah. Your ancient feudal system was based on custom rather than law.'

She shrugged her shoulders, dismissing the subject.

'Are you going to have Miranda set free?' she wanted to know, and Charon looked at her with the most odd expression.

'In spite of the danger you yourself face, you can still be concerned about your friend?'

'Certainly I can! There's nothing heroic about that!'

'You might not think so, Sarah, but I do. In fact, I'm beginning to admire you more and more with each hour that passes.'

'Thanks for nothing. Your opinion matters not at all to me!'

He only laughed, amazing her, since she expected to see that familiar gleam of fury enter his eyes.

'I can appreciate your feelings, Sarah,' he returned quietly. 'What I cannot fully understand is this lack of fear..He paused a moment, nodding thoughtfully. 'You *are* afraid, but you've no intention of allowing me to see your fear.' He stopped again, and there was no mistaking the expression of deep admiration in his black eyes. 'How old are you, Sarah?' he inquired almost gently.

'Twenty-four.'

'A mere child—and yet you have this tremendous courage. I should have known, without having the matter brought out by my grandmother, that you were of the Pavromichali--'

'But you said that their courage never came up to their beauty,' she could not resist reminding him.

'Perhaps that was a little ungenerous of me,' he admitted after a moment of thought. 'Some of them were outstandingly courageous—and it would appear that you have come from that particular branch of the family.'

She fell silent, yet there was an urgency to keep the conversation going, since while she was here, in the sitting-room, she was comparatively safe. As if reading her mind Charon said, in his finely timbred accents,

'Have no fear, Sarah. I shall not molest you yet. In fact, I believe I am anxious to know you better before we embark on the more intimate relationship I first had in mind.'

She stared, unable to take him seriously.

'You mean—you don't intend to—to--' She stopped and endeavoured to rephrase her words. 'You're willing to wait for—for...' She allowed her voice to trail away slowly on seeing the dawning amusement in his eyes.

'As I've just said, Sarah,' he murmured, coming to her rescue, 'I prefer to learn more about you before we become lovers. You intrigue me, you see...' His own voice drifted to silence as, his whole attention becoming focused on her face, he stared as if compelled to take his fill of her beauty. 'I think, my dear, that we shall be friends first, then lovers later.'

Sarah leant back against the cushion, and a great shuddering sigh issued from her lips. What miracle was this? And why had this man whom she had branded as a ruthless pagan, a man totally without mercy, suddenly changed his mind about taking her as his pillow-friend? What did he hope to gain by the delay? That he had changed his character was not possible; that he had changed his intentions seemed totally at variance with this character. She said at length,

'I fail to understand you, Mr Drakos, but it would be most unsporting of me not to own to being grateful for this respite you are affording me.'

She heard a breath being drawn out, knew for sure that he had waited expectantly for her words of gratitude, knew also that they were what he hoped to hear—nothing humble or ingratiating, just an honest admission of her relief at his change of mind.

'More and more you intrigue me, Sarah.' He spoke after a long pause. 'Yes, I am very right to desire this knowledge of you, of your personality, your likes and dislikes, your spirit and your loyalty.' Another pause and then, 'Your friend will be rescued from Iscarte without too much delay,' he promised.

'Thank you.' She fell silent, thinking of the pleasant life she had led before becoming involved in Miranda's plot. The school in which she taught was small, with the result that her class consisted of fourteen pupils only. The working hours were short; the vacations came often and were of a much longer duration than those existing in England. Yes, it had been a pleasant life, an easy life.

'What are you thinking?' inquired Charon interestedly. 'Those lovely eyes are brooding, and restless.'

She looked up.

'I was thinking of my very happy life,' was her frank reply.

'And bitterly regretting your headlong plunge into intrigue?' he added with a hint of amusement.

'Naturally I'm regretting my involvement.'

'As I said, the girl wasn't worth the risk you took.'

'It's too late to think of that now.'

'It's too late for regrets of any kind. Brooding won't avail you anything, Sarah.'

She nodded in agreement.

'I'm not usually so impulsive,' she murmured, speaking more to herself than to him.

'It was loyalty which impelled you to help your friend.'

Again she nodded, this time automatically, and then changed the subject, bringing it back to what they were talking about previously.

'Will you eventually hand me over to your grandmother?'

For a long moment silence reigned.

'I haven't yet made up my mind.'

'If she were to enlist the aid of other members of her family, would they be likely to—to take me by force?'

'Take you from me?' The black eyes glittered with the evil expression she was beginning to know so well.

'Yes—that's what I meant.'

'No one will take you from me! You're mine and you go only if I decide you shall go.'

'They'd—kill me?'

'I expect they would,' returned Charon with a casualness of tone. 'My people have wanted to get their hands on a Pavromichalis female for years, but the family's dying out rapidly and there aren't any young females left, not here, in the Mani.'

'Your family ... are they still strong?'

'In numbers?'

'Yes.'

'Not really. I believe there are about ten of us altogether.'

'You believe? Don't you know?'

Charon shook his head. But he hesitated before vouchsafing a verbal reply.

'No, I don't.' A glimmer of humour lit his eyes. 'I haven't bothered to count them for some time.'

Sarah frowned in puzzlement.

'People usually know how many relatives they have,' she said.

'Perhaps they're more interested than I. In any case, we have the odd death now and then, caused by the *vendetta*.'

Sarah drew a breath.

'How stupid the *vendetta* is!'

'It's stupid to you simply because you do not understand it. It serves a purpose—and it suits the mentality of those people who practise it.'

Her lovely eyes looked into his.

'You practise it, of course.'

'Is that a question, or a statement?'

'It was a statement.'

'You might not believe it, but I personally have never practised it. However, that doesn't signify anything. If the occasion happened to demand reprisal, then I should not hesitate to practise it.'

She knew he spoke the truth; his expression at this very moment appeared murderous to her.

And I am in his power, she thought, trying to keep in mind the fact that all was not yet lost. She would watch for a chance of escape ... yes, every single moment of her waking hours she would be on the alert for an opportunity of freeing herself from this barbarian into whose clutches she had fallen.

But this was far easier decided than carried out; Sarah was very soon to realise that if escape ever did come, it would be made possible only by a miracle. For the bedroom door was locked on her every night, and although during the day she was free to wander in the grounds of the tower, always there would be, somewhere close at hand, the evil- looking figure of Marko, one of Charon's manservants. He would be moving about, ostensibly pulling

a few weeds, or holding a rake or spade, neither of which Sarah had ever seen him employing. Charon himself was invariably around, and at last Sarah was brought to the despairing conclusion that her only hope was Miranda who, once she was free, must surely go to the police. But when Sarah mentioned this to Charon he immediately shook his head, confidently saying that it was most unlikely that the police would come into the Deep Mani to look for her.

'We make our own laws here,' he added. 'We don't bother the police and they don't bother us.'

'But I'm English!' she protested. 'They must try to find me 1' -

'What are you to them?' he responded carelessly. 'Why should they trouble about a missing female?'

Sarah was not convinced; she would wait, and hope—hope for help to arrive before Charon changed his mind and took her for his pillow-friend.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

THE sun had left the mountains; its rays filtered the branches of the trees, sending darts of light on to the naked rocks outcropping along the steep sided, dry river bed. Giant cactuses took on weird shapes, as did the tangled scrub and cistus bushes growing among the boulders trailing the flank of the Taygetus.

Sarah stopped and glanced around, wondering how anyone could voluntarily choose to live in so grim a wilderness.

'What is it?' The voice of the man at her side brought a swift frown to her eyes. How she hated him! With his arrogance, his condescending manner, his swift resort to total mastery if and when any argument threatened to take place between them, the unflagging vigilance by which he made escape impossible.

'This place ... I can't understand why you live here.'

A strange silence followed; she half thought he was on the verge of making a confession. She glanced up into his dark forbidding countenance and tried to find some softness in his features. This searching was not new; she had done it several times during the two weeks she had been here with him, in his tower in the deepest and most primitive region of the Mani. Why should she seek for softness in so evil a face? It was absurd ... and yet she knew a strange unfathomable desire to make a discovery...

For what reason? She shook her head, recalling how, on one occasion when he had almost forgotten his resolve to be her friend before he became her lover, he had taken her to him and kissed her. Something incomprehensible had stirred deep within her. She had hated his nearness, his lips on hers; she had wanted to do battle with him, to knock him to the ground. And yet, conversely, she had looked up into his cruel face—and searched for some redeeming feature...

That had been the beginning of her search; since then she had more than once found herself exploring those hard lines, trying to discover ... what? Nothing tangible ever came to her mind.

'One lives where one's home is.' Charon's quiet voice reached her at length, answering what was only partly a question.

'You could live anywhere you wished.'

'I suppose so.' He began to walk on and she followed.

'You're a strange, unpredictable man,' she said after a while.

'Is that an invitation?' he inquired, and she threw him a puzzled glance.

'An invitation?'

'For me to explain why I am acting as I am?'

Why I haven't molested you in any way at all?'

She nodded automatically.

'It was an invitation, yes.'

'You're so very cool about it all,' he commented, and there was no mistaking the admiration in his voice.

'Hysterics wouldn't get me very far, would they?'

'They'd get you nowhere.' His voice was smoothly detached; he seemed remote suddenly, as if absorbed by his own private reflections. And so they continued in silence for a while, towards some stunted plane trees growing along the loop of the dry river-bed. It was a lonely world, a wilderness of moving shadows and brown parched earth, a moon-landscape of dark and winding canyons, of empty ragged heights whose naked peaks had stubbornly resisted the soothing emollience of time. All was an abomination, the haunt of the goddess Artemis and her trio of goat-footed nymphs whose delight it was to entice lonely travellers to dance and then lead them unsuspectingly to the edge of a precipice and send them hurtling into the gulf below.

This was the terrain in which Charon Drakos chose to live out his life.

Sarah gave a small sigh and, hearing it, he stopped, inquiring about its cause.

'This foul wilderness...' She shrugged, and spread her hands. 'I can't understand why you live here,' she said again. 'It doesn't make sense.'

There followed the same strange silence which had ensued before, and again she felt he was on the verge of a confession. But the moment passed and, reverting to something else she had said before,

Sarah reminded him that he had not accepted her invitation for him to explain his present behaviour towards her.

'You had not expected me to be so controlled?' he said with a hint of amusement.

She nodded, aware of the colour rising in her cheeks.

'Your control has amazed me,' she returned, wondering how she could talk in this way to him, for surely the subject of his ardour was one to be avoided at all costs!

'It's amazed me also,' he returned with a twitch of his lips. 'My grandmother would never believe it.'

'You have a reason,' she stated curiously.

'I gave it to you: I desire us to be friends first.'

'We shall never be friends; I've told you several times.' She frowned at him, and shook her head. 'You have some other reason,' she asserted, watching his face closely so that any change of expression would be caught, and read. But his dark features remained as impassive as those of a statue.

'You don't appear to be afraid that I shall go back on my decision,' he said.

'I never cross my bridges until I come to them.'

'What a logical person you are! How very different from the rest—in every way. It's no wonder I have come to respect you.'

'You ... respect me?' she murmured in amazement. 'Is that why—why...?'

He nodded, and for the first time a full smile came to his lips. Sarah gasped, for the transformation to his features was staggering. Gone were the evil lines, the cruelty of the eyes and mouth! A strange tremor swept through her, a new and disturbing emotion for which there was no cogent explanation.

'Yes, that is partly the reason for my present— er—inaction.'

Sarah's, colour heightened, as he meant it to, and he laughed at her expense. The laugh, like the smile, was different from any she had noted previously. No harsh sound to grate upon her ears, no cynicism or contempt. She would almost have laughed with him, had not his words embarrassed her.

Her composure was soon recovered, however, and she said curiously, 'I take it that none of your other women has inspired your respect?'

'Your assumption's correct. You are the only female for whom I have ever felt respect—except my mother and grandmother, of course.'

'You're praising the qualities of a Pavromichalis, remember,' she could not help reminding him, and her voice was light suddenly, although she could not have said why this should be. 'You're supposed to hate them.'

He seemed to smile as she was speaking, but she could not be sure. What struck her as odd was the fact that he did not immediately confirm his hatred for the whole of the Pavromichalis clan.

'I've already said I admire your courage. I also admire your honesty, your logic, your composure, your optimism. All these attributes are exceedingly commendable, and therefore to be admired.'

'You're a strange mixture,' she observed, aware again of some new unfathomable stirrings within her. A fortnight she had been this man's prisoner—a fortnight in which she had never once had reason to fear him, or

to endure any objectionable act on his part. True, there had been several slanging matches between them but, strangely, nothing which could be truthfully described as hostile.

'You sound as if you would like to know me better,' Charon was saying in response to her comment, and Sarah could not deny this. The man intrigued her, just as she intrigued him—or so he had said.

'You appeared so—so evil at first...'

'Evil?' he laughed. 'Because of the connection of my name and Hades, perhaps?' He was actually teasing her! Had he another side to him, this pagan from the remote wilderness where so many savage deeds had been perpetrated in the past? And was it this other side for which she searched? Amazed at her mind-wanderings, and unable to understand them, she instantly dismissed them, tossing them away like the lingering shades of a bad dream. 'Tell me, my Sarah,' he said after a long silence, 'am I as bad as you first expected me to be?'

'No,' she replied promptly, 'you are not.'

'You're not afraid of me?'

She paused a moment, then shook her head.

'Fear is not one of my weaknesses,' she returned musingly.

'But you were afraid at one time—you must have been?'

'I was greatly perturbed,' she had to admit. 'Any girl would be with a threat like that hanging over her head.'

'It's still hanging over your head, Sarah.'

She said nothing and they walked on in silence.

This strolling after dinner had begun after the first evening when Charon, having kept Sarah confined to the house all day, asked if she would care to take a stroll.

'The prisoner is allowed to take her exercise,' she had said sarcastically, but added before he could speak, 'Yes, a walk in the fresh air would be pleasant.' And so each evening they strolled through the wild gardens of the tower, into the lane and then on to the winding path following the river bed. To one side stretched leagues of cactus scrub, while to the south-west lay the silent sea, a long way off, and visible only through a score in the mountains. To her surprise Sarah had come to look forward to these strolls; she enjoyed them in spite of the pagan at her side, in spite of the desolation of the scenery, in spite of the stark fact that she was a prisoner. Strange, and unfathomable! She now seemed to have reached a point where she was poised on the edge of some new realm—afraid to go forward, reluctant to step back. This man, this strong-willed creature of the wilds ... there was something about him which affected her profoundly, and in a way she could not have begun to explain. That she still hated him was an' undisputed fact, and yet she frankly owned to herself that she would not have enjoyed these strolls half so much had she been on her own.

The admission had at first angered her, then filled her with apprehension, for it did seem that he possessed some power by which he could—just whenever he chose—bring her totally under his domination. That he had the gift of magnetism she would not deny, since he could claim her full attention just whenever he chose to do so, no matter how forbidding and austere might be his demeanour at the time.

He stopped suddenly and, following the direction of his gaze, she saw a tough weather-beaten peasant jogging along on a donkey, drumming the poor animal's ribs with his sandalled feet.

'Poor creature,' murmured Sarah impulsively. 'What has it got to live for?'

Charon turned his dark head, an unfathomable expression on his face.

'You feel pity for this animal?'

'But of course! Its life is a misery to it! Death will be a blessed release from the torture inflicted by man.'

His eyes flickered over Sarah's lovely face; he noted the firm classical lines, the perfect contours, the flawless skin. The merest movement of his throat betrayed the fact that he was swallowing hard; the twitching of a muscle at the side of his mouth gave evidence of some emotion within him.

'Compassion ... and in a Pavromichali...'

'Their blood is well thinned in me,' she was quick to remind him, and to her surprise he nodded instantly in agreement. 'Were they very cruel?' she asked after a pause, and again her companion nodded his head.

'Very. Their heinous crimes were legion.'

'And you—your clan, I mean?'

The trace of a smile touched his thin lips.

'They too practised barbarism.'

She frowned then and said,

'I don't understand how people can inflict pain on one another.'

'My grandmother shocked you, then?'

'Naturally she shocked me. She's uncivilised!'

To her surprise he let this statement pass without comment, merely standing, silent and still, peering ahead to where Taygetus lay deep in shade, while the arc of the sky above it retained the buoyant radiance of the sun's final glowing flames.

'Shall we walk on?' he said at last. 'Or are you tired?'

'I'm not tired. I've done nothing today.'

'That remark comes out every evening. Perhaps I shall find you something to do.'

'Such as?'

He had begun to move on, and now he sent her a slanting look.

'Do you want some occupation?'

'I certainly don't enjoy doing nothing,' she retorted. 'I'm not used to it for one thing.'

'Tell me about yourself,' he invited. 'I know so little of your life--' He indicated a large boulder, flat-topped, that lay by the river-bed. 'Let us sit a while and talk.'

Sarah paused, then decided this was preferable to returning to that dismal edifice he liked to call his home. Here, despite the primeval nature of the terrain, was the sunset, and the softness which its lowering light was spreading over everything. She sat down, with Charon at her side.

'There's not very much to tell,' she began, but Charon interrupted and in his customary imperious manner told her to begin at the beginning and carry on.

She told him a little about her childhood, about the way her father had had to bring her up after the death of her mother.

'You mention that it was your father who related to you tales of the Deep Mani,' he interposed at one point when she paused in her narrative.

'Yes. He had it all from Mother. But he visited the Mani once--' She stopped and a faint smile touched her mouth. 'He never wanted to visit it again,' she added at length.

Charon laughed; she turned to watch his profile. He could be handsome, she realized with a little shock of surprise.

'Tell me some more. You were clever at school, obviously.'



'I trained for teaching, then wanted to work abroad.'

A small silence followed before he asked, turning to face her,

'And now you regret the desire?' Half statement, half question; she made no reply, and when she did speak it was to switch the subject and ask him what his livelihood was.

'Many things,' he replied. 'I have several hotels; I own olive groves and citrus orchards.'

'Hotels,' she murmured with interest. 'Where are they?'

'Two are in Athens, two in Corfu and one on the island of Hydra.'

Sarah's blue eyes flickered. Hydra ... where his yacht was moored. Hydra, a most enchanting island, a place where almost anyone would be happy to live. It was an island where resided several of Greece's wealthiest shipowners, men whose ancestors acquired their riches by contraband trading in the early years of the nineteenth century when Hydra's ships sailed even as far as the West Indies. It was a small island, with a quaint little harbour lying serenely at the foot of Mount Prophitis Illias, and from this port the sponge-divers sailed every spring, to spend the summer sponge fishing along the coast of Tunisia.

'Your hotel in Hydra ... you stay in it sometimes?'

Charon moved, bending to pick up the head of a pink oleander that had been carried either by the breeze or by a bird, from another part of the river bank.

'Sometimes,' he offered at last, and she thought this was not quite the truth.

'Why don't you live there always?'

Again he hesitated. The air was strident with cicadas and he seemed to be diverted by the noise.

'My home is in the Mani,' he replied presently. 'I've already told you that.'

She made no comment. Why should she care that he chose this bleak and outlandish place in preference to somewhere like Hydra or Corfu? The Mani suited him, no doubt of that. The land of eagle- haunted crags and gloomy gorges, of pagan gods and superstitions—the stark and untamed terrain where Satan walked at noon and ghosts abounded, where at dead of night witches led people up the mountains to inflict hideous tortures upon them, where a man's blood calls out loudly the day before he dies, or where if a man should go to sleep beneath a wild fig tree he will wake up mad.

Yes, this abominable realm suited the dark forbidding Charon Drakos admirably ... and yet...

She looked at him in profile, saw the noble lines, sharply etched in the afterglow of sunset, the firm chin and jaw, the aristocratic way in which his head was held. Frowning suddenly, Sarah glanced aside, as if she would put from her a picture which was beginning to hold her in some way which, to her practical mind, was by no means desirable. The man was a fiend, a primitive savage whose grandmother would commit murder at this very moment should Charon choose to hand over his prisoner to her.

'What are you thinking about, my Sarah?' The voice of Charon came to her, unexpectedly soft and gentle.

'You,' she said, and turned to him again, compelled by some force she could not resist.

'Me?' in some surprise. 'Must I feel honoured, or sorry for myself?'

'My thoughts were neither flattering nor derogatory.'

'Tell me,' he said imperiously.

'You suit this infernal terrain.'

He laughed, and in the lowering shadows all the evil returned to his dark features.

'I'm beyond redemption, you think?'

Her eyes flickered.

'What answer would you like to that?'

'I don't care what answer you give. However, I'm sure that, coming from you, it'll be a truthful one.'

'I don't believe that anyone is beyond redemption.'

'You haven't answered my question.'

'I feel you could be different—but that you have no desire to change.'

Silence fell between them. Sarah thought she heard a sigh issue from his lips. He was staring across the cactus-haunted emptiness beyond the meandering river bed to where the low hills, already darkened by the shadows, took on the appearance of a cluster of whales' backs, bare and weird.

'Shall we return?' Sarah spoke at last, for some reason disturbed by the long silence, and by the forbidding spectacle of the man beside her.

He turned abruptly and spoke.

'Why are you not afraid of me, Sarah?' His voice was harsh, demanding. 'By all that's logical you should be terrified.'

'I've said,' returned Sarah quietly, 'that fear is- not one of my weaknesses. I also told you that I never cross my bridges before I come to them.'

'I could change my decision tonight!'

'Undoubtedly, but I don't think you will.'

'Confidence! I suppose you're expecting the police to arrive at any time?'

'I sincerely hope they will,' was her frank rejoinder. 'I'm not expecting to remain much longer in this wilderness!'

'You obviously do not like my homeland?'

'Like it?' she repeated, amazed that he should put such a question to her. 'I hate it!'

'As you hate me?'

'As I hate you, yes.'

To her surprise he took no exception to this honest reply. She had expected some show of temper, or to see an ugly twist to his lips before he subjected her to a harsh and scathing retort. Instead, he seemed to fall into a brooding, pensive mood, and a deep frown knit his dark forbidding brow. For one crazy, incredible moment Sarah found pity entering her heart. Pity? For this creature? It was jail he deserved, not pity!

'I want to return to the house,' she almost snapped. 'I'm tired.'

At the sharpness of her tone he gave a start, and he looked keenly at her, questioningly.

'Is something wrong?' he queried.

She set her mouth.

'What an absurd question to ask me! Everything's wrong!'

'You're in a temper. I haven't seen you quite like this before.'

'I want to go back to the tower!'

'Very well.' He rose as he spoke, and offered her his hand, which she ignored.

'Take my hand!'

She glared at him and shook her head.

'I don't require your help, thank you!' The words were scarcely out of her mouth when his hand gripped her wrist, and savagely twisted it.

'Don't you dare treat me like this!' he snarled. 'I'm your superior, and never forget it!'

Pale but still composed despite the pain he was inflicting on her wrist, Sarah looked into his black luminous eyes unflinchingly. There was a sort of devouring intensity in them, deep and unfathomable. His other arm came around her, bringing her to his hard and sinewed body. She closed her eyes, shuddering at the contact. Roughly he turned her face to him and, bending his head, he took her lips with all the savagery of his merciless ancestors. She tried to struggle and then gave up; it was useless to pit her strength against his.

'And now,' he said menacingly, 'perhaps you'll obey me when I give an order!' His mouth was still close to hers; she felt his warm breath on her lips, saw the fire of passion in his eyes and wondered if his control would last beyond this night. 'Much as you abhor my touch you'll keep your hand in mine the whole way home!'

Much later she was walking about the bedroom like a caged animal. This waiting to see if he would come! This utter helplessness and the frustration resulting from it! If only she could use the window as a means of escape-- Her thoughts were cut and she stood stock still. Charon was coming up from the hall...

Her hand went to her palpitating heart. How long would her own control last? Nerves were never made to stand a strain such as she had been through during the past two weeks. Why didn't the police come? Miranda must have contacted them long before now, for Charon had given Sarah his word that Miranda had been released.

Charon stopped outside the door and the key was turned. The door swung open and Sarah, white to the lips and resigned, waited for him to enter.

But he remained in the doorway, that brooding expression on his face. He looked at her; she knew he was taking in her pallor, the convulsive

movement of her throat, the way her hands were clasped in front of her. She saw his expression change ... and knew that yet another respite was to be hers.

'Good night, my Sarah,' he said quietly. 'Sleep well, and peacefully,' and without waiting to hear a reply he was gone. Sarah heard the key turn in the lock, and then his quiet footsteps swiftly dying away.

The following morning at breakfast he met her as if nothing unusual had happened. He was cool, composed, very much master of his emotions. His attire was immaculate, his jet black hair shining with cleanness.

'Did you have a good night?' he inquired politely as he pulled out her chair for her.

She sat down.

'I slept well, if that's what you mean?'

'I'm glad.' Moving to the other side of the table with the grace of the born athlete, he sat down opposite to her and helped her to coffee. 'I have to go out this morning,' he told her. 'So if there's anything you want from the shops then let me have your list and I'll get the things for you.' She made no answer and they ate in silence. When the meal was over Sarah went out to the garden and, settling in a corner she had previously chosen as the most cool and shady place there was, she opened one of the books Charon had given her. It was a book of poems and- its presence in his house had quite naturally surprised her.

'I wouldn't have expected you to have books in English/ she said when he handed it to her along with three others, all of which were novels.

'I have a library...' He had stopped, and turned away, his attention apparently caught by a brightly-coloured butterfly which had settled on the tangled vine which climbed the slender trunk of a tree.

'You have a library?' Sarah had repeated, frowning in puzzlement. 'I haven't seen it.'

'I should have said I did have a library.'

She was still frowning.

'Where is it now?'

Charon shrugged his shoulders.

'The books are about somewhere.'

She had turned away, and left him, puzzled by his strangeness, and even more by the fact that, having had a library, he was now without one.

The incident came to her as she opened the book of poems, she was still puzzled, but as there was no answer to any questions which she might ask herself she dismissed the matter and settled down to read.

She had been there about an hour when, hearing voices raised in excitement, she looked up. Marko was running towards her, his whole manner one of urgency. On reaching her he spoke rapidly—too rapidly, and she could not grasp anything at all.

'*Siga, siga,*' she said, forgetting that he might tell Charon she could speak a little of his language. 'Slowly, slowly.'

He began again, and this time Sarah heard more than enough! Her face blanched as she stood up, her eyes darting to the front door of the tower where five men were gathered, fierce men ... with a tall woman in the middle of the group ... Charon's grandmother.

'Mr Charon,' faltered Sarah, real fear entering into her for the first time in her life. 'Where is—is h-he?' She spoke in Greek; the man understood but shrugged his shoulders. He was agitated, and Sarah felt sorry for him despite his evil countenance. Charon had charged him to watch her, but now he was helpless. These men, people of Charon's family, had come to take her away--They meant to kill her.

Marko was speaking again, telling her to run. She knew it was too late; three of the men—dark fiendish men from the heart of the Deep Mani— were approaching with deadly steps towards the little harbour where she stood. Marko shouted; the other manservant was already running from the house, towards the three men. The two servants closed with them, but within seconds both were on the ground, unconscious. Sarah, trembling from head to foot, prayed for Charon's return, vitally aware that, with him here, she would not have feared these men—and yet she knew full well that he could never tackle five Maniots single-handed.

A tirade of Greek burst out as, grasping her by the arms, two of the Maniots half carried, half dragged her until she stood before the old woman.

'So—we have you! Charon ought to have known I'd wait my chance! Take her away!' she screamed. 'I want to see her writhing in agony! Then she will die by the knife! I want to see her blood flow!'

Sarah struggled, but was very soon overcome. Her arms were pinned behind her and she was dragged on again, this time to a large van which was discreetly parked among the scrub.

She had made no sound at all up till now, but as they began to bundle her in through the open doors of the van she spoke, warning them of Charon's fury when he returned to find her gone.

'He'll kill you,' she cried. 'He'll slay every single one of you—including that old she-devil!' Sarah spoke in Greek and for a moment the woman was taken aback. But when Sarah called her a she-devil - she came forward and, with a vicious cry of fury, she struck Sarah across the face. A stone from her ring broke the skin and blood flowed from the wound. The woman screamed again, pointing and crying,

'Her blood's flowing already! That's what I want to see--' She stopped abruptly as one of the men gave a sharp cry of warning. Sarah, her arms bruised, and blood pouring down her cheek, twisted round as the hands of one of the men fell to his sides.



Charon was racing across the uneven ground, a figure swift as Hermes himself. Within seconds he had reached her.

'Charon!' she cried, quite unable to believe her eyes. 'It's n-not true...' She was still speaking in Greek and for an instant a smile warmed Charon's face. His brain was working with lightning speed, for already he realized the folly of attempting to do combat with odds like these against him. He spoke, his face black with fury.

'Davos—kindly unhand my wife!' Charon's voice rang out, imperiously arrogant, and the man instantly obeyed.

'Your--!' The eyes of the old woman smouldered in their sockets. Her tone was a cracked invidious snarl. 'I don't believe it! Curse you, Charon, you lie!'

Sarah, her eyes fixed on Charon's face, saw the faint flicker of his lids. She knew she must support him—or die.

'We were married a week ago,' he said quietly and, moving closer to Sarah, he held out his hand. She took it unresistingly, scarcely able to accept that this drama was being enacted. It was too unreal, too incredibly fantastic.

The old woman turned on Sarah, her mouth twisting convulsively from side to side.

'This isn't true!' she snarled in English. 'Say it, you Pavromichalis scum! Say he lies!'

'It's the truth,' returned Sarah huskily. 'We've been married for a week.'

An hour later, her wound dressed by Charon himself, Sarah was lying on her bed, having been told to rest by Charon who, after hearing all that had happened, explained how he came to return so opportunely. He had forgotten some papers which were necessary for the business he was intending to conduct.

And what a fortunate circumstance it was, thought Sarah as she stared up at the ceiling. She dared not dwell on what her situation would have been at this moment had those brutes managed to carry out their intention. That old mad woman too!—bent on torturing her before having her brutally murdered.

Switching her thoughts a little, Sarah saw again that tall athletic figure racing across the uneven expanse of scrub that once had been a lawn. She guessed that his mind had leapt to the stark fact that he stood no chance at all against so many, and it was then that he conceived the idea of saying they were married. Only in this way could he save her—and himself as well, since if he had fought those men he must inevitably have either been killed or very seriously injured.

A clock struck somewhere downstairs and Sarah looked at her watch. Only half past ten! It seemed like an eternity since she had sat down to breakfast with Charon. Only two hours... Yet she was tired; sleep hovered temptingly and she succumbed to it, turning on her side and snuggling her cheek into the pillow.

It was almost two o'clock when she awoke and she rose at once. She washed and brushed her hair, grimacing as she looked in the mirror and saw the dressing on her cheek and the bruises on her arms. Charon had been seized with a black fury on seeing them, and she knew for sure that, should he ever meet these cousins one at a time, they would suffer for what they had done to her.

'Ah,' he said when she appeared in the open doorway of the sitting-room, 'you've had a sleep?'

She nodded, and came into the room.

'Yes, thank you.'

'Lunch has been ready for some time. I had it held back, hoping you'd be up. We have something to discuss.'

'Have we?'

Charon nodded, then clapped his hands to fetch Marko.

'You can serve lunch now,' he said brusquely, and the man departed.

'We'll talk while we eat,' he said, noticing Sarah's glance of inquiry. 'How's that wound on your face?' he asked, putting out a finger to touch the swelling above her cheek. 'Painful?'

'Not very. I was lucky.'

'Lucky.' The trace of a smile touched his thin lips. 'Not many young women would say a thing like that after the experience you had. Aren't you going to berate me?' he added with a tinge of sardonic amusement.

'Would it do me any good?' she asked.

'Not a bit.' He looked towards the door as Marko appeared to tell him that lunch was ready.

'Come, Sarah, you must be ready for something to eat.'

She was ... but little did she know that her appetite was soon to go!

Charon spoke only when Marko, having served the starter, retired from the room and closed the door after him. Charon's grandmother had telephoned soon after Sarah had gone to lie down. Convinced that both Charon and Sarah had lied about their being married, she was demanding proof. If Charon failed to provide it within two days she would storm the tower, having already had the offer of reinforcements from other members of the family.

'Every one of them is against me, she says,' continued Charon. 'I must admit I cannot defend the tower, simply because I have no one at all to call upon.'

Sarah's heart leapt. So he must free her! Yes, obviously he would set her free, for he himself would be in grave danger should these barbarians storm his home.

Sarah exclaimed excitedly,

'This means, then, that you're intending to free me.' It was a statement, spoken in the most confident tones, and she actually smiled at him, feeling she could forget all he had done to her now that she was on the verge of gaining her release.

'Free you?' he murmured softly, his black eyes fixing hers. 'What gave you an idea like that?'

She stared at him, her fork poised half-way to her mouth.

'What else can you do? I mean, if I'm not here they'll scarcely carry out their threat to storm the tower.'

Charon continued to look at her, his silence causing disturbing tremors to run up and down her spine.

'I can marry you,' he replied quietly at last. 'That's what I can do. The priest will—for an extra thousand drachmae—back-date the document--'

'Marry?' she cried, all her loathing written on her face. 'Marry a heathen like you? You're out of your mind even to think of such a possibility!'

The black eyes glinted dangerously.

'You'll marry me—and be glad to! It's either that or torture and death.'

'You can release me,' she blazed. 'That will solve everything. I'm willing to give you my solemn promise that I'll never breathe a word of all this to anyone; I'll not bring a case against you--'

'Save your breath, Sarah,' he broke in. 'There is no possible chance of your getting away from here unmolested. My cousins will be posted all around the tower by this time. My grandmother informed me that, even while she was speaking, the rest of her family was being rounded up and they'd be here, surrounding the tower, in less than a couple of hours from that time.'

They'll be hiding among the rocks and if you should so much as step through that gate you'd be seized.'

'Then how do you propose to get a priest here?' she demanded.

'He's already here,' was Charon's cool and quiet reply. 'Even before my grandmother had gone off the telephone I had given Marko orders to fetch the priest. He's been here for a couple of hours or more.'

Her blue eyes flickered.

'So ... if you had time to get him here, you must have had the same amount of time to get me away.' Her teeth snapped together in her fury. 'You didn't want to get me away!'

'You know very well I didn't,' he agreed coolly. 'I've told you you're mine, Sarah, and what I have I hold. You and I shall be married this evening.'

'If we marry, these people will go away?'

'Of course. They would never infringe our laws by molesting a member of their own family.'

She fell silent, her mind working furiously. If these men went, then she might be able to escape... Charon was speaking, pointing out that his way was the only one in which his enemies could be outwitted. 'You might as well agree, Sarah,' he ended. 'For this is the only way of saving your life.' He paused, waiting for her to speak, but she said nothing. For the first time in her life she was having to admit that total defeat was hers. 'Your choice,' he murmured after a long while. 'Have you made it, Sarah?'

She looked at him with black venom in her eyes.

'I'll marry you,' she said and, flinging her napkin on the table, she rose from her chair and went up to her bedroom.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

WITHIN six hours they were married, by the Greek priest. Disgusted by his leering expression, by the clammy warmth of his hand as he placed hers in that of Charon, by the idea that he was willing—for an extra one thousand drachmae—to commit a felony, Sarah knew she would always remember this as the worst day through which she had ever lived. And she would shudder at the memory. Charon, tall and noble, with his harsh patrician features unrelieved by even the trace of a smile, spoke in Greek, as did Sarah. Charon had previously congratulated her on her small knowledge of Greek, but immediately admonished her for not revealing this knowledge earlier.

'You understood everything, then?' he had asked, but Sarah shook her head.

'No, I can only understand when people speak slowly.'

The priest spoke slowly and so did Charon. Marko, and Glavcos, the other servant, were witnesses. Sarah, as desolate as it was possible to be, wondered if any woman had hated her bridegroom as much as she hated hers. When at the end of the ceremony he kissed her she was so low in spirits and lethargic that she scarcely felt his lips on hers.

'Well, Mrs Drakos,' smiled Charon when at last they were alone, the priest having retired to the room which had been allotted to him until the following day, when the ruffians outside would be leaving, Charon's grandmother having been supplied with the evidence she demanded, 'How does it feel to be a Greek?'

'I'm not a Greek! I'm English and always shall be!'

'You're still hoping to escape me?'

'Of course. I *shall* escape you eventually.' Why, she wondered, had not Miranda done something about rescuing her? Charon had firmly maintained that Miranda would not even go to the police, being afraid to do so on account of what she herself had planned for Charon. Sarah could not bring herself to believe that Miranda would abandon her, and yet it did seem as if

she had been abandoned to her fate. Yet each morning on opening her eyes Sarah's first thought was: 'Will this be the day I am set free?'

As if reading her thoughts Charon said slowly,

'Now that you're my wife, Sarah, there is no hope of freedom for you. Even if the police were contacted by Miranda, and even if they did decide to come here to search for you in this barren wilderness as you so often call it, they'd never take you from me. In Greece a wife is her husband's property...'

'Chattel!' she flared. 'I've lived in your country long enough to know that! Well, I'm not your chattel, so you can get any such idea out of your head! I'm not only English, but I've Pavromichalis blood in my veins and no Drakos will ever subdue me!'

To her amazement he applauded this, actually allowing a glimmer of amusement to be revealed in his eyes.

'Well spoken, my Sarah! I've already predicted the success .of our relationship. I still maintain that it will succeed--'

'You talk like a fool!'

'And you like a fishwife! Keep your voice down.'

Her eyes glazed, and her small fists clenched.

'I wish I could kill you!' she cried, and again Charen's eyes glimmered with amusement.

'That's a true Pavromichalis speaking. They were the most bloodthirsty lot in the whole of the Mani.'

'You have room to talk! Those creatures out there belong to your barbaric tribe, remember I'

To her surprise he laughed.

'This is our wedding day, Sarah. Let's not fight just yet. Later, it will be diverting for us both, but for tonight....' And the moment she had dreaded came. She was drawn possessively into his arms, her face lifted and her lips taken with all the arrogant mastery of those pagans from whom he came. Pagans and villains, thieves and murderers. What atom of good could there be in such a man? Why should she search for some redeeming feature or line in his face? And yet, even now, as he released her and held her from him to look with admiration into her face, she found herself exploring, examining his dark face... 'I believe,' he murmured softly, one long finger caressing her cheek above the dressing, 'that you will soon come to like my kisses, and to desire them--'

'Never!' she broke in contemptuously. 'It's like your arrogance for you to say a thing like that!'

His eyes glinted suddenly. His fingers on her arm tightened painfully and once again she was pulled against the solid frame of his body.

'Whether you ever come to like my kisses or not, you're going to have to accept them! You're here, a prisoner in my tower, and I'll do with you what I like! And now,' he added harshly, 'you will reciprocate!' She shuddered as his vile lips claimed hers again. What hell was she to go through before she was rescued from this prison? Tears were very close, but with innate courage she defied their insistence and held them back. 'Reciprocate, I say,' he commanded imperiously. 'In the name of Hades, girl, I'll bring you to heel!'

But she remained quite impassive, even when, his fury rising, he actually bruised her mouth with the savage pressure of his. At length he released her; she knew she would later pay for the frustration he was at present enduring.

Marko knocked at that moment and opened the door. He spoke in Greek to Charon, who replied.

'Dinner,' said Charon briefly to Sarah, and gestured for her to precede him from the room.



It was to be a special meal, he had previously informed her, but to Sarah the whole thing was a farce and she told Charon so. 'I hate and despise you, so what is there to celebrate?'

The black eyes hardened.

'Be careful,' he warned softly, 'you're my wife now and you'll remember it! Greek wives are subject to their husbands, and the sooner you learn to respect me as your master the sooner you will find contentment.'

'Contentment!' she quivered. 'What kind of contentment do you expect me to have?'

'Far better you accept your fate, to reconcile yourself to it,' he told her practically. 'Straining at the bonds like this will avail you nothing. In time you will come to realize this.'

Time... How long must she remain here? She *would* escape! One day there *must* come a chance!

For her part the dinner would have gone untouched, but Charon, with typical arrogance and mastery, told her to eat. She refused, but when at length he made to rise and come round to her side of the table, she decided it were less wearing to give him his way. But the food, delicious as it was, felt tasteless in her mouth, and as the minutes passed she felt almost physically ill as the compulsory swallowing of food began to choke her.

At last it was over; Charon had ordered coffee and liqueurs to be served on the verandah outside the dining-room window. Thankful for the cool evening air Sarah tried to relax against the cushions of the rattan chair, but her heart and nerves were in a state of chaos. She thought of those men out there, and asked Charon how long it would be before they abandoned their posts.

'I can't bear the thought of their being all around me,' she added with a shudder.

Charon shrugged, and answered in tones of calculated indifference,

'They'll not act without orders from my grandmother. Glavcos has already gone off, taking to her the necessary proof of our union. By mid-morning tomorrow they should have received a message from her and they'll leave.'

She said after a while,

'I can't understand the *vendetta*. It doesn't make sense. Why don't some of you get together, act sensibly and put an end to it once and for all?'

'It's a part of the life here—and in Crete also,' was his unconcerned reply. 'The blood-feud will continue for a long time yet.' He paused a moment and the trace of a smile hovered about the hard outline of his mouth. 'We here were six centuries behind the rest of Greece in adopting Christianity,' he told her in some amusement.

'So you *have* adopted Christianity,' she said with surprised sarcasm. 'I wouldn't have known if you hadn't mentioned it.'

Charon laughed, his black eyes regarding her with approval.

'Total frankness again, Sarah? It pleases me that you possess this honesty as one of your many distinctive attributes.'

'Don't praise me! I certainly wasn't praising you. Christianity!' she added derisively. 'Pagans— every one of the Drakos family! —and that rascally grandmother of yours is the worst of them all. You can't tell me she practises any faith except paganism?'

'Her home is full of ikons,' was his amused rejoinder. 'And every night without fail she goes round the house and kisses them all.'

'How disgusting!'

'Not to her, Sarah.'

She looked at him in the shaded light from the lantern above their heads. His face in the dimness was like that of Satan himself—dark and evil, with those

luminous black eyes appearing to reflect all the hardness that lay within his heart and mind.

'Can you in all honesty reconcile this absurd kissing of ikons with her insane desire to torture me, then murder me?'

For a long moment he paused, and she found herself once again seeking for a sign of softness in his face. She saw only a hard inscrutable mask—the tough uncompromising exterior of what lay beneath.

'It's difficult for strangers to understand our philosophy,' was all he said when at last he broke the silence.

'Difficult?' she scoffed. 'It's impossible!'

He nodded in agreement.

'You are right, it is impossible.'

'It would be better if strangers never entered your territory at all.'

'They do, though; many venturesome travellers come to see what we are like.'

'To their peril, I'm led to believe.'

'From what your father told you?'

'And from what little I've read about the Deep Mani. It isn't a place in which one would choose to live, that's for sure.'

'You,' he murmured, taking up his glass and moving the amber liquid so that it caught the light. 'Did you never have any desire to visit the place from where your maternal side originated?'

She had to be honest, and admit to having been curious to visit the Deep Mani.

'But it was my intention to keep my background a secret,' she added, 'for I could not ignore the possibility of my becoming involved in the *vendetta*.'

'Knowing of your particular clan's activities in the past, eh?' The flash of an amused smile accompanied the words.

'I was well aware that there might be people here who would like to get their hands on one of the Pavromichalis clan.' She paused a moment. 'You yourself said that peril threatened any girl of the Pavromichali your family might one day encounter.' A question, yet she was not afraid for her own skin, not now that she knew just how strong was his desire to own her body. He smiled faintly; it was clear that he read her thoughts, clear even before he said,

'You're not afraid, though?'

'I heard you tell your grandmother you preferred me alive rather than dead. In any case, you wouldn't have insisted on marriage had you not wanted to keep me alive. You were ready to forfeit revenge in order to satisfy your own selfish desires, apparently.' Contempt edged her tone, but Charon made no visible show of temper, although his manner did undergo a change and an unpleasantly metallic glint entered his eyes.

'It would be a pity to destroy such beauty,' he commented after a small silence. 'I have never met a woman I desired so much as I desire you.'

'Obviously not. You never married any of them!'

'My wife--' He murmured the two words, then repeated them, as if to impress them firmly upon his mind. Sarah stared at him in the dim light, aware of some strange emotion stirring within her. She suddenly knew that he was deriving pleasure from the sound of the words ... and she watched, fascinated by the change taking place in his expression—in fact, in his whole demeanour. Whatever his private thoughts they transformed him, and without warning he seemed to become possessed of considerable charm. Gone was the austerity, the haughty composure, the hard metallic glitter in his eyes. Leaning forward a little, Sarah took up her coffee cup and pensively sipped its contents. Without warning the air seemed charged, and

she found herself once more owning to being on the edge of a new realm and, as before, she had the strange unfathomable sensation of being afraid to go forward, yet reluctant to go back. Bewildered greatly by these impressions and sensations, she tried to shake them off, angry with herself because she knew, deep in her subconscious, that she was shirking an analysis of her hatred for this Greek who was now her husband. On the surface her hatred was so strong that, given an opportunity, she could have struck him a mortal blow, in order to gain her freedom; conversely, she had the startling impression that were she to explore the depths of her subconscious mind, she would have doubts as to the strength of this hatred.

The silence lasted, and became more charged with pvery moment that passed. And eventually she knew she must break it, must try to discover this man's mind.

'What are you thinking?' she asked, putting down her cup and picking up her glass.

His gaze was transferred to her face.

'Are you really interested, I wonder?' he spoke broodingly and almost to himself. 'Have you any interest at all in me?'

She stiffened, but could not have given a reason.

'That,' she returned curtly, 'is an exceedingly odd thing to ask.'

'So was your question odd.' The black eyes flickered. 'Do you want to know what my thoughts were, Sarah?'

She frowned, and made no answer for a while. She listened instead to the chirp of the cicadas in the stunted olive trees, and the distant sound of goat-bells on the bare brown earth of the mountain foothills. The moon was a crescent hanging in argent, splendour among the stars. The sky itself was cloudless and soft.

'I merely wanted to break the silence,' Sarah admitted at last, seeing that her husband was awaiting her reply to his question. 'It was—was an uncomfortable silence,' she added on a slow and quiet note.

'Uncomfortable?'

She shrugged impatiently, and took a drink.

'I can't explain.'

'You don't want to try.' He fell silent again, his eyes staring straight ahead to the rough skyline of Taygetus, and, following the direction of his gaze, Sarah picked out the tall straight shape of a solitary tower, perched upon a stony ledge, similar to that on which Charon's tower was set. Her glance swayed around, to one or two other towers, standing, stark and straight, like sentinels of a bygone age. All were in a state of disuse, and the more she thought about it the more she became convinced that Charon's tower had also fallen into disuse before he decided to renovate it a little. Her deductions brought two questions in their wake: where had he lived prior to taking up residence at the tower? And what had been the reason for renovating it and deciding to live there?

She sat back in her chair, strangely absorbed by the mystery which she herself was weaving around this dark pagan whom she had been forced to marry. He was so strange a personality, a quiet unfathomable man whose entire family had been willing to turn against him. His defence of her, causing him to resort to marriage when he could so easily have given her up. From what she had gathered he had had many women. To lose one surely meant nothing to him. But the thought of losing her certainly had. meant something to him. The more she dwelt on the circumstances of the marriage the more deeply enmeshed she became, and it was a relief when Charon, coming out of his own reverie, brought her from hers by suggesting they take their usual evening stroll. Surprised—for she had not expected his patience to last much longer, she immediately nodded and said she would very much like to walk, her swift acceptance bringing a curve of sardonic amusement to his lips. But no unpleasantly cynical remark was made, a circumstance for which she was glad, since it would all be embarrassing later, without any preliminary discomfiture troubling her now.

He, took her hand in his as they stepped down from the verandah; she felt its warmth, its strength, its strangely pleasant assurance of protection. She recalled how, when finding herself surrounded by those men and that rascally old grandmother of his, she had mentally cried out for Charon's presence.

As soon as they were approaching the gate Sarah stopped, catching her breath. Perceptively Charon looked down at her.

'The gang out there will not molest us,' he said. 'You have no need to worry at all. They'll not even make themselves visible.' So reassuring was his tone that she no longer hesitated, and his words were in fact to prove correct, for they saw no sign of the men lurking in the shadows of the boulder-strewn scrub and cactus plain.

'Are you feeling chilly?' Charon's voice cut into her thoughts and she instantly shook her head.

'No, it's a beautiful night.'

'In Athens—you went for walks?'

'Of course. We lived outside the city itself, though.'

'I take it that you like Greece?'

'I did like Greece,' she was swift to correct him. 'I hate it now.' He said nothing and she had to ask, repeating a question she had put to him on a previous occasion,

'Why do you live here?' and she received the same answer as before,

'It's my home, Sarah.'

'Has it always been your home? Were you born in the Deep Mani?'

'I was born here, yes, of course I was.'

'Have you lived here ever since?' she persisted. 'Have you never left it to live somewhere else?'

He turned, casting her a downward glance.

'What makes you say that?' he wanted to know, a curious ring to his voice.

'I have the impression that this is not really where you want to live--' Her voice trailed away as surprise caught at her mind. Why had she said that? It was not what she had intended saying.

'If I didn't want to live here then I wouldn't, would I?'

She frowned a little, falling thoughtfully silent. They were making for the path which ran along the looping river bed, but wild vegetation here was so high that they were literally threading their way through a winding labyrinth of tangleweed. Charon's fingers tightened around hers when, catching her foot in an exposed root, she had to do a little skip in order to keep her balance. His other hand came out, to encircle her waist, and she had to stop. Charon drew her to him, unresistingly, for she saw no sense in fighting him. Let him take what he desired; she would never give him anything willingly, so if he should eventually tire of making love to a lifeless statue then the better she would like it. He might then let her go, release her from this bondage in which—by her own folly—she had landed herself.

'You are entrancing,' he breathed as, slowly, as if savouring the very act of approaching her lovely mouth, he bent his head to kiss her. She stood, straight and still and unresponsive, waiting for the signs of fury and frustration she expected to encounter. But she was wrong. His lips explored hers in gentleness, they explored her shoulder and her throat before finding her lips once more.

'Kiss me, Sarah,' he murmured persuasively. 'Kiss me in the way I kiss you.'

Instead, she twisted in his embrace, and managed to free herself.

'As if I would kiss you!' she flashed. 'Your request's as absurd as some of your threats!'



'Threats?' he echoed, for the moment diverted.

'Threats of subjugating me!'

'You're telling me I can't subjugate you?' he queried, standing a little way from her. Shadows enveloped them both and although he appeared to be looking down into her face she doubted his ability to see her clearly.

'I shall resist, naturally.'

'Because you're a Pavromichali?'

'Because I'm me. My background doesn't matter. As I reminded you once before, the Pavromichalis blood is greatly thinned down in me.'

Charon moved a step closer to her, his face harsh in the starlight.

'Perhaps it's as well. Had you been a first generation I might not have been able to resist calling you to account.'

'Nonsense!' she retorted. 'You desired me, and that was the only reason why you decided I should not die. Had I been of the first generation it would have made no difference.'

He shrugged, as if the matter were suddenly boring to him.

'Come,' he invited, 'let us continue our stroll.' The tangled path was even narrower at this point —too narrow to walk abreast, and Charon went on ahead, parting the scrubby vegetation so as to make her progress easier. He wore a white dinner jacket, and his tall broad figure stood out against the dark mountain ahead. It was a distinctive figure— majestic was an apt description, and mentally this was the description she gave him, but grudgingly.

'Are you all right?' he asked after a while. 'A long gown isn't exactly the most sensible garment to wear for this type of region.'

'I'm all right, thank you.'

Delay. Every step taken increased the distance back to the tower, and an increase in distance meant a delay in time.

When at length the roughest of the vegetation was left behind Charon was able to come to her side. He slid his arm about her waist and she shivered at the contact. His hand was warm and she hated it; sensing this, Charon in his arrogance closed his fingers, trapping her flesh between them.

Stoically she bore it, fully aware that to twist away would avail her nothing. It was like living on a knife-edge, she thought, wondering desolately whether she would ever see the day when she was free.

'What are you dreaming of?' inquired Charon. 'You've been walking along with your eyes staring ahead, as if you were seeing something which I did not.'

'I was dreaming of freedom.'

'An unprofitable dream, then.'

'I'll be free some time,' she returned doggedly. 'You seem to forget you said you might one day tire of me.'

'Ah, but the position's very different now. You're my wife, Sarah, and in Greece marriage is permanent.'

'You could tire of me just the same.'

'I could,' he agreed, but added without hesitation, 'We'd still stay together, though.'

She said, sending him an upward, slanting glance,

'Do you really believe you can keep watch on me for the rest of my life?'

'If we stay here, yes. There are my servants, remember. They know better than to allow you to escape.' Something in his tone caused a great shiver to pass along Sarah's spine. What, she wondered, would he do to his servant

should he allow her to escape? Kill him? The man's fate was dismissed as Sarah inquired curiously,

'What do you mean by "If we stay here"? Is there some possibility of our leaving the Mani?'

'None at all. As I've just said, I can keep you prisoner if we remain at the tower. Should we leave, and decide to live elsewhere, it would not be possible for me to hold you prisoner.' A pause, significant and yet oddly baffling. 'Were the day to come when you desired to remain with me of your own accord, then perhaps I would take you somewhere else.'

She gave a little gasp.

'How can you entertain the idea that I'd ever stay with you of my own accord? You're mad!'

'And you, my dear,' he returned with surprising mildness, 'are not as clever as I believed.'

'I don't know what you mean?'

'Were you smart, Sarah, you'd play up to that half-promise; you'd attempt to convince me you wanted to stay—then once we left here you could make your escape.'

She said nothing to this and for a space they moved along in silence; his words had reminded her that he had cleverly managed to evade answering her earlier query as to whether or not he had ever lived anywhere other than in the Deep Mani.

They reached a clearing in the scrub and the mountains came into view again, their spiky summits harsh as steel in the glow from a myriad stars. Then suddenly the twinkling lights of a mountain village appeared as if by magic, from out of the wilderness of barren crags.

Sarah had seen the lights before, but tonight she asked about the people who lived in the village.

'They must be so poor,' she added with a hint of compassion. 'What work can they find in a place like this?'

'They grow a few olives and keep goats,' was his indifferent reply. 'They don't grumble at the life. After all, they do get plenty of God's fresh air.'

'That's no compensation for lack of food and clothes.'

'They don't miss what they've never had.'

She looked again at the lights. And then her eyes scanned the dark terrain around her. Great banks of prickly pear reared their spiky heads across the river from where she and Charon were walking, the tallest growing all of twenty feet in height. A few straggly wild fig trees, a few struggling carobs, and that was the extent of any growing thing from which profit could be derived.

'Why don't they leave?'

'People don't leave their homes,' was his half impatient answer. 'They happen to be happy here.'

He stopped, and said it was time to turn back. Reluctantly she fell into step beside him and half an hour later they were entering through the front door of the tower.

Sarah shivered, and in her deep desolation she wondered what was in store for her.

## CHAPTER NINE

SARAH stood in the middle of the bedroom floor waiting for Charon to come to her. She was aware of the subconscious hope of some miracle that would intervene to save her from the caresses of the man she hated. But logical thought overrode this wild craving for an eventuality which was almost impossible. Apart from his falling down and cracking his head, or suddenly dying from a heart attack, there seemed to be no hope of his not coming up to her within the next few minutes or so.

She heard him at last, quietly mounting the stairs. Her heart seemed about to burst within her and for one weak moment she felt she must plead with him.

But no! She would never allow him the satisfaction of being able to denounce her as a coward.

The door swung inwards; Charon stood there, fully dressed, his dark face impassive. Sarah stepped back, an automatic movement and not meant as an attempt at escape, which would have been both futile and absurd. But it was a movement that had a strange effect on Charon, bringing a sudden frown to his face. Her own face was white; it accentuated the buff colour of the dressing which Charon had earlier applied to her cheek. Her hand was lifted to her heart, for its throbbing frightened her. Yet she faced him unflinchingly, her head held high. She had no idea what a tempting picture she made, with her glorious hair falling like a golden cloak on to her shoulders, her eyes bright and unblinking, her slightly parted lips moving convulsively despite her efforts to keep them steady. For a long, long moment Charon stood there, his face an impenetrable mask, but at the side of his mouth a nerve twitched, and in his black eyes a brooding expression lurked. Suddenly he drew a deep breath, which lengthened to a long, lingering sigh. She knew even before he spoke that he was intending to leave her.

'You're tired, and you've had a severe shock today,' he said almost gently. 'Sleep well, my Sarah, I'll see you in the morning.'

She stared wordlessly at him, vitally aware of something akin to pity rising within her. She had experienced this once before and now it shocked her to

discover she could feel the same again. As before, she told herself that it was jail he deserved, not pity. She managed to say,

'Yes, I did have a rather bad shock.' And then, 'Good night--' She broke off, saw the contraction of a muscle in his face and added quickly, '—Charon.'

The flash of a smile took every harsh line from his face.

'Good night, my dear...' He came forward; she made no attempt to evade his arms as they encircled her warm slender body. His lips met hers in a gentle kiss. He bade her good night again and then he was gone, locking the door behind him.

She lay awake into the small hours of the morning, wondering about this man who, having gone to the lengths of marrying her in order to keep her alive so that he could own her, had, on their wedding night of all times, left her to sleep alone— and in peace.

She wanted to cast thoughts of him aside, to relax and go to sleep. After all, he was nothing to her even though the law now said he was her husband.

She hated him-- Or did she? This question came reluctantly, but it came all the same. She asked herself how she could feel anything else but hatred for him, and naturally found no answer.

This pity she had come up against? Was it pity? She knew for sure that it was, yet, conversely, she still told herself she hated him.

Try as she would she could not succeed in casting his image from her. His dark face intruded all the time; it was as if it were permanently imprinted upon her mind and nothing could erase it.

Sleep came to her at last, and she slept late. Charon was nowhere to be seen when at half-past nine she put in an appearance in the breakfast room. Marko was there, making his customary silent approach. He asked what she wanted and she told him, using Greek as best she could. He understood, of course, as he always did, for she spoke very slowly to him. She had already taught him a few words of English, something which Charon had never bothered to do.

The man seemed grateful, and she actually coaxed a smile from him on one previous occasion.

'Where is Mr Charon?' Sarah asked in Greek as she sat down at the table.

'He has gone out, madam, to do the business which he should have done yesterday. He told me to tell you this, and that he would be back in time for lunch.'

'Thank you, Marko.'

After breakfast she went into the garden with\* her book, but she had only just settled down when Marko appeared saying that she had a caller.

'A caller?' she cried, springing to her feet. His words threw her into a state of elation, for she felt sure the caller was someone from the police. 'I'll come at once!'

Marko looked at her with a sort of mild surprise.

'The caller, madam, is Miss Elena.'

She stared, her spirits sinking into her feet.

'Then it's Mr Charon she wants,' managed Sarah at last, swallowing convulsively. 'You'd better tell her he's out.'

'It is you she wants to speak to, madam,' said Marko respectfully.

Sarah frowned, and stood there undecided. What could the girl want with her? Marko spoke again, saying he had shown Elena into the sitting-room.

'Very well, I'll see her,' decided Sarah resignedly. And as she walked towards the house her curiosity began to be aroused. What could the girl want with her? she asked herself again. A car stood at the side of the house, close to the open door of the garage where Charon kept his car. It was large and fairly new. If Elena was alone, then she had driven the car herself.

The Greek girl, beautifully dressed and coiffured, was standing with her back to the window; she merely turned her head slightly as Sarah entered, her dark eyes narrowed, her mouth twisted in a sneer. She was very different from the quiet, almost subdued girl who had accompanied Charon's grandmother that first day. Confidence flowed from her, and no sooner had Sarah entered than she spoke, saying she had come because she knew that Charon was out.

'I heard he had gone to the village,' she added, and Sarah wondered if one of the men outside had acted as a spy for her. What intrigue! It was like living in a city of gangsters!

'You want to see me about something? Perhaps Charon's grandmother sent you?' Sarah spoke in English and the girl paused a moment, mentally phrasing her answer.

'I come on my own. I think you are not married for so long as one whole week.'

Although her nerves tensed instantly Sarah remained outwardly in full command of herself. She said coolly and with that arrogance of which her father had so often spoken,

'And what has given you an idea like that?'

'You were abducted by Charon. It is not—not—believable that you marry him by yourself--'

She stopped and frowned in concentration. Sarah could have helped her, but she decided not to do so. 'I think you not willing to marry Charon?' A question; Sarah made no attempt to answer it and the girl continued, 'It is my thought that he make you marry him because it saves your life from those men who are told by Charon's grandmother to take you to her tower.' Elena's face suddenly twisted into lines of venomous hatred. 'Charon want you so much that he go to these lengths of marriage! He must be mad for desire for you—because he tells me many times he never marry English woman! Why do he want you so much that he marry you?' The dark eyes swept Sarah's



figure disparagingly. 'I have the better body than you! I am what men like! You have not the fine figure what the Greek men wish to hold--'

'Charon's grandmother also lives in a tower?' broke in Sarah at last, bypassing the wild ravings of the girl, a girl who was crazed with jealousy.

Elena glowered at her for this change of subject, and it was some moments before she was able to regain her control. However, when presently she did speak, her voice had assumed its former cold and confident timbre. 'A more lonely tower than this. One—two hours in a car.'

'Do you mind telling me why you are here?' asked Sarah after a pause.

At the hauteur in her tone the other girl bristled. Sarah had no doubts at all that, as an enemy, this girl could be dangerous.

'If you are not married for one whole week, then you must have married Charon because your life in danger.' Sarah said nothing and the girl continued, 'I think you are married only yesterday—I think Charon make up his mind after the men come to get you.' Her eyes glinted as they looked into Sarah's. 'It is my belief that the priest is still here, waiting till the men go so he can return to his village. You see, English girl, I have made message to the distant village and their priest is not at home. He is not expected home last night, so I have made my mind that he is in this tower. I know Charon so well. It is the thing he do when he make up his mind. Nothing makes him—makes him...' Her voice trailed away as she frowned in concentration. 'I think it is "daunted" that is the word I want?'

'Your brain,' returned Sarah, 'appears to have been working overtime.' Despite the heavy sarcasm contained in her voice, Sarah was mentally admitting to an admiration for the girl. She had certainly been perceptive in her treatment of the situation.

However, she was not too perturbed, simply because the date of her marriage to Charon was not important; it was sufficient that she was married and, therefore, safe as far as the *vendetta* was concerned.

'Does Charon's grandmother have the same ideas as you?'

'No. She very old and she not think with the clearness so much any more.'

Sarah said quietly, 'She wished for a marriage between you and Charon. Why was this?'

'Charon should marry. It is the desire of old people to see the young ones married.' The girl stopped, and her mouth moved convulsively. 'He would have married me in the end, if you had not come along!'

'I believe you are mistaken in assuming he would have married you,' responded Sarah in a cool and distant voice.

'You are—what you say?—too arrogant! I think I will not offer to help you, after all!'

Sarah's eyes became alert.

'Help?' she echoed, catching her breath.

'If you are married against your will, then you want to escape—no?'

Silence; every nerve in Sarah's body quivered. Escape! Elena was willing, to help her. That the help was offered merely to spite Charon mattered not at all.

'You can assist me to get away from here?'

The girl nodded.

'Of course. I know of secret way out. It lead from the small room which is a saloon to sit in some time when the big room not wanted--'

'Yes—yes! I know the room,' interrupted Sarah, by now consumed by excitement. 'But where is the door? I presume it's a door to an underground passage?'

'That is right. In the days of war many passages were made, but I am believing that there is only one left at Charon's tower. His grandmother has four of these--

'Never mind that! Tell me about this passage in Charon's tower. Where is the door?'

Elena's eyes became veiled. 'I not tell you that yet, English girl!'

'There are conditions attached to the offer of help you have made?'

'Of course.'

'They are...?'

The girl looked down at the floor. When presently she spoke Sarah strongly suspected there had been a tense moment of indecision with the girl, as if the condition she was about to make known to Sarah was highly distasteful to her. However, she said in quite unemotional tones,

'I want you to promise you will prosecute him when you get back to Athens.'

Contempt looked out from Sarah's eyes.

'The woman scorned, eh?' she said, and as was to be expected the girl looked questioningly at her.

'I do not know this scorned? What is it?'

Sarah's mouth curled.

'You want Charon put in prison?'

The girl frowned, but within seconds her face had twisted with hate.

'Yes, for what he has done to me! As you say, his grandmother believed he would marry me—but he marry you—an English girl—instead! I like to see him lying in jail!'

'I could make the promise,' pointed out Sarah after a thoughtful pause, 'and then go back on my word.'

'In that case,' returned Elena significantly, 'I would send some of my people to—to—give you the *vendetta*!'

'So your people are just as bloodthirsty as those of Charon?'

'We have the *vendetta*—yes. Everybody in the Deep Mani have the *vendetta*.'

'You believe they could find me, once I had left here?'

'They find you, English girl.'

'I might go home—back to England.'

'They still come. The *vendetta* does not know a boundary.' A silence fell; then Elena spoke again.

'The Pavromichali, cruel as they were, never break promises they make. I believe you will not break yours—for I think if you do this your own con—con—\* She stopped, looking for help from Sarah.

'Conscience,' she supplied, her mind confused, a circumstance which amazed her. Why should she hesitate about accepting this girl's offer? It wasn't as if she, Sarah, had made any definite promise to Charon not to prosecute him. She had offered her silence in exchange for her release; he had refused and therefore she owed him nothing.

'You are going to make this pact with me?' The girl had spoken with difficulty through the entire conversation, but Sarah preferred to speak her own language rather than that of Elena, since she herself knew so little Greek and she did not want any misunderstanding.

She became thoughtful, seeing no reason why she should not be able to find this secret way out for herself.

Intently watching her changing expression, Elena spoke, and now her voice was a languid drawl, and full of confidence.

'If you believe you can manage without my help, English girl, you are a fool! No woman can find her way safely out of this place. Many chasms and precipices are here, and there are no real roads.' Suddenly the dark eyes glittered. 'There are bandits, to spring on travellers and throw them into a gorge!'

Charon had said something of the sort, Sarah recalled, and she was ready to believe it. She had acted with foolish impulsiveness once; she was not now so stupid as to assume that these two were lying, and that she could in fact make her own way safely to the coast. In any case, she had no Greek money, no transport, no guide as to direction. She might go around in circles, might even lose all contact with civilisation. Her thoughts wandered on; she tried to visualise her situation should she have recourse, to seek help from one of the cottages, those primitive buildings in which dwelt the strange, barbaric people of the Deep Mani. She shuddered involuntarily, and Elena immediately said,

'For your safety, English girl, I tell you that it is not possible to get from here by yourself.'

Sarah nodded, conceding this point.

'You are willing to help me, once I get away from this tower?'

Elena nodded eagerly.

'I have a car, which I drive myself. I--'

'You can help me now, this morning?' interrupted Sarah in swift and breathless tones, but this time Elena shook her head.

'It is not possible, because we might see Charon on the way. It must be done when he is in the house. I will tell you of this secret panel in the--' She stopped a second, then continued,

'When you are in the tunnel I wait for you at the end. I have my car some way away—one kilometre. We go to the coast and you get boat. I give you money for this boat. I was thinking I could take you all the way by car, but it is too long. Boat is better.'

Again Sarah became thoughtful.

'But, when Charon misses me, he can get in touch with the captain, and I might be held aboard?'

'This can happen,' frowned the girl. 'I think if I take you some of the way on land, and you then get hired car which I will pay for if you have no money?'

The idea of accepting the Greek girl's money, although abhorrent to Sarah, was a necessity. Her freedom being her first thought, nothing else was of any major importance. However, she did promise to repay the money, but even before she could ask for her address Elena was saying,

'I not want it! I have much money which Charon gave to me. I want only this thing—to see him in jail!' Black vindictiveness looked from the girl's eyes, and as Sarah's own eyes travelled down she saw that her fists were tightly clenched against her sides.

'When can this escape be effected?' inquired Sarah, and Elena's eyes glittered with triumph.

'So you are ready to give me your promise?'

Intense the silence which followed. Chaotic thoughts intruded to prevent Sarah from supplying the spontaneous answer which ought by rights to be leaving her lips. Charon in court, being prosecuted ... Charon languishing in a Greek prison. The prisons here were grim, she had heard more than once. Charon himself had implied this.

'You hesitate,' snapped Elena. 'Why is this? You not like my man--' She stopped abruptly, colouring. 'You not like Charon! It is not possible that you like man who abduct you—no!'

'I hate him,' responded Sarah slowly. 'I want nothing more than to escape from here.'

'Well, then! What is this hesitate! I not understand why you not in big speed to leave him!' Elena stopped again, and this time her venom was mingled with actual pain. 'Last night—he make love to you? You find you like it and you--'

'Be quiet, girl! No, he did not come near me last night!' Fury caused Sarah's voice to take on a low bass note and Elena looked at her in surprise.

'You have the temper of the Pavromichali! They have the worse tempers in all the Deep Mani!'

'Shall we get back to the question of my escape?' frowned Sarah. 'The time is the important thing. Each morning between breakfast and lunch I am usually alone--'

'I know this,' snapped Elena gratingly. 'I have lived here, remember! I was the mistress for many long times! Charon always does his work in the mornings!'

Diverted for a space, Sarah said curiously,

'He's told me he owns hotels and other properties. Does he do all his own office work?'

'The hotel managers do their own. Charon does all the big things.'

'I see.' A small pause. Although doubting the girl's willingness to answer questions, Sarah decided there was nothing to lose by putting them, and she asked Elena if she knew why Charon lived here, in so desolate a place.

The girl's eyes narrowed and her mouth tightened.

'Why you so interested in Charon? If you hate him as you say, and all your mind is for this escape, then why you ask me these many things?'

Shrugging with affected carelessness, Sarah answered, 'It just seemed strange that he should live here when, obviously, he could live anywhere he chose.'

There was a long pause; Elena scanned Sarah's face as if seeking for a reassurance that she really was disinterested. Having satisfied herself of this she became unexpectedly expansive and Sarah learned of a new virulent hatred, the hatred of one man for another who had taken his loved one from him.

It happened over ten years ago, when Charon was only twenty-three. He was living on the island of Skiathos at the time, having been asked by an uncle a year previously to take over the management of one of the old man's hotels. This uncle had left the Deep Mani thirty years earlier, having become disgusted with the way the blood-feuds had continued. He had branded the people—his own among them—as uncivilised. A week before his death he had told Charon that all his wealth was left to him, but in return he demanded a promise that Charon would care for his godchild, a lovely Greek girl whom Charon had never met, but who came over to Skiathos in response to her godfather's summons, for he knew he was dying.

'One look at each other and they were in love,' continued Elena, and her voice was strangely unemotional. 'They were betrothed immediately, receiving the old man's blessing, and making him very happy before he died.' Elena digressed here, informing Sarah that Charon's grandmother had told her this story some months previously. 'She often wanders off into the past with her mind, and she makes you listen to these tales she likes to tell.' Returning to her narrative, Elena then continued,

'There was a brigand living in the Deep Mani, a man who distantly related to Charon's uncle, but not by the blood tie, you know? He hear that this relation of his is dying and is giving all his great wealth to somebody else, so he set off in great haste to see Charon's uncle before he die. He arrive, but the nurse will not allow him in to see Charon's uncle and so he seek for Charon who happen to be out in this moment.

'He see this lovely girl who tell him she and Charon are to marry.' Elena stopped and, as it was clear that she was having a great deal of difficulty



with the language, Sarah was just about to tell her to carry on in Greek when Elena began again and Sarah heard how this brigand, seeing a way of forcing the old man to change his will, took advantage of Charon's temporary absence and, seizing the girl, he drugged her and carried her off in a boat, bringing her to his lonely cottage in the mountains where he meant to hold her to ransom, forcing the uncle to change his will in return for the safe return of his goddaughter. Charon, unwilling to upset his uncle by letting him know of the girl's abduction, followed swiftly, but the girl, believing she was to be seduced by this barbarian, had thrown herself from a cliff and Charon was in time to attend her funeral.

'Driven mad with grief and the desire for revenge, Charon went from the church to seek out the man responsible. He had disappeared without a trace. Charon swore to get him, and to murder him. And at first Charon spent all his time at his tower, having had it made—what you say—? a bit comfortabler in a few rooms. He sold the hotel in Skiathos because he not bear to go there any more. But his uncle have many other hotels as you know and so Charon had to attend to his business as he not wish to let all his uncle's working go for a ruined business, you understand?'

Sarah nodded.

'He felt he must keep faith with his uncle's trust in him.'

'This is it. But he say that no matter what calls he has on his time he will always spend six months of every year in the Deep Mani looking for this wicked man.'

'What a sad, sad story!' Something painful caught at Sarah's throat, all her innate compassion going out to the young man of twenty-three who had lost his beloved.

'Sad, yes,' agreed Elena, but her tone was cold, unfeeling. 'It is in the past, though. Charon, is not hurt any more.'

'How can you know that?'

Elena spread her hands indifferently.

'Ten years ... it is too long for having broken heart. Charon have many women since then. He enjoy his pillow-friends and so he not have time to think of this girl who is no more alive.'

To her own amazement Sarah felt the prick of tears behind her eyes. Would Charon have been different had everything gone right for him? Sarah was positive he would. Obviously he had been willing to leave the Deep Mani and make his home in a more civilised part of Greece, as his uncle had done before him. Sarah rather thought he would never have returned to the Mani. In fact, she saw by the attitude of his family that he was no longer regarded as one of them.

'When he isn't here,' she said at length, 'where does he live?'

'He has a house on the lovely is--' Elena broke off, her mouth twisting. 'You ask too many questions! It seem you might want to stay with Charon?'

Sarah shook her head.

'I want to get away,' she said quietly. 'I thought I had convinced you of this?'

Elena relaxed, nodding her dark head.

'It is on the island of Hydra that he has beautiful home, with gardens and flowers and many nice furnitures and two Greek peoples to do the housework for him. He has two men for the garden also, and his grandmother tell me he is bigly...' Elena let her voice trail off, looking at Sarah with a frown between her eyes.

'Are you telling me he is highly thought of on the island of Hydra?' asked Sarah, and Elena instantly said yes, that was what she had been trying to say.

'He never take his pillow-friends there.' Elena paused a moment and the frown deepened. 'He would have taken me if I been his wife! But he would never take you because you not really his wife——'

'Why am I not?'

'He marry you against your will, and so you can have the marriage put away.'

An annulment--Yes, this was what she already had in mind...

'I would have liked to get away today.' Sarah looked at her, thinking of the coming night and feeling sure that Charon would not leave her again. 'In fact, I *must* get away today.'

'I have said, if we go now we might meet Charon as he come back from the village.' Elena's face actually lost a little of its colour as she added, 'He kill me if he find out that I help you to get from him.'

'Marko,' said Sarah as the thought suddenly occurred to her. 'He will tell Charon you've been here today.'

The girl shook her head, and told Sarah that she had a hold over the man, that she could expose him for theft, and so she had warned him not to say anything to Charon of this visit.

'Surely you can go another way—missing the road from the village?' suggested Sarah, leaving the matter of the Greek servant.

'It is possible, yes! I not think of the small road because we never use it. So many stones and big holes, you see.'

'But you can manage it?'

'I think so.' Elena became thoughtful; Sarah found herself looking at the clock every couple of seconds or so.

'We shall have to make haste.'

'That is true.'

'If we go along to the small room you can show me the panel.'

The girl hesitated.

'You have not make your solemn promise that you give Charon to the police.'

Sarah looked at her, saw the hatred in her face, the expectancy in her eyes. Some strange compelling force seemed to be holding Sarah back, exerting some pressure whereby she was unable to give the required promise.

What was the matter with her? Her freedom was of the most vital importance to her and here it was, being offered, and yet she was hesitating about giving a promise which would ensure that freedom. It was illogical to hesitate, and presently her common sense prevailed and she gave the promise.

'I will have him brought to justice,' she said, a slight tremor in her voice. 'He shall be put in prison.'

Elena became brisk then, and, making sure that Marko was not about, Sarah accompanied her to the small room and was shown the panel. It swung open easily and Sarah, peering into the aperture, saw only blackness.

'I have no torch.' Sarah was frowning heavily. She disliked intensely the idea of travelling any distance in that tunnel. Yet she estimated she must spend at least ten minutes in there.

'I carry a torch always in my handbag,' said Elena, 'but it is not very good light.'

She produced it. Sarah accepted it from her hand and, switching it on, decided it would do very well.

'I just carry on until I see daylight?' she asked.

'At the other end is a door, hidden in the hillside and with many earth over it. I clear away this earth and you see daylight, yes!'

'Thank you.' Sarah closed the panel, then opened it again, to make quite sure she knew how to manipulate the rather complicated mechanism by which it was opened. 'How long must I wait until I begin this dark journey?' she

inquired, and Elena said she could start as soon as she herself had left the tower. 'I not take long to get to the outer door and to clear away the earth.'

The two went from the small room to the hall; there was still no sign of Marko and Sarah surmised he was outside in the grounds as usual, keeping watch in the front door, which was the only one by which anyone could enter or leave the tower.

'*Adio,*' said Elena as she ran lightly down the steps. 'This been most pleasant talk with you!' These words were spoken loudly, just in case Marko should hear. But as Sarah glanced around she saw no sign of him. He would be in the bushes, she thought, elated at the idea of his keeping watch on the front door while she escaped by the secret door inside the house. He would be in serious trouble with Charon, but Sarah dismissed the matter of his probable punishment. She had the more important matter of her own skin to think about, for she would never feel safe from Charon until she was actually back in Athens, in the villa she shared with Miranda.

## CHAPTER TEN

THE panel was just sliding open under Sarah's fingers, and she was preparing to enter the inky blackness of the tunnel when she heard her husband's voice—just outside the door!

With a thought as swift as lightning she knew she could not make it, not with having to close the panel behind her. With disappointment flooding over her she reluctantly pushed the panel back into place and barely had time to move to the centre of the room before Charon entered. Why had he to arrive back so soon? Had he seen Elena on his way? He stood there, just inside the door, his black hair a little awry, having been teased by the wind. A slow smile touched his lips and she let out her breath. It was plain that he had not seen Elena—or, if he had, he had no suspicion that she had been to the tower.

'Marko said you were in here,' Charon came towards her. 'I should have thought you'd prefer the sunshine; you usually do.' A question in his tone and glance, but she chose to ignore it as she replied,

'I did go out, but the sun was becoming hot. I prefer to read in here.'

Charon glanced around.

'Read?'

'I came in and left my book outside. I'll fetch it in a few moments.'

'Marko will do that for you.' Charon paused a moment. She felt a sort of electricity in the air, as if he were on the verge of making some quite dramatic statement to her. His mouth was no longer thin and cruel, nor did his eyes wear that metallic glint. She found herself licking her lips, as they had gone dry for some reason.

Her disappointment lay upon her, a dreary weight which she had the greatest difficulty in hiding, but she knew she must act normally, must remember that there was still a chance, for Charon might well be intending to go to his study. When he made no move she ventured to ask,

'Aren't you going to do some work?'

He shook his head.

'I thought I'd take you for a drive. You haven't seen much of the countryside--'

'I'm not particularly enthusiastic about a drive,' she interrupted. 'What I've seen already is quite enough for me.'

His eyes kindled.

'Sometimes, Sarah, your rudeness astounds me.'

'Do you expect civility all the time?'

He said, his eyes resting broodingly on her face,

'Last night you were different.'

'I don't know what you're talking about?'

'You do, Sarah. You called me by my name—and it sounded soft and gentle. You were in a most attractive mood, and I wondered afterwards if I had done the wisest thing in leaving you.'

'I'd had a shock, you yourself admitted that. I needed the complete rest.'

'And now...?' Softly he spoke, his eyes devouring her beauty.

She said, frustrated by his failure to leave, 'Now I feel like resting again. I believe my nerves have suffered by my experience yesterday.'

Charon frowned at her, and examined her features with a clinical stare.

'If you need a rest then have one by all means. I had hoped, though, that you'd welcome the offer of a drive?'

She shook her head decisively. 'I prefer to rest.'

The black eyes flickered oddly.

'Are you intending to read?'

'Of course. I always read. You said Marko would fetch my book from the garden.'

'I'll tell him,' he promised, and left her.

He seemed tired and dispirited, and she wondered if something had gone wrong.

She turned slowly, and looked at the panel. It would be folly to attempt an escape with Charon around. If only he would go to his study and settle down to work, as was his customary practice each morning. But as Sarah glanced at her watch she realised it wanted only an hour to lunch time. She caught her lower lip between her teeth, so tensed and frustrated that she could have wept. If only Charon had been half an hour later, or if Elena had arrived sooner. Time had been wasted in talking, and thinking about it now Sarah cursed herself for asking questions which it had taken Elena so much time to answer.

It was done now, though, and no profit could be made by regrets. What of Elena, waiting out there, having removed the camouflaging vegetation and earth from the door? Already ten minutes had elapsed since she had left the tower; she would be expecting Sarah to appear at any moment now. A deep sigh escaped her as, glancing through the window, she saw her husband wandering aimlessly about the garden. She thought of the great sorrow of his youth and wondered if its scar had healed. One thing she would never understand was his continued seeking for vengeance, causing himself all this discomfiture. She saw now why he had never married: it was clear that he could not keep on bringing his wife to this bleak and dismal wilderness of a place, not after having her live on the lovely island of Hydra for part of the year.



How fruitless had been these ten years! No one other than a Maniot would have acted so.

He returned to the house; Sarah went out to meet him in the hall, not knowing why she should, nor even asking herself. She acted from some compulsion and wondered if pity was intruding even yet again.

His face seemed to lighten when he saw her standing there, after she had come from the room behind her. She stood immobile, slender and graceful as the loveliest *kore*, her delicate, fine-boned features as unmoving as her body, her dark blue eyes wide and staring. He shook his head, and a slight movement of a nerve in his throat gave evidence of some deep and disturbing emotion affecting him. It was a tense moment, electrically charged like the moment in the small room when she had gained the fleeting impression that he was on the verge of telling her something. The moment passed, in the same way as it had previously. She knew a most odd sensation of regret and on analysing her feelings she owned that she had been waiting with an inexplicable expectancy for him to speak. He smiled at her, and her own lips responded; he held out his hand and with a movement not of her own volition she placed hers in it. And as she surmised, Charon was not to leave her alone again—at least, not tonight. At dinner he was more than usually attentive, and his tone of voice was never harsh or cynical. They strolled in the moonlight, then came back to the tower. And Sarah had been in her room a mere ten minutes when he came, entering after the quietest knock and closing the door firmly behind him.

Coming over to where she stood, by the window looking out at the rough outline of Taygetus, he took her arm and turned her towards him, speaking softly as he drew her close.

'My lovely wife!'

Comprehending the vibrant note of ardour but failing to catch the hint of tenderness, she recoiled from him, every sense and nerve rebelling at the contact of his body, her one despairing thought being of how close she had come to escaping from him, and tears actually gathered at the backs of her eyes.

Her action seemed to snap something within him, some cord that held his pagan traits in check. With brutal compulsion he forced her to accept his caresses, and his kisses. She struggled instinctively, the one searing idea in her mind now being that, if only she could hold him off tonight, she might escape unscathed, for she was sure Elena would contact her tomorrow morning somehow.

But Sarah's struggles served only to incense Charon and all the savagery of his barbaric forebears was released in the deluge of angry passion that swept over him. With ruthless arrogance he dominated her, determined to show her who was master.

'Let me go!' she cried when for a few seconds he drew, his hard possessive lips from hers. 'You— fiend!' The tears were closer still, but she would not let him see her cry. 'Get out of my room!'

For answer he swept her once again into the fiery vortex of his passion, bruising her mouth and her body, until, the blood thrumming through her brain, she was reduced to utter weakness both mentally and physically. His face became blurred, as if seen through a haze, but its savage outlines were there, terrible to see—the thin cruel mouth, the piercing, luminous eyes, the out-thrust jaw, hard, implacable.

'Get out!' she repeated gaspingly when once more he held her from him. 'How can you want to stay when I hate you so!'

He received this in silence, but it was a terrible silence—like the fatal hush of doom. Yet when presently he spoke his voice was unexpectedly quiet and controlled.

'Have you not thought how considerate I have been, Sarah? I could have--'

'Considerate!' she flashed. 'Keeping me here, a prisoner! You call that considerate?'

'I could have taken you, Sarah, long before now.'

She had to concede this, but she would not do so verbally.

'Tonight ... if you would wait until tomorrow night...?'

Charon's black eyes kindled strangely.

'What difference would that make?' he queried, subjecting her to an intense scrutiny as if alert to any changes in expression which would give him a clue as to the workings of her mind. She stared him out, her face pale and drawn but with no sign of fear to mar the beautiful, classical lines inherited from her ancestor, the Maniot who was supposed to have married a 'mermaid'. Charon seemed fascinated by her; she wondered if a softness had come to his face or if it was merely her imagination.

And then, staggering her, she knew she was seeking even yet again for some redeeming feature among the harsh satanic lines of his face. And with this admission something stirred her senses, a yearning, nebulous and fleeting—like the vaporous thread of a dream that swirls tantalisingly out of reach. What was this emotion which defied interpretation? And as she asked the question many incidents came before her vision—the pleasure she had always derived from walking with him, repellent though the terrain was; the pity she had experienced on more than one occasion; the re-luctance to give Elena that promise and, lastly, she was hearing again the story of his youth, when the girl he loved was brutally snatched from him, to meet her death in the most horrible way.

'What are you thinking?' His imperious voice cut into her reflections and she looked up into his dark forbidding face. His eyes pierced; Sarah's lids quivered, but she would not allow them to fall. Instead, she met his gaze unblinkingly, confident of her ability to hide what was in her mind.

'My thoughts are private,' she returned with all the arrogance of which her father had spoken. Her chin was lifted and her eyes were dark with contempt. She knew she was deliberately putting up a fight against some inner force which seemed to be striving to break down the hatred she felt for her husband. 'All else you can take from me, but my thoughts are my own!'

'And your arrogance,' he remarked, his eyes kindling dangerously. 'I ought to humble you, madam! And I will do if you persist in adopting this manner with me!'

She turned her face from him, but he roughly brought it back.

'Take that look off your face,' he snarled. 'I'm not a worm for you to despise--!'

'No, a vile beast!' she inserted. 'That's what you are!'

The words seemed to ignite the embers of his fury and his passion. A terrible expression leapt into his eyes before, sweeping her into his arms, he carried her across the room.

'Vile beast, am I!' he said through clenched teeth. 'Then, my girl, you're going to have to endure the caresses of this vile beast!'

Dawn crept slowly into the room, followed by a ray of sunlight which stung Sarah's eyes. Turning her head, she looked at the dark, gipsy-like face on the white pillow and shuddered. She rose and, after washing and dressing, she parted the curtains and, sitting on the window-seat, looked out unseeingly on to the desolate countryside. But the terrain was not to occupy her thoughts for long. Escape was what must from now on possess her whole mind. Elena would contact her, she was sure, but how she would do this Sarah could not conceive. However, so strong was the girl's desire for revenge that she would undoubtedly scale any obstacles which might get in her way.

And Sarah's predictions were to prove correct. At ten o'clock that morning she was wandering around the grounds, alert for any unusual sound, when suddenly she heard a quiet,

'English girl!' coming from behind a derelict building.

'Elena!' The girl's name, spoken by Sarah for the first time, was a mere whisper, uttered while Sarah was glancing swiftly around. Marko was there, as usual, ostensibly weeding one of the borders. He turned his head and, holding her breath, she reached up to pluck a solitary flower from a struggling hibiscus bush. Marko returned to what he was supposed to be doing.

'I expect you guessed that Charon returned?' said Sarah quietly.

'Yes, I guessed.' Elena spoke in her own tongue. 'Can you come now?'

'I think so.' Sarah could scarcely speak for the wild pulsation of her heart. 'Charon's in his study.'

'Good! It is now, then! I shall be waiting for you!'

'I'll see you in about fifteen minutes' time.'

That was all. No other sound came from behind the building. Sarah, aware of Marko's eyes once again coming in her direction, casually moved on, twirling the flower between her fingers. With unhurried steps she made her way to the front door and entered, going straight to the small sitting-room. A glance through the window told her that Marko was now standing idly looking around, his hand going to his pocket to find a cigarette. He would not bother to come in yet awhile.

Without going upstairs even to collect her bag, Sarah took the torch from under the couch where she had hidden it yesterday, opened the panel, passed through, then closed it noiselessly behind her.

It was late that evening when she walked into the grounds of the villa. It all appeared unreal, and she herself felt like a stranger. It was as though she had been away for years.

Miranda saw her through the window and ran to open the door.

'Sarah! How on earth have you got here?' Miranda gasped out the words, but Sarah noted at once the lack of enthusiasm, the way Miranda's eyelids came down, so that she did not need to meet Sarah's gaze.

'I escaped.' A silence followed these two brief words. Sarah entered the villa and stood looking all around. She shivered, for there was something cold about the room—an unfriendly atmosphere which had never been there before. She turned her head but not her body; Miranda was standing by the

open front door, and their eyes met. Something in Miranda's expression made Sarah say,

'You didn't tell the police that I was missing, did you, Miranda?'

Miranda was very pale, and for a long moment did not speak.

'I feel so ashamed,' she muttered at last. 'It was Mother-- No, I shouldn't blame her altogether. We talked a lot, and decided we'd be in dreadful trouble if we contacted the police, so--' Miranda stopped as Sarah, swinging right round, raised a hand to silence her.

'You needn't say any more. Charon had doubts about your doing anything to rescue me.'

'I was amazed when I myself was rescued.' Miranda spoke awkwardly; Sarah guessed she was so embarrassed that she would have made her escape if she could. 'I believed I'd be left there to die!'

Sarah looked at her through contemptuous eyes. She could have said that it was she who had persuaded Charon to have Miranda released, but she held her tongue, too impatient and disgusted to prolong the conversation with the girl whom she had considered to be her friend.

'What happened to you?' Miranda's question was forced and it was plain that she was only saying what was expected of her.

'I was forced to marry Charon Drakos.'

'Marry!' ejaculated Miranda, gaping at her. '*Marry* him!' Sarah merely nodded and moved over to the window. The Acropolis basked in the sunshine, its famous buildings soft and golden. 'But why did you have to marry him?'

'The *vendetta*.'

'I don't understand?' 'I was involved. Only by marrying Charon could I save my life.'

'Good God, Sarah, but how calm you are about it all!'

Sarah swung round, her eyes blazing.

'Calm!' she cried. 'Where are your wits, Miranda? Would any girl be calm at going through what I've gone through?'

Miranda blinked, then went red.

'He—I mean—it wasn't just a marriage of convenience, then?'

Impatiently Sarah turned away again.

'You're absurd,' she said.

'I can understand how you feel about everything,' said Miranda after a long pause. 'But you seem to forget that I've suffered as well.'

Sarah's eyes lighted on the old gardener, pottering about among some tomatoes he had grown, stooping to pick out a weed now and then. He reminded her of Marko, whose pace was just as unhurried as that of the old man out there. Marko ... and Glavcos. Two dour Greeks with scarcely a smile between them. These were Charon's companions during his self-imposed sojourns at the tower. What was Charon doing now? Sarah dismissed the question she could not answer.

'How long were you on the island?' she inquired at length, as Miranda's petulantly-spoken words returned to her.

'Four days. It was awful! I was terrified!'

'The abduction was your idea. There was always the risk of its going wrong.'

'It was all your fault, Sarah. I'm sorry to say it, but it was! Had I gone back to the boat it would never have happened.'

'Charon suspected from the first. He was intrigued by your invitation and decided to see what you were up to. He never drank the wine—but I expect you guessed that.'

No answer from Miranda, so it was impossible to tell whether any of what Sarah was saying came as a surprise to her.

'How did you manage to get away, then? I suppose this Charon Drakos helped you--'

'Helped?' Sarah swung round again, staring at Miranda. 'He had me a prisoner in that tower—and it was no luxury hotel--' She stopped, frowning heavily. 'I don't want to talk about it, Miranda,' she said, and went up to her room.

Standing in the doorway, she looked around. Objects were recognised yet no longer familiar. All was different, all seemed to be part of a former life. Vaguely she was aware that she and Miranda must part company, that they must find separate accommodation. They weren't friends any more.

'Everything is changed,' whispered Sarah as she slowly entered the room. 'Not one thing, or two— but everything. I feel uncomfortable, as if I don't belong here, as if none of these things is really mine.' Absently she picked up an enamelled hairbrush and flicked the bristles. In the same absent manner she brushed her hair, and as she did so it came to her that Miranda had not really wanted to pursue the matter of Sarah's terrible experience; she was a shirker. She had not desired to be faced with any added guilt.

Again Sarah's eyes swept round the room. For a fleeting second she thought of Pam, then frowningly dismissed her. The bed-- Another bed seemed to take its place ... and on the pillow lay a dark head...

'What are we going to do about this villa?' Sarah asked the question the following afternoon, when Miranda came in. She had been to see her mother at her work, guessed Sarah, and wondered if Mrs Maddison was as indifferent as her daughter.



'I don't know what you mean?' Although Miranda tried to inject a hint of puzzlement into her voice the relief in it was apparent.

'You can't want to live with me any more than I want to live with you.'

Miranda swallowed, then admitted it would be preferable for them to separate. They would see one another, at school, thought Sarah, but she was determined to give in her notice and leave as soon as possible. She would return to England and try to forget her terrible experience. After a long hesitation she said, 'I'm charging Charon Drakos with abducting me,' but no sound came. She had been talking to herself.

Two days went by, Miranda had gone to stay with her mother, so Sarah had the villa to herself, a circumstance for which she was more than a little thankful. To have come into daily contact with Miranda would have been an impossibility, unbearably for them both.

On the third morning Sarah went out, intending to make an appointment to consult a lawyer about the charge she meant to bring against her husband. But without her own volition she found herself in the Plaka, and then her footsteps took her towards the Acropolis. Once there, she sat down on a broken column and hoped for peace to fall upon her. But she felt lost and her mind was in chaos, as it had been since she had whispered to herself that she was prosecuting Charon.

The proud aristocratic Charon Drakos brought to trial for abducting an English girl, putting her in a position where marriage to him was imperative. Sarah thought that if he had not asserted his rights he might have got off with a lighter sentence, but as things were, his conduct would be condemned and he would receive a punishment fitting the crime. He could get ten years, ten years--The same length of time he had already wasted, seeking vengeance for the wrong inflicted on him.

'I can't do it!' She rose from the column and walked about, thinking, thinking, remembering her promise to Elena and knowing she could not go back on it. 'What shall I do?'

She had no fear of the reprisals of Elena's gang of thugs. She would be safe enough once she returned to her own country, which would be made possible as soon as she could obtain her release from the contract she had made with the school authorities. They did not like teachers breaking contracts, but they rarely tried to keep one who desired to go home.

For the past two days Charon's face had risen up before her continually. And never did she see the harsh contours, the thin cruel mouth, the hard incalculable eyes. No, instead she saw the softness she had searched for on so many occasions, she saw the smile which transformed his face. She wondered what he would look like if ever real joy brought laughter to his face.

Restless and bewildered, Sarah continued to pace about, only half aware of the crowds, the guides with their husky voices, the children irreverently playing hide-and-seek in the sacred temples, or treating the fallen columns as stepping stones. What she was *fully* conscious of was the face before her, the face of her husband. And with it came the sadness she had seen there, the brooding expression—Suddenly she knew she could never have him brought to justice, and swiftly upon this was the knowledge of her unwillingness to break her promise to Elena. She had made a pact, had accepted the girl's help in exchange for that promise.

'I must go back--' Her eyes widened at the idea. How could she think of going back? With a sudden flash of perception she knew she *wanted* to go back! This was the reason for her restlessness, her feeling of loss, of no longer belonging here. For if she wanted to go back, there could only be one reason— 'I don't love him,' she breathed, her eyes staring dazedly at the little Temple of Athene Nike, serene in the sunlight. 'How can I love a man like that? And after what he's done to me...'

Her thoughts were cut as a staggering idea leapt out at her. Had Charon begun to care for her? He could have taken her that first night. But instead he had said he wanted to get to know her better—to be friends before they were lovers. What was his reason? And then, on their wedding night, he had once again controlled his desires. Pagan, she had called him, but was he a pagan? He had not molested her until she herself had driven him by her arrogance and contempt. 'Can it be that he was learning to love me, and that was the

reason why he was so gentle at times, and restrained?' This was the only thing about the whole affair that made sense. 'I must go back!' she said again, and having finally made up her mind she was as impatient as a child to be moving.

The following day she was in a hired car, driving into the Deep Mani, her heart lighter than ever before in her life. The tower came into view at last and a smile spread over her face.

'My master has gone away,' were the words she was hearing a moment after she had run lightly up the steps to the front door. 'I do not know where he has gone.' Marko spoke in Greek, his glance accusing, but not unduly so. Sarah knew for sure that he had not received any punishment for allowing her to escape.

'You do not know, but--' Sarah broke off, her eyes widening. 'All right, Marko, thank you very much.'

The car was turning and she was in time to hail the driver. Glad of the fare back again, he smiled broadly.

'I want to get to the island of Hydra,' she said, 'please make the port as quickly as you can.'

She remembered the island from that last time, which seemed an eternity ago, so much had happened in her life since then. Would she find happiness with Charon? Was she making one great mistake in thinking he loved her? That the idea was incredible she would not deny, since love seemed totally alien to such a man. Yet he had loved, a long long while ago, so surely it was possible that he could love again?

The house, she was told after she had stepped off the boat which had brought her to the island, was on a plateau on the hillside, and she would have to go by foot or donkey, since there were no roads on to the mountain; it rose far too steeply from the shore.

'It is a beautiful house,' added the man whom she had approached. He spoke in broken English, looking Sarah over with a sort of critical interest as he added, 'Mr Drakos has been away for some time, but he is at home now. He returned only yesterday.'

'Thank you,' said Sarah. 'I walk up those steps, I think?'

'You can have my donkey.'

'Thank you very much,' smiled Sarah, 'but I think I shall walk.'

She wanted time-- Or did she? Suddenly she had an urge to run up the whitewashed steps which served as a road, wanted to get to Charon swiftly, in order to know whether her deductions were correct—or whether he did not want her, after all.

He was standing on a lovely terrace, gazing at a fountain, his tall figure as formidable as ever she had seen it, his profile harsh in the sunlight. She stopped, breathless, and stared, her heart pulsating madly, her legs weak, as if they rebelled against carrying her any further. Over the beautiful garden all was silent, peaceful, with colour everywhere. The house itself, noble and mellowed, with its delicately-fashioned portals and flower-bedecked patios and balconies, had views sweeping down the mountainside to the sea, a sea alive with bright little caiques and other boats, bobbing about as the zephyr of a breeze swept in to the water's edge. What a paradise! How could Charon choose to leave it and go to the desolation of the tower?

Suddenly Charon turned his head, forced she knew by the knowledge of another presence close by. He stared, seemed to blink rapidly, then started forward. She saw even from here that a nerve twitched uncontrollably in his throat, that a hand was clenched at his side. Emotion gripped him, as it gripped Sarah.

Overcome with a shyness totally new to her, she took a faltering step forward, then stopped. But the movement brought Charon from his stupor

and he moved with swift and eager strides towards her, disbelief written upon his face and yet, paradoxically, his eyes were alight with pleasure.

'Sarah ...' He reached her, then seemed to be almost as hesitant as she. His hand came out to touch her, as if even now he must make sure she was real. 'You—you have come back to me?' Deep wonderment edged his tone, and there was about him a humility which was totally out of character. 'Is this true? Am I dreaming even yet again?'

'Again, Charon?' her tone was gentle, filled with love.

'I dreamed you'd return, then told myself I was a fool. Sarah, my dear wife, have you really come to—to stay?'

'If you want me--'

'Want you!' Charon swept her into his arms and for a long, long while she was unable to speak. Breathless when he released her, she still clung to him, reluctant to let him go, even for one moment.

'I was so desolate when I found you gone--' Charon broke off and a frown creased his forehead. 'And yet I did not follow because I was so sure you'd never love me--' He held her at arms' length and looked searching into her beautiful eyes. 'When did it happen?' he asked, a tremor in a voice which was normally so clear and strong.

'When?' She gave a shaky little laugh and shook her head. 'I was hoping you weren't going to ask me that, Charon. I cannot answer you, dearest. You see, I thought it was pity--'

'So you did feel something other than hatred for me?'

'Yes ... it was strange, but I seemed so often to be searching for some softness about you. I realise now that, subconsciously, I knew that beneath the shell there was something very attractive.' He did not speak, but drew her close to him and kissed her tenderly on the lips. There was so much to say between them, but this moment of blissful reunion was not for wasting on explanations, and apologies for past hurts they had inflicted on one another.

But eventually they did talk—not that Sarah had any need to tell Charon how she had effected her escape. He had guessed it was with help from Elena because Marko, overcome by guilt, had made the confession that he had stolen from his previous master and then gone on to explain how Elena had threatened him with exposure if he told Charon of her visit.

'I went to see her and got everything out of her,' said Charon grimly. There was no need to say more. Sarah shivered in spite of the warmth of her husband's arm about her waist, and the tender touch of his other hand on her arm. She would not have wished to be in Elena's shoes when Charon visited her.

'I found I couldn't keep my promise to her,' Sarah told him simply, and in view of her subsequent action in coming to him there was again no need to say more.

'I loved you almost from the first,' he admitted after another tender interlude, when he held her close to his heart and caressed her lips with his. 'That was why I waited, for I hoped that we might become friends, and from there a more tender relationship would develop. I should have tried harder, my darling, and in fairness to myself I believe I would have done so had not that business of my grandmother's insane desire for vengeance forced us into marriage. Even then I could not sully my own love by taking you against your will. But that last night--' He stopped, and she saw at once how painful to him was the memory. Tenderly she offered him her lips; his smile and the swift clearing of his brow was her reward.

They talked again; Charon made some remark which gave Sarah an opening to ask about the girl he had once loved.

'Elena admitted relating that story to you,' he said, a pensive expression settling on his face for a moment. 'It hurt for a long time, and it was then that I began to find solace in pillow-friends. But while the pain of my loss faded with the years, my hatred for the man seemed to grow. I had vowed to have my revenge, and this determination to punish him gave me an aim in what otherwise was an aimless existence.' He paused a moment before saying, slowly and quite unemotionally, 'I heard, about a month ago, that he had died in a road accident.'

'So you'll not be going to the tower again?'

His eyes lit with tender amusement.

'I shouldn't be going anyway, not now that I have you,' he said. 'That is no place in which to set such beauty as is possessed by my wife.' He stopped and glanced around. She saw the pride in his eyes, the appreciation of all he perceived around him. He was a completely different man from the one who had lived in that dark tower. Here he had sunshine and flowers, the wine-dark sea of Greece and the clear blue sky. 'This, I think, is a much more appropriate setting.'

'It is very beautiful, Charon,' she breathed.

'I haven't taken you inside yet; it's a pleasure in store for me because, my darling, I know you will love your home.'

A few minutes previously he had rung a bell above his head, and now the refreshments he had ordered came, carried on a silver tray by a smiling Greek woman, Sophia, who, having been introduced to her new mistress, had expressed surprise, of course, then delight that her master had at last found so beautiful a bride. Sophia was smiling again as she put down the tray on the table on the patio to which Charon was leading his wife.

'Thank you, Sophia,' he said graciously as the woman stood aside. 'I will ring if we require anything else.'

How different! thought Sarah again. The charm, the way he spoke to the servant. Noticing her expression, Charon smiled with sheer happiness and said,

'It's all due to you, my love.' But Sarah shook her head.

'It's the setting,' she returned, then caught his smile. 'Charon, let's hurry, for I'm dying to see the inside of this enchanting house!'

'Some refreshments first, my darling.' He paused as if savouring his next words even before they left his lips. 'This is the first time you've eaten with

me willingly, my Sarah.' His voice seemed almost to fail and she knew he was too full to say anything further at the moment.

'Charon,' she murmured after a while, 'am I right in thinking that, on several occasions, you were on the verge of telling me you loved me?'

He looked swiftly at her.

'You knew?'

'No. All I sensed was a sort of indecision, as if you wanted to tell me something but couldn't make up your mind whether to do so or not.'

He nodded his head.

'You were right, my love. And how I wish, now, that I had told you of my love.'

She made no comment on this, unable to say whether or not she would have wanted to accept this at the time. But his admission made her feel guilty and she said softly,

'I'm sorry for hurting you, Charon.'

*'You're sorry! Beloved, it is I who must apologise !'*

These two apologies brought home to them the fact that there were still incidents to clear up between them—incidents which would be recalled, mentioned, and then explained. But for now, showered by the warmth of their love for each other, and the peace and beauty of their surroundings, they dismissed the past and, turning their minds to the future, they rose from the table and, hand in hand, stepped from the patio into the lovely blue and white villa that was their home.