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Harlequin Presents

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**ANNE
HAMPSON**

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STORMY THE WAY

Anne Hampson

"Wanted, good-looking young man to per-form simple task. Few hours only. Generous remuneration."

When Ricky had blandly jilted her in order to make a more advantageous marriage and had then had the nerve to invite her to the wedding, Tara Maine was determined, for pride's sake, to go, but equally determined not to be an object of pity. So she had advertised for a bogus "fiance" to accompany her to the wedding -- and in the devastatingly hand-some young Greek, Paul, found exactly what she was looking for.

It was only when Paul's stern older brother Leon Dorkas, domineering and with the worst possible opinion of Englishwomen and their morals, got mixed up in it all that Tara realised what deep waters she was getting into!

CHAPTER ONE

'WANTED, good-looking young man to perform simple task. Few hours only. Generous remuneration.' The wording of Tara Maine's advertisement came back to her as the doorbell rang. A look of acute disparity cast in her direction brought a militant light to her soft grey eyes and she spoke with unaccustomed sharpness.

'Will you answer it for me?' Turning, she regarded herself in the mirror over the mantelpiece. She was in the sitting-room of her brother's suburban house and for the past fifteen minutes she had been obliged to listen to Stewart's scathing homily on her childishness. But Tara was determined to attend the wedding of Ricky and Freda ... and she was also determined to have as her escort a handsome fiance. She would convince every one of them that she did not care, would fool Ricky into believing her love for him had gone no deeper than his so-called love for her. She would laugh and be gay as the rest, with this man who had answered her advertisement, confounding all those who had said pityingly,

'Poor Tara, to be jilted like that. And Ricky marrying her best friend - Tara must be feeling awful.'

Stewart made no move to comply with his sister's request, even though the bell was ringing for the second time.

'You can't do this,' he snapped, using the imperious tone reserved for those occasions when he wished to emphasize the five years' difference in their ages. Stewart was thirty, and married. Two years previously his father had been offered a post as adviser to a firm of sugar planters in the West Indies; he and his wife had left England only after receiving Tara's promise that she would move in with her brother and his wife. This she did immediately on her parents' departure^ and she had been perfectly happy ... until three months

ago. 'What about afterwards?' Stewart was inquiring. 'How will you account for the sudden disappearance of this new fiance of yours?'

'To my friends?' Absently she twisted a stray lock of dark hair; it fell in a half-curl on to the blue-veined whiteness of her temple. Her face, possessing an unusual beauty, was pale, and the hand idling against her side was clenched and damp. No one knew just how deep the wound had gone, for Tara had not loved lightly. Ricky had been her all, her life. But this hurt would be the last; from now on men were out as far as Tara was concerned. 'I shan't be called upon to explain.' Stewart frowned questioningly and would have spoken, but Tara went on, facing him squarely, 'I'm going away, to the north of England. No one will ever learn that this young man is not my real fiance.'

Stewart stared in disbelief.

'You're leaving us? You must be mad! Whom do you know up in the north?'

'No one - that's the whole idea. I'm not willing to remain here and be pitied; and in any case, if I'm to forget I must change both my surroundings and my friends.'

An impatient sigh escaped Stewart before he said,

'What about your promise to Mum and Dad? They'd never have gone abroad had they thought you'd leave Joan and me.'

'I'll write to them. They'll understand.'

'I won't allow you to go away!'

Her brows shot up at that, but she spoke gently and with patience. She and Stewart had always agreed. And Joan, to Tara's great delight, had proved to be the most affectionate of sisters-in-law.

'I'm twenty-five, Stewart, and perfectly capable of taking care of myself.'

'Your job,' he persisted, even though he knew he wasted his time. When Tara made plans nothing short of a catastrophe would prevent her from carrying them out. 'I saw Mr. Bairstowe a couple of weeks ago and he had nothing but praise for you - said you were the best secretary he's ever had. You can't leave him.'

Tara reflected on that tussle with her boss, but in the end he had been kind and understanding. There would always be a post for her should she ever decide to return, he had said in tones of resignation tinged with regret.

'I've already discussed my plans with Mr. Bairstowe. I've also applied for a post in Liverpool.'

He stared at her.

'And never a word to Joan and me! How could you, Tara?' His voice softened as he continued, 'Don't do this. I know you've been terribly hurt, but you can't allow the damned business to cause a complete upheaval in your life. You mustn't leave us, Tara. We love you, remember.'

Too full to respond, Tara fell to thinking of Richard and the heartlessness of his behaviour. His father owned a dress factory in the town; four months ago there had been a merger with another factory which was owned by Mr. Mayfield, father of Tara's best friend, Freda. Within days of the merger Tara guessed at the pressure being put on Ricky by his father, and less than a month later he broke the engagement. A fortnight ago Tara had actually received an invitation to the wedding of Freda and Ricky.

'The door,' she said at last, glancing at her brother 'He'll think I'm out.'

'You made an appointment; he'll know you're not out— There he goes again. Patience is not one of his virtues, apparently!'

She had to smile despite the weight clawing at her heart.

'He's been waiting ages. I'll let him in myself.' But as she moved Stewart barred her way.

'This stupid idea of yours—' he began, when she interrupted him.

'We've been through it all before, and I've explained. If I don't attend the wedding everyone will assume I'm broken-hearted; if I go alone they'll all stare at me with pity, wondering how I'm taking it. So I'll be there with my fiancé - if this young man's willing, that is. And I shall derive the greatest pleasure from ringing Freda up and asking for the extra invitation!'

'You're an idiot!'

Tara shrugged.

'May I pass you, please?'

Stewart glared at her.

'No! I'll let him in! I want to see what sort of a fool would reply to a damned silly advertisement like that!'

Listening, Tara heard him open the door, heard the curt invitation to the man to enter. A Greek. Aware that some Greeks could be devastatingly handsome, Tara had instantly picked out the letter signed 'Paul Dorkas'.

The young man was saying good afternoon imperfect English; a moment later he was in the room and Tara could only blink at him in disbelief. A handsome man she had expected, if only owing to the

wording of her advertisement, but this young Adonis fairly took her breath away. He stood before her, flushing and fidgeting nervously, although the height of him, the muscular leanness and firm classical features spelled great strength and poise as yet undeveloped. A few awkward moments of silence inevitably resulted from her surprise, and this was broken only when Stewart snapped,

'The man you were expecting!' and with that he stalked from the room, leaving Tara alone with her visitor.

Inviting him to sit down, she asked if he would care for a drink.

'Brandy - if you have it?'

He looked as if he needed it, she thought, and poured him a stiff dose. This she placed before him and he took up the glass. As he drank he became more composed and Tara was soon being treated to an all-embracing examination of her body.

'You're Greek,' she commented, looking curiously at his immaculate attire and expensive shoes. His hands, smooth and well-kept, had never been employed in any form of manual work. 'It wasn't difficult to deduce that from your name.'

'Dorkas?' He nodded. 'You like Greek men?' He was still rather unsure of himself and ignoring his question, Tara asked his age.

'Twenty,' he replied, flashing a row of even white teeth in a smile, and at the same time allowing his dark eyes to wander over every entrancing curve of her slender figure.

Twenty. .. He looked more, fortunately, but Tara said with a frown,

'I'd have preferred someone older.'

His face fell.

'You've had many replies? You have others to interview?'

'I'm not really interested in the others,' she admitted after another puzzled look at his clothes. 'You don't appear to be in need of money,' she couldn't help remarking, and his colour heightened again. 'Can I know the reason why you answered my advertisement?' He bit his lip and suddenly Tara wanted to spare him embarrassment. She asked if he were willing to become her fiancé for one afternoon and evening.

'Your fiancé?' He looked puzzled and Tara explained as briefly as she could. He appeared quite shocked, and Tara recalled that in his country an engagement was as binding as a marriage and in consequence a broken engagement was almost unheard of. When one did occur it brought dire disgrace to both families.

'I can't imagine anyone jilting you,' he said indignantly. 'You're so beautiful, and have the enormous eyes that I like to see in a girl. You also have hair of beautiful brown...He reached out to touch her hair, a natural gesture, as Greeks like touching people. 'It has lights of fire in it!' He smiled and appeared proud of his description, but Tara was not interested. 'No, I can't believe he would jilt you,' added Paul Dorkas, his eyes and voice filled with admiration.

'Nevertheless, he did jilt me,' she returned bitterly. 'Are you willing to do as I ask?'

He moved in his chair and she sensed the question even before it rose to his lips.

'How much are you paying?'

'Ten pounds,' she ventured, naturally having no idea as to what she must pay. 'Is that sufficient?'

A deep sigh and then, flatly,

'It will suffice. Yes, I suppose it's ample for what I shall be doing.'

Tara's puzzlement grew, for it was abundantly plain that this young man came from a cultured - and probably wealthy - family. And yet he was short of money,

'Are you in England on holiday?'

He shook his head.

'I'm at a university.'

'How can you be in need of ten pounds?' The question escaped before Tara could check it and this time the boy became more expansive.

'My allowance went ages ago; I'm absolutely broke, but I daren't ask my brother for more. I did try once—' He broke off, grimacing. 'Never again, though!'

'You've no money of your own?'

'It is my money, but Leon has control of it.' Paul became sulky all at once and Tara could not help feeling sorry for him.

'Your brother holds the purse?' For no reason at all she fell to wondering about this Leon, and whether he were as handsome as his brother. 'How old is he?'

'Thirty-four.'

'Fourteen years older than you? That's a big difference in age.'

'He's my stepbrother. Leon's father died when he was seven. My father thought there was no one like Leon and that's why he left him in charge of our money.' Tara sent him an inquiring glance and he went on to say he had a sister, Androula, aged twenty- two, who

was at Athens University. She's in his good books, of course, not only because she takes her studies so seriously but also because she never does anything to cross him.' Paul smiled wanly at Tara and continued, 'On the other hand have been a great trial to Leon - I sometimes get into scrapes, you see - and so he's very strict. But I've recently decided I must be circumspect and cautious, because without Leon's approval I can't have my inheritance when I'm twenty-one. I might have to wait until I'm twenty-five if he says so.'

'This stepbrother can prevent your coming into your inheritance?' That seemed grossly unfair, she thought, deciding that Leon was not only stingy, but also something of a dictator.

'Indeed he can,' came the grim rejoinder. 'That's why I've decided to be cautious, just for the next four months - until I'm twenty-one.' He would reach that age in September, he went on to inform Tara in case she had not bothered to reckon up. 'My father left a vast fortune between Androula and me, and I can never see why Leon is so mean with my allowance. It's my own money, as I've said.' He frowned and drained his glass. 'I mustn't take a single step out of line between now and September,' he mumbled to himself, 'for I couldn't bear to continue this life of near-poverty for the next four years.'

'Your sister - does she receive a small allowance too?'

Paul looked down into his empty glass and Tara had the impression that he was deliberately avoiding her eyes.

'She seems to manage, but - yes, I expect she receives a pittance as well.'

'And she could have to wait, like you, for her inheritance?'

'She doesn't get it in any case until she's twenty-five, and Leon could withhold it until she's thirty.'

'Thirty!'

'That's right - if she should do something seriously wrong, that is. But Leon won't withhold it because he thinks she's just perfect; she can do no wrong in his eyes. It's a good thing he doesn't know—' Breaking off in consternation, Paul instantly recovered, saying, 'How silly I am! You'll never meet my brother and sister, so it doesn't matter if you know our secrets. You see, Androula has a boy-friend. He's English and he's poor - two circumstances that would instantly turn Leon against him.' Paul gave a short laugh. 'Androula's not nearly so meek and obedient as he believes her to be, but she's clever, and she'll keep up the pretence until she's safely in possession of her money.'

Tara mused on what had been said. By rights she should have felt no interest whatsoever, and yet the position intrigued her. What an antiquated set-up where two educated young people were so dependent on the whim of one man who, from what Tara could gather, was thoroughly autocratic in his attitude towards his stepbrother and sister of his.

'Your brother doesn't like the English?' He was not averse to sending his brother to an English university, though.

'Leon has two cousins who married English girls; both marriages failed - the girls were unfaithful, and they were extravagant. Leon thinks a lot of these two cousins, he and they having always been great friends together, and he was terribly cut-up by the failure of the marriages. Besides, we don't often have divorces, as you probably know, and when these two marriages failed we had two divorces practically together. It was a dreadful disgrace for our family.'

'So your brother considers all English girls to be unfaithful?'

'I'm afraid so - well, let us say he hasn't much of an opinion of their morals. Also, he considers them to be gold-diggers, because there

was no doubt that both of these girls were out to get their hands on his cousins' money.'

'These two cousins were just unfortunate,' said Tara indignantly. 'All English girls can't be branded just because of this.'

The young man shrugged.

That may be, but Leon has very fixed opinions about things - and about people. This boy-friend of Androula's, for instance - Leon would send him off immediately, not only because he's English, but perhaps more so because he's poor.'

'So, in your brother's opinion, our men too are merely after money when they marry?'

Paul was beginning to feel uncomfortable and Tara was sorry she had carried the subject so far. But she did feel furious at the attitude of this unknown brother of his.

'Androula's a very rich heiress,' was all the reply Paul gave, and Tara allowed the matter to drop. Having satisfied her curiosity as to the reason for his answering the advertisement she felt she should have no interest either in Paul Dorkas or his family. She got down to business, informing him that the wedding was to take place a week the following Wednesday — which was-in nine days' time - and that it would be celebrated at the Swan Hotel at Brantingham.

'Will you be able to get away?' she asked anxiously.

'Yes, I'll arrange it all right.' He paused; Tara saw the flush appear in his cheeks and waited perceptively for what was to come. 'You - you couldn't let me have the money now - in advance?'

'I could, but I might never set eyes on you again.'

'I promise to keep my word. I'd never let you down, believe me.'

She looked straight at him, quite unable to envisage his being so desperately short of money, and yet he was in need, otherwise he would not be here. What would his brother think, she wondered, were he to know that Paul was practically begging for the paltry sum of ten pounds?

Deciding to trust the boy, Tara made him out a cheque, convinced he would not let her down.

'Thank you very much.' Paul took Tara's hand in a firm grip as they both stood on the doorstep. 'I'll go with you to this wedding and we'll laugh and dance, and everyone will think we're in love !' He smiled at her and then, 'Is Brantingham a big town?'

'Fairly.'

'Androula has a friend who comes from there.'

'She does?'

'Yes, they met when Androula came over here for a year to finish learning the language. This girl's going to Athens soon for a holiday and my sister's spending two weeks of her holiday showing her round. After that Androula will go home to our brother. He lives on an island.' Taking the steps three at one leap, he turned. '*Adio!*'

'*Adio,*' she responded, and he laughed. He said, forgetting his recent assertion that Tara would never meet this family, 'Some day you will come to our island, and we will make you very welcome.'

Tara looked down at him - the handsomest man she had ever seen. How triumphant she would feel at the wedding! Yet it would all be an act of bravado, calculated to serve as balm to her pride. She would actually suffer agonies, witnessing that profound ceremony in which

Freda and Ricky would play the chief roles. Ricky wasn't worth a single thought, Stewart had several times declared, but although Tara admitted the truth of this she could not cease to care at will.

'What is your island?' she called out as Paul proceeded to stride along the path towards the gate. He turned and his eyes glowed. To every Greek his particular island was the most beautiful of them all.

'Poros!'

'I've heard of it.'

'Only heard! But you should see it. Next time you go to Athens you must take a trip on the boat. You've been to Athens?' And when Tara shook her head he looked pained. 'Everyone should visit Athens. The most beautiful city in the world!'

'Perhaps one day I will manage to visit it—' Paul, fired with enthusiasm, was coming back, but she waved him away again. 'Adio,' she called, and a moment later he was gone.

As Tara had predicted, the wedding was a triumph for her with Paul the object of many admiring stares, and herself regarded with unconcealed envy. Ricky was tight-lipped as Tara introduced her 'fiance' to him, and she did wonder if Ricky and Freda were in love, or whether, as Stewart maintained, the marriage was merely a business arrangement. Philip, from the *Brantingham Observer*, cornered Paul in Tara's absence and when at the week-end the newspaper appeared Tara read, right at the end of the report of the wedding,

'Included in the list of guests was Miss Tara Maine with her fiance, Mr. Paul Dorkas, a wealthy landowner from Greece. When interviewed, Mr. Dorkas, at present studying law here in England,

said that he and his bride would eventually make their home on the beautiful island of Poros. Lucky Tara!'

'Such rubbish!' declared Stewart on reading the report. 'What did you let him be interviewed for? ~ Never have I known you act in so immature a way. How you could attend that wedding, and put on such a pretence, has me utterly beaten!'

Flushed, and herself angry that her name should have been mentioned, Tara said nothing. Had she had the least inkling of Phil's intention she would have made sure he did not manage to get Paul alone. However, as the report was quite harmless she soon put it from her. In any case her time and mind were fully occupied. On the tenth of next month she was leaving her present fob. She had three weeks' vacation due to her and this she intended using profitably in setting herself up in a flat and becoming familiar with her new surroundings. She had to attend for interview in Liverpool and should she be successful in obtaining the post for which she had applied, so much to the good, but even if she failed she would not be too disappointed. There were plenty of posts available and with the testimonial given her by Mr. Bairstowe she knew there would be no difficulty in finding one. Meanwhile, she was spending her time and money in picking up pieces of furniture for the home she intended setting up for herself in the north, and these were at present accumulating in her bedroom at her brother's house. Joan, who had naturally been surprised at Tara's decision to live so far away, proved in the end to be more understanding than her husband - perhaps because she was a woman, and knew just how Tara was feeling.

Three days before she was due to leave her job Tara came in from work to be informed by Joan, who was just emerging from the kitchen with a tea-tray, that there had been a telephone call for her.

'Your young Greek. He wants to see you urgently.'

'Urgently?' Tara frowned as she took off her coat and hung it in the hall. 'Did he say what it was about?'

'Wouldn't say a word, but he seemed rather perturbed about something - or so it appeared from the tone of his voice. I told him you'd be in this evening and he said he'd call about eight o'clock.'

Still frowning, Tara followed her sister-in-law into the sitting-room and sat down by the fire.

'Thanks, Joan,' she said a moment later on being handed a cup of tea. What could the boy want? More money, probably. Would she give it to him? He had certainly played his part to her complete satisfaction so perhaps she would let him have a further five pounds - but that was her limit.

However, it was not money that Paul asked for - but Tara's help in a totally different way. Without preamble he poured forth his story, telling Tara how the newspaper report, read by Androula's friend, had been taken to Athens and passed on to Androula who, naturally believing all she read, and feeling excited at the idea of her brother being engaged, had promptly posted off the cutting to Leon in Poros. Leon's letter to Paul had arrived that very morning.

'He wants to see you,' continued Paul in troubled tones. 'Here, read the letter for yourself.'

'He wants to see me? I thought you said he doesn't like English people.'

'That isn't important,' returned Paul with the impatience born of anxiety. 'If I'm engaged then I'm engaged. Though I don't know why Androula should have sent on that cutting, knowing full well that Leon would be far from pleased that I was engaged at all.'

'You mean, he himself would pick a wife for you?'

'Oh, no, he wouldn't go that far. It's just that he'd expect me to finish my studies before getting down to marriage.'

'Well, as you're not engaged I can't see what all the fuss is about.' Taking the letter from Paul's hand Tara sat down on the couch and unfolded the single sheet of paper. An icy inflection ran through the words, which were brief in the extreme. After explaining how the news of the engagement had reached him Leon went on to say that he desired to see Paul's fiancée as soon as possible. As Paul's vacation would naturally be spent at home, there was no reason why his fiancée should not accompany him to the island and have a holiday there. This would enable her to meet her future in-laws. That was all, except for the abrupt ending, 'I shall expect you both within the next fortnight.'

Placing the letter on her knee Tara made a fuller examination of the imperious sweep of the handwriting. And then she went through the contents of the letter again. A thoroughly pompous and autocratic type, without a doubt. Did he think this supposed fiancée could leave her work and home at such short notice merely to satisfy his demands? For a brief moment her blood boiled, but then a rueful smile broke as she became fully aware of the drift of her thoughts.

'You'll have to enlighten me,' she said, puzzled. 'Obviously you're not expecting me to accompany you to Poros?'

Paul leant forward in his chair.

'I should be eternally grateful if you would.' Tara could only stare uncomprehendingly and he went on, a sudden droop to his mouth, 'I've been in enough scrapes lately and a broken engagement on top of it all will just about finish my chances of getting my money. It would be such a disgrace to the family.'

Tara's face was now impassive.

'It isn't a broken engagement. You've never been engaged.'

'I can't tell Leon that.'

'I'm afraid you'll have to.'

He became sunk in dejection.

'You wouldn't consider coming over with me? - just for a couple of weeks?'

'What good would that do?'

'Once Leon saw you he'd approve of my choice - yes, he would, even though you are English. He considers me empty-headed and immature - too immature to handle my money. You're level-headed and sensible and Leon will soon see this.'

She had to smile on recalling the disparaging comments made by her brother. He certainly did not consider her level-headed and sensible - quite the opposite, in fact.

'He doesn't like English girls,' Tara reminded Paul again, but he merely shook his head.

'I feel that if he saw you he'd admit . I'd shown wisdom and maturity in my choice.' He paused to note the effect of this, but Tara's face remained expressionless. 'If you'll come with me, as Leon suggests, it will swing the balance in my favour and he won't withhold my inheritance. If you won't come, and I'm forced to tell him that the engagement was all a pretence, then I'm lost - utterly. The third course is to say the engagement has been broken, but here again I'll be in his bad books.' Paul stopped again, but as she did not speak he added beseechingly, 'Do this for me, Tara. You mentioned you had three weeks' holiday to come, and you'd love it in Poros.'

'My three weeks is spoken for. Besides, what will happen later? You'll have to tell him the truth some time.'

'Yes, but not until I've got my inheritance in September. If you come with me now, then we can correspond - just for his benefit - until I go back to university. A couple of weeks later I'm twenty-one and Leon, believing I've a sensible fiancée like you, will readily drop the reins and give me my freedom.'

'I can't pretend to be your fiancée,' she said with slight impatience. 'I'd like to help you, but it's not in my power to do so.'

'It is in your power. As I've said, you'll influence my brother because anyone can see you're genuine—'

'Thanks, but cut out the flattery, Paul. I'm still thinking of what you said about your brother's having an aversion to the English.'

'I did say that, but it doesn't mean that he would dislike my marrying an English girl.'

'I can't see him receiving one with open arms.' Paul bit his lip; it was clear that he now regretted his words about Leon's not liking the English.

'Please come,' he begged. 'Leon won't expect you to stay for more than a fortnight or so, for he'll realize you can't leave your work for any longer than that. As I've said, we'll correspond, then when I get my money you and I can say good-bye.'

She eyed him curiously.

'How will you explain my disappearance?'

'I'll say you broke the engagement,' He shrugged. 'It won't matter then if he is mad. I'll be out of his power.'

Tara remained silent. What was she thinking about to be considering such a deception? She could not possibly go to Poros, much as she would have liked to help the boy, deploring his brother's pinch-fisted control of the money. No, she could not go to Poros....

'Would you like something to drink?' she asked, and to her surprise Paul said he would like a cup of coffee.

'I'll make it and bring it in,' offered Joan when Tara went into the kitchen where Joan was making potato cakes for supper. 'By the way, there's a letter for you in the hall. You missed it when you came in. It's on the table.'

'Thanks, I'll get it.'

The letter was postmarked Liverpool and contained the brief information that the post had been filled.

Never mind, there were other posts, she thought as she returned to the sitting-room, the letter still in her hand. She put it on the sideboard and stared at it for a moment. She was leaving her present job, and she had no other to go to. She was free; it was an odd feeling - like being in a vacuum. Free. She could do whatever she cared to do ... while her savings lasted, that was.

Paul began his persuasions again as she sat down, and gradually the idea of going to Greece became attractive. Just her fare to find, plus some spending money.

'You'll come!' exclaimed Paul, suddenly reading her expression. 'You're really giving the matter some thought?'

'I don't know, Paul,' she replied cagily. 'It's not a decision I can make without thinking more carefully about it.' Looming large on her horizon was the awareness that what Paul contemplated was grossly dishonest, even though this Leon deserved to be thwarted. Obviously

he was dictatorial and overbearing, and in Tara's opinion he had no right even to contemplate holding back his brother's inheritance. It had merely been a whim on the part of the boy's father that had put Leon in control of his money, and as Tara thought about this she found her conscience troubling her less and less. Dishonest it might be to go to Greece as Paul's fiancée, but Leon obviously deserved all he got.

'You won't give me your answer now?' Paul spoke persuasively, but Tara shook her head.

'I must consider it first.'

'If I have to tell Leon the truth it will be awful. For one thing, he's so proud, and would be furious if he discovered I'd done what I did for the sake of a mere ten pounds.'

'I've thought of that,' she admitted, then added, 'You wouldn't necessarily have to mention the money, though.'

'I suppose not, but Leon is so staid - he'd consider me more immature than ever for taking part in - in ..His voice trailed away and he flushed at his lack of tact. Tara also coloured, once again recalling her brother's scathing comments on her own immaturity, 'Please come,' urged Paul again. 'I don't think I could tell my brother the truth.'

Tara remained firm despite his entreating manner.

'As I've said, I'll consider the matter carefully.'

'And give me your decision soon? Leon is expecting us within the next fortnight.'

'I'll give you my decision tomorrow.'

CHAPTER TWO

LEAVING mist behind in England, Tara entered a world of sunshine when the plane touched down at Athens airport. After lunch taken in an hotel she and Paul took a taxi to Piraeus and then the boat to Poros, passing many rocky islands on the way. The small ship sailed through a narrow strait into the circular Bay of Poros where the sea was smooth as a lake and pine forests and olive trees and lovely citrus groves rose up the sides of the mountains. White cubic houses occupied the lower slopes, while all along the waterfront small craft were moored. Across the strait - and appearing so close that it would seem possible to throw a stone on to it — was the pretty village of Galata with hotels and shops spread along its front. Small boats plied continuously between the harbour at Poros and that of Galata on the mainland.

On disembarking Tara and Paul were met by Androula, brown-haired and grey-eyed and not nearly as dark as Tara had expected her to be. Speaking excellent English, she welcomed Tara to the island and then said,

'I've been so excited about my aster. I never expected to have one so soon!' and only then did Tara experience her first tinge of uneasiness.

Androula drove away from the harbour, into the lush green hills, and there on a wide terrace stood the modern villa, built partly on stilts so that it commanded a panoramic view across the limpid landlocked waters of the bay to the coast of the Argolid.

The car came to a standstill at the front of the house; a manservant was there ready to take the luggage.

Tea was served on the patio, and the two girls got to know each other. Androula was thoroughly modern both in dress and manner. She

possessed strength of character, too, Tara soon discovered. There would be no arranged marriage for her.

'I wish Leon, would come,' said Androula, glancing at her watch. 'He was rather upset at having to go out, when you were expected, but he said he would be back by five o'clock, and it's that time now.'

'Where has he gone?' asked Paul without very much interest.

'Across to Troezen. He had to meet someone there.'

Paul was looking at Tara; she wore an air of confidence, but she was inwardly aware of a small access of trepidation at the idea of meeting this brother of Paul's ... and yet what had she to fear? She was here to act a part, just for a couple of weeks, and after that she would never set eyes on any of these people again. Most certainly she would never cross Leon's path again.

When, an hour later, Leon had still not appeared, they all went into the house and Paul left the two girls in the lounge, saying he was going to his room to write letters.

'Tell me all about yourself?' Androula smilingly invited, crossing her elegant legs as she leant back on the couch. Tara had been glancing around, faintly surprised that she saw no sign of such things as ikons and statues of the saints. What she did see gave evidence of an enlightened westernized existence - the gold-covered chairs designed for comfort, the inlaid tables and the cabinets filled with rare china and jade. One cabinet was completely given over to a splendid array of Georgian silver.

'There isn't much to tell,' returned Tara in answer to Androula's eager question. 'As Paul told you, our engagement came swiftly upon our getting to know one another.' She stopped, frowning inwardly, her eyes on the ring she wore - Joan's engagement ring, lent to Tara without Stewart's knowledge. This was all wrong; Tara hated to

deceive this lovely girl, and although she freely owned that Paul needed her help she was beginning to be stirred by conscience trouble.

'But you yourself,' persisted Androula, her eyes eager and smiling. 'You have relatives?'

'My parents are in the West Indies.' Tara went on obligingly to offer a few brief facts about herself and her family, naturally omitting anything about her projected move to the north of England.

'I would have liked to come and see you in England,' smiled Androula, twisting a soft strand of hair between her fingers, 'but I have no long holiday until next summer and by that time you'll be married to Paul. Oh, I am so glad you're what I wanted,' she exclaimed impulsively. 'It is a little frightening, you know, when you realize you're to have a sister-in-law. I used to have visions of someone I couldn't like - and indeed I am sure that I shall never like anyone who marries Leon, because she is sure to be like him—' She broke off, her lips forming a silent 'Ooh!' but then she shrugged and went on to confide, 'It doesn't matter if you know, because you are to be one of the family anyway, but Leon is cold, Tara, and somehow so very aloof and superior, that I'm sure he will choose a wife who is equally forbidding.' Naturally Tara made no comment on this piece of deduction; she was still troubled by her conscience, since every word said by Androula seemed to act as a prick. Already Tara knew she was going to feel mean and guilty, and thoroughly ashamed of herself, when eventually this trusting girl learned of the broken engagement. Not that Androula would ever be in receipt of the knowledge that the engagement had been a sham anyway, but this went no way at all to assuaging Tara's conscience. Androula began to speak again and then stopped, as, glancing through the open window, she saw Leon appear. Tara twisted round, saw the gleaming white Mercedes coming quietly along the path before sliding to a halt at the side of the house.

'Your stepbrother. ..Tara spoke automatically, her fascinated gaze fixed on the man who was now striding majestically across the wide green lawn. Incredibly tall for a Greek, and slim to the point of angularity, he wore such an air of confidence that he might have been descended from the mighty Zeus himself! Dark-skinned like his brother, he even exceeded him in looks and grace of movement, the natural result of maturity. With easy agile steps he mounted the patio and entered the room, his eyes on Tara, expressionless eyes dark as coal, and set in a face which was now an inscrutable mask.

His hand was extended as Androula made the introductions.

'I trust you had a good flight,' he said after the preliminaries were over. Tara nodded, automatically rubbing her fingers soothingly, for his grip had hurt.

'Yes, thank you.' All Greeks extended a welcome to strangers and Leon's omission was not only noticeable, but also unpromising.

'I had hoped to meet you myself, but pressure of business prevented it. I apologize.'

So formal. Did the man ever unbend? wondered Tara, noting the rigid jaw lines and stern set mouth.

'It was all right,' put in Androula brightly, 'I was there on time.'

His eyes slid towards her, sweeping her elegant legs; Tara knew instinctively that he would have his sister clad in long black clothes if he had his way. But the girl was in a pretty mini-skirt, her legs crossed to reveal shapely thighs.

'A miracle,' he murmured at length in a dry tone which did no more than bring a tinkling laugh from Androula. She had referred to her brother as formidable, but it was plain that she was a long way from

going in awe of him. She was in his good books, though. Not like poor Paul, who went in fear of his inheritance being delayed.

'Don't give my new sister the wrong impression, Leon. I am not nearly so scatterbrained as you would have people believe!' She smiled enticingly at him, but no responding smile softened that inflexible mouth.

'That,' he said, 'is something Tara will determine for herself - when she gets to know you better.' He sat down, hitching a white trouser leg, and leant back languidly, his eyes once again fixed on Tara's face. It was ridiculous, but already she sensed his dislike of her. Impatiently she tried to shake off the idea, telling herself that it was of no consequence anyway, and yet she reluctantly admitted the fact of his disapproval was not what she could ignore. She frowned inwardly. How could he dislike her on so short an acquaintanceship? She must be imagining it, she told herself sternly. 'I'd like to have a few minutes alone with Tara,' he said at length, glancing at Androula. 'Will you leave us?'

She rose at once.

'Of course,' obligingly. 'I'll go and see what Paul is doing. He went upstairs to write some letters.'

Leon watched the door close behind her, then turned his attention to his companion. His gaze was searching; her figure had been ignored and Tara soon realized it was her mind in which his interest lay, not her body, as is the case with the great majority of Greek men. She managed somehow to present a frank expression, but the rising colour in her cheeks was quite beyond her control. He was altogether too disconcerting, this lean bronzed Greek with the superlative classical features and the piercing black eyes. It would be no easy matter to deceive him, and unless she wanted to ruin Paul's chances at the outset she must be very much on her guard. Added to the suspicion

that he had disliked her on sight was the instinctively- formed idea that he did not trust her. Yes, she must tread with extreme caution in her dealings with Leon - whose surname, by a coincidence, was also Dorkas - as otherwise she was going to find herself letting Paul down.

'There's no need for me to say that his engagement came as a complete surprise to me,' he commented, leaning further back in his chair. 'How long have you known my brother?'

'Only a few weeks,' she replied, relieved that at least one truth could be told. % 'A few weeks, eh? Where did you meet?'

Paul had told her that Leon had been informed that they had met at a party, and as Tara repeated this she lowered her head, it being her first attempt at deceit. She felt embarrassed but not guilty, for deception was the only method of breaking this man's arbitrary control over his brother's money. Leon's stare seemed to pierce her, but she kept her eyes downcast. It never occurred to her that this avoidance of his gaze might prejudice him against her.

'I see,' thoughtfully and, with slow deliberation. 'You are not contemplating marriage yet?'

'Not - not until Paul finishes his studies.'

'How old are you?' he asked, and something in his tone indicated a slight hesitation over this question. She felt sure it was one he meant to ask sooner, but had perhaps thought it rather delicate.

'Twenty-five,' she answered, glancing up to see what effect this had upon him. His eyes were narrowed to mere slits.

'Five years older than Paul. Don't you mind this difference in age?'

She flushed.

'I don't consider it all that important,' she returned defensively.

'A man at twenty is a good deal younger than a woman of the same age,' he remarked suavely. 'In comparison to a woman of twenty-five he's a mere child.'

Her indignant eyes flew to his. What was he insinuating? It would appear that already he was branding her a gold-digger, but after a swift flare of anger she knew an almost irrepressible desire to laugh, the idea of Leon's anxiety being the stimulant. She managed to maintain her cool exterior, however, but she did wonder if her amusement showed in her eyes. It really was funny - his being troubled about something that would never materialize - but it would do him good, she decided. Let him worry!'I don't think I understand you, Mr. - Mr.— She broke off, raising a questioning eyebrow and expecting him to tell her to call him Leon. Instead he himself raised his brow and said smoothly,

'I'm quite sure you do understand me. I have spoken perfectly plainly, I believe.'

Her colour deepened. He was far too overwhelming - with his air of superiority and hauteur. Anger rose, to remain this time. But it was the anger born of her own inability to spar successfully with this pompous brother of the boy she had promised to assist.

'Are you suggesting I'm too old for Paul?' she queried at last, feigning a rather injured mien.

Leon threw her a measured glance.

'Aren't you?' he said gently.

Tara stiffened, and lifted her chin. What an inordinate amount of satisfaction she would have derived from allowing herself a free flow of speech! It would be good to watch that arrogant face while she told

its owner just what she thought about him! But she had to take care, much to her disgust, since if his man decided she was not a suitable wife for his brother then undoubtedly all that Paul was scheming for would be lost. The inheritance would be withheld for another five years.

'I hadn't given it much thought,' she returned, thankful for her ability to swallow the tight little ball of anger which had for one dangerous moment threatened to affect her reply to Leon's softly-spoken question. 'Age makes no difference when you're in love.' Was that convincing? Tara sincerely hoped it was. This man required careful handling, though. The opinion that all Englishwomen were gold-diggers was well rooted, owing to the fate suffered by the two cousins of whom Androula had spoken.

For one fleeting moment a half-smile of amused contempt touched the firm outline of his mouth.

'Love?' he murmured with gentle satire. 'You're in love?'

Her teeth gritted together. How could she hope to keep her temper?

'Why else would I get engaged to Paul?'

'A good question,' he returned promptly, and she instantly realized her mistake. 'Why did you become engaged to Paul, Tara?'

Her colour mounted more vividly than ever.

'I've just said we're in love,' she reminded him in constricted tones. 'I trust I've answered the question to your satisfaction?' The content of her words, and the tone of their delivery, were lacking any measure of diplomacy, but by now Tara was almost at the end of her patience. If only Paul would come, but Androula would have informed him that his brother wished to be alone with Tara, so there was nothing to be gained by hoping for a speedy rescue.

'You are aware that Paul is a very wealthy young man?' Leon spoke after a short silence, watching her through half-closed eyes.

'I believe he will be wealthy one day,' she admitted stiffly. 'I assure you I'm not marrying him for his money,' she added in a voice decidedly tart.

'He has told you about his wealth, then?' Easing himself further back in his chair, Leon crossed one leg over the other, languidly. He had deliberately ignored her added comment and this caused her blood to boil, for she had expected him to deny harbouring any such suspicion that she was marrying Paul for his money. Such a response was incumbent on him, if only for the sake of courtesy. Yet he had allowed it to slide without comment, and this was surely tantamount to implying that he did in fact believe she was interested only in his brother's wealth. And for one wild uncontrolled second she opened her mouth to blurt out the truth - to tell him she was not engaged to Paul, and never would be, but by a tremendous effort she managed to control the impulse. Paul's chances would be ruined altogether if Leon was put in possession of the knowledge of his brother's duplicity. And as for herself - Tara actually shuddered inwardly at the vision of Leon's wrath being directed at her, which inevitably it must be were he to learn that she had lent herself to such a scheme. No, there could be no going back now, she decided rather dismally, already wishing with all her heart that she had given the matter more thought before embarking on this deception with such blithe unconcern.

'Paul mentioned that he was soon to inherit a large fortune.' Tara managed to look into her companion's eyes as she made this reply to his query. She saw his brows lift a fraction, noted the faint flicker at the corner of one eye.

'Soon?' he mildly repeated.

Another mistake. She chided herself for this.

'He said he hoped to come into his inheritance when he is twenty-one.'

'Hopes don't always materialize,' he observed coolly. 'I have full control of his money and, should I decide he is not sufficiently mature to care for that money, then I shall have no hesitation in withholding it for another five years. Did Paul tell you this?'

She nodded, drawing a deep breath. If only she had known she was to be put through an ordeal such as this!

'Yes, he did tell me.' Paul, she remembered, had been confident that his brother would approve of Tara simply because *she* was mature, and level-headed into the bargain. Well, this maturity appeared to have had little or no effect on Leon - or if it had, then it was without doubt an adverse effect.

'You don't mind being poor for five years?' he queried after a moment.

Owing to her impatience Tara frowned heavily - a most unthinking gesture and one she instantly regretted on noting the swift perceptive widening of those black eyes.

'We're not thinking of marrying until Paul finishes his studies,' she reminded him, 'and that will not be for another two years.'

'I see. Well, perhaps I shall release Paul's money on his marriage,' he informed her quietly, eyes alert and glinting at the sudden start she gave.

'Not until then!' She stared, aghast at making yet a third mistake. 'It won't matter,' she added speciously, and far too casually for her deception to work. 'We shan't need money until we're married.'

'Of course you won't,' with gentle satire. 'Paul has his allowance, which in my opinion is more than adequate, and you will naturally carry on working.'

More than adequate! Tara fumed inwardly at this deliberate lie. The boy was practically a pauper. She wondered what Leon would say were he to be told that Paul had been so short of money that he had been driven to answering her advertisement. That would be a crushing blow to his pride, she thought, wishing fervently that she had been in a position to deliver that blow. The man needed a good set-down. He deserved to be thoroughly humiliated. These musings did no good, though, and Tara dwelt on what Leon had said about withholding the inheritance until Paul's marriage. If Leon should really decide to do this then the whole scheme had fallen flat already. What a hateful creature he was! Suddenly Tara was determined to outwit him. She would put on an act so clever that, smart as he considered himself, he would never see through it.

And she began immediately, for at that moment Paul entered the room, after knocking quietly and waiting for his brother's permission to come in. Tara's eyes lit up. She had been in love, so she knew how a girl felt on beholding her loved one. Her mouth quivered with a halting smile, which broke as Paul came closer.

'You've been away a long time,' she said in soft adoring tones. 'But your brother and I have been having a pleasant talk.'

At this remark Leon naturally glanced at her with suspicion, but she had no time for him now that Paul was here. He sat down and her loving eyes remained on his face.

He glanced anxiously at his brother.

'You've made friends with each other?' he said hesitantly, examining Leon's dark features. Leon's gaze was fixed on Tara; she was conscious of this, but had eyes only for Paul.

'We've become acquainted,' replied Leon casually. 'One doesn't make a friend in ten minutes.'

'No...' Paul darted an apologetic glance at Tara, who in turn glanced at Leon. He was merely amused by his brother's discomfiture. 'You've got on all right, though?' added Paul after a second or two.

'Certainly we have,' Tara answered for his brother, who looked across at her, his face an expressionless mask, 'I'm very happy with my relations-to-be, Paul, so please, darling, don't look so troubled.' She turned, smiling, to Leon. 'Paul was terribly anxious that you wouldn't like me, because I'm English. But I told him not to worry; I have every intention of adapting myself to the life I shall have to live when I come to Greece.' At that a faint curve of Leon's mouth and then, 'You are aware, I hope, that ours is a strictly patriarchal social system. Our attitude towards women is far different from the ideas current in the West. Women of the East possess the inherent trait of obedience towards their husbands - or fathers, whichever might apply.'

Tara said nothing. She was tight and seething inside. What an outmoded way of life! Inherent trait of obedience ! She could see, without a trace of difficulty, this arrogant Greek lording it over whoever he chose to marry, treating her as a slave, a chattel, a possession whose importance in his life was little more than any one of his servants. If ever a man needed a lesson it was he! And she was more determined than ever to help Paul get his inheritance - and what a thrill of satisfaction she would enjoy when the engagement was broken and once more Leon suffered the sting of disgrace. He would certainly hate all Englishwomen then, but little she would care!

Sending him a glance from under fluttering lashes, she said meekly,

'I do realize these things. And, loving Paul as I do, I shall adhere to any conditions imposed upon me.' A timid smile broke. 'I shall always obey Paul - although I don't think he'll domineer over me too much, will you, darling?'

'Most certainly not!' He looked indignantly at his brother. 'You might treat a woman like that, Leon, but I never shall! You'll have Tara throwing me over if you say things like that!'

Excellent acting, applauded Tara silently.

'Oh, no,' she denied swiftly. 'I could never throw you over, Paul. Why, I think I'd die if ever we parted!'

A rather strange hush fell on the room. Leon slanted Tara a glance and the warm blood rushed to her cheeks in spite of her determination to put on a calm and confident front.

'You must forgive me, Tara, for questioning you as I have,' he said apologetically at length. 'I have to protect my brother, whose money has been entrusted to my care. I see now that you love him deeply, and I feel that he has made an excellent choice.'

Another silence. Stunned for a moment, Tara then became exultant. How easy, after all! Of course, it was her excellent acting which had done the trick. She would continue to act, and deceive this disagreeable specimen of Greek masculinity who considered women as inferior beings whose lot it was to be mastered. A few minutes ago she was wishing herself back in England, and free of the complications entailed by Paul's scheme; now, she was anticipating a good measure of enjoyment from bamboozling the man who had caused her such discomfiture. He was watching her and she met his dark glance with suitable submissiveness in her own wide gaze.

'Thank you for being so kind,' she murmured. 'I was so very frightened that you wouldn't approve of me.'

Slender brown hands were spread. Leon said pleasantly,

'I must approve of a girl so obviously devoted to my brother as you are. I hope you will be very happy together.'

'Thank you,' she said again, and smiled charmingly at him.

CHAPTER THREE

'TARA, you were simply marvellous! I'm sure Leon will raise no objection to my having my money. It was incredible - the way you acted! I'm ever so grateful to you!'

They were strolling in the garden, having left Leon a moment ago as he said he had to work in his study for an hour or so before dinner.

'I'm glad you're satisfied,' she returned, her attention more with her surroundings than her companion. The flowers were fantastic; she had never seen so many blooming all at once. And the perfume assailing her nostrils - it was heady and exotic, filling the air with sense-stirring delights. For a fleeting moment her thoughts strayed and she was with Ricky, walking here, in this lovely Eastern garden, on an enchanted island floating like a gem on the calm blue waters of the Saronic Gulf. Romance ... That was what it all spelt. To be in love, in a setting like this. . . It would be sheer heaven, every single moment of it. Ricky. She closed her eyes tightly, and shook her head in an angry gesture. She would *not* think of him, would not torture herself with visions of him with Freda, walking and talking; kissing and petting . . . making love— No! She would not allow him to intrude into her thoughts!

'You're miles away.' Paul's voice cut in, and she mentally thanked him for the diversion. 'What are you thinking, Tara?'

'it was nothing of importance, Paul. This garden, it's absolutely delightful! What are all these flowers.

Name them for me.'

'These are oleanders; they smell nice, yes?'

'Delightful. And these?'

'Bougainvillaeas. They climb, as you see over there. Everybody grows them up pillars of the verandahs, because they look so petty. There they are again, clambering over those walls. On the islands of Rhodes and Cos you see them everywhere, because there are lots of ancient walls on those islands. These are hibiscus - so bright a red! You have no such lovely flowers in England.'

'We have roses—'

'But so have we! All your flowers will grow here, but ours won't grow in your country. We have flowers all the year round.'

She nodded, inhaling deeply. She had always been susceptible to perfume, especially the natural perfume of flowers.

'Those trees, on the hillsides over there?'

Tines - Aleppo pines. See down there; they grow right to the water's edge. And can you see the lovely golden beaches down there too? We have wonderful bathing beaches, and much sun all the time.'

She had to smile at his enthusiasm. There was no doubt about it, the Greeks certainly loved their homeland. Perhaps this was owing to the fact of their many struggles to defend it. They had fought numerous greedy enemies in their long history, and often they had lost, only to rise again, as was fitting for the people who had been the first to bring civilization to the West. And they were a devout people despite their paganism in the past. Churches were everywhere - numerous white edifices, charmingly humble and lovingly cared for, their campaniles always gleaming in the brilliant sunshine, their black-bearded priests always smiling a welcome to strangers, should they desire to look around the churches, or to take part in a service or a wedding.

'Tomorrow we will go into the town,' Paul was saying. 'You didn't get a proper look at it when you came from the boat because Androula

was there to bring us straight home. You would like to see the town of Poros?'

'Very much. I want to buy some souvenirs. Can I get them there?'

'There are shops, yes.'

Tara fell silent, her mind straying to Leon and that interview. He had meant trouble, she felt sure, and it was with thankfulness that she dwelt on her determination not to lose her temper. All would have been lost, whereas now everything appeared to be plain sailing. Just a little more acting and Paul would get his money and be out of the man's clutches for ever. How short-sighted it was of Paul's father to leave his stepson in charge of his children's money. He should have seen the possibility of Leon's adopting an arbitrary, highhanded attitude which could cause hardship - as it had, in Paul's case. Androula seemed not to be troubled by the shortage of money, and this could be that she did not require as much as Paul, who naturally would want to pay for any girl-friend he happened to take out.

Leon was not seen until almost dinner time, when he appeared on the patio, dressed in a superbly-cut white tropical suit. Her attention was arrested and she lowered her eyes only when, aware of her interest, Leon made a haughty lift of one eyebrow. She coloured at the action, and wondered at it too, since she had been given to understand that she and Leon were to be friends. This arrogance was far from friendly and, to her surprise, it hurt in a vague, incomprehensible sort of way.

However, the action was forgotten during the pleasant, light conversation accompanying the meal. Paul was especially happy - secretly exultant, no doubt, thought Tara with a smile. Androula was most untypical of Greek girls in that she was thoroughly modern and self-confident. And while Tara was sure she would never openly defy her brother, she was also sure that she would never be domineered by him. She wore a low-cut dress, very short. Frowning darkly when she

at first appeared, Leon seemed then to give a resigned shrug, but Tara did hear him say, a moment later when he was sitting close to Androula on the patio, having pre-dinner drinks,

'When you get married, my girl, your husband's going to beat you. Where did you buy this most inadequate scrap of feminine nonsense?'

Androula laughed softly.

'They're all over the place. You never look in the shops, that's why you've not seen a dress like this before.'

'I have seen a dress like this before. I'm not blind. One does not expect one's sister to go about half-naked, though. In any case, what's worn in Athens is not suitable to this island.'

'The poor little Poriot girls! They live in the past, Leon, as do all the people of the islands.'

His eyes roved her, then moved to Tara, who was clad rather more modestly in that her dress was high-necked. But this was merely because low-cut necklines did not suit her. Had they done so she would have worn them. Her dress was very short, though, and she did wonder whether he disapproved. What a stuffy, old-fashioned man he was! He was living out of his time; he would have done very well in early Victorian England, when the man was undisputed lord and master and his wife and daughters cringing females without wills of their own. Tara thought of his marrying, and wondered how his wife would fare. His earlier words had been enough to illustrate what sort of husband he would make.

When dinner was over Tara would have preferred to remain with Androula and Leon, for although Leon was far from being good company, Androula was witty and vivacious and had kept the conversation alive. But Leon, with smooth pleasantry, said,

'I expect you two want to be off on your own. Don't allow good manners to influence you. Tara's stay is comparatively short, so you must make the most of your time together. Off you go, into the garden.' His black eyes held a cynical light as they caught Tara's expression. 'Enjoy yourselves.'

Her colour had heightened at his words, 'Off you go,' because they not only savoured of an order, but they also seemed to imply that there was something faintly disgusting in the idea of a woman of twenty-five allowing a boy of twenty to make love to her. And in all honesty she herself felt that way - which only served to increase her anger against Leon.

'Your brother is a man of changeable moods,' she almost snapped once they were out of earshot of Leon and Androula, who were on the patio. 'I concluded, earlier, that he had accepted me, and in fact that he fully approved of me, but now I'm not quite sure.'

'Take no notice,' advised Paul carelessly. 'You never know when you've got him. All I want to do is keep in with him until I get my money. I'm sick to death of being without. You've no idea how much I owe, Tara.'

'You're in debt?'

'How can it be otherwise? I've borrowed from all my pals, and I've even been driven to going to a moneylender—'

'No - surely not !'

'It's quite true.' He looked harassed all at once and she felt heartily sorry for him. To own a fortune and yet have to resort to borrowing; it was disgraceful.

'Can't you have it out with Leon? Surely he knows your allowance is inadequate.' Leon himself had maintained that it was more than

adequate, she recalled, condemning him for that deliberate lie. 'Tell him you can't manage; that you must have a larger allowance.' But Paul was shaking his head even before Tara had finished speaking,

'He won't listen,' he told her sulkily. 'I've tried, over and over again, but he's adamant. It's so frustrating! I'll be an old man before I can enjoy what's really mine!'

At this Tara had to laugh, and she received a scathing glance in response. It wasn't at all funny, Paul said, still in the same sulky tones. What a child he was, really, she decided. Leon was right when he declared that a woman of twenty was much older than a man of that age, and that compared to a woman of twenty-five he was a mere child. This much Tara did concede.

'I hardly think you'll be an old man,' she argued lightly. 'Even had you to wait until you're twenty-five you'd still be young.'

'Twenty-five! I can't wait that long,' he groaned.

'And twenty-five isn't young - well, I don't think so.'

'I'm twenty-five,' she reminded him, and he made a swift apology. 'It doesn't matter, Paul,' she smiled. ^{fi}'I don't consider myself old.'

They strolled about the garden, into the trees so that they were hidden from the house. But Tara was feeling bored; a young boy of twenty was not the company she would have chosen, and it was a relief when eventually she could say,

'I think we can return to the house now. Our absence has been long enough to satisfy your brother that we've been having a little cuddle and a kiss or two.'

He laughed then and said,

'You're very attractive, Tara, as I told you on that first meeting, and if we'd been the same generation I'd have fallen in love with you, I'm sure.'

'The same generation?' she exclaimed. 'Really, Paul, I'm not quite as far removed from you as all that!'

'Sorry again. But, you see, to be suitable as a wife for me you'd have to be about fifteen, which is ten years younger than you are.'

'Shall we change the subject?' she suggested with a laugh. 'I don't care to be looked upon as an old woman.'

Leon was alone when they reached the patio, and as Paul excused himself and went off somewhere Tara found herself alone with the man she heartily disliked.

^Languidly he stretched forth a hand and brought out a chair.

'Sit down,' he invited, 'and enjoy the cool evening breeze.'

Accepting the chair, she then wondered what they would talk about, but she needn't have worried; Leon began asking her about her family.

'And you have let your parents know that you're engaged?' he queried when at length she fell silent.

'Not yet.'

The black eyes flickered strangely.

'The British have such peculiar ways,' he commented presently.

'You mean - here, the marriages are arranged by the parents - so in effect they know all about it before the poor bride.'

'Poor bride?' with the merest hint of amusement. 'The girl is greatly honoured that a man will offer for her.'

Tara's lips pressed together. So it was to start all over again, it seemed.

'This might be the case here—'

'It's the case in most parts of the East,' he interrupted, stifling a yawn, a mannerism she had noticed before and one which irritated her immensely.

'Very well, it's the case in your part of the world. But in the Western world women are considered equal.'

'I wonder why?'

She looked at him across the small space separating them, her resolution to outwit him forcibly thrusting itself into her consciousness.

'Mr. - I mean ...?'

'Leon. We're to be related,' he murmured inscrutably.

'Leon ... I can't help feeling that you dislike me, in spite of your acceptance of me as Paul's fiancée, and your saying he had made an excellent choice.'

Glinting eyes flickered over her for a second. The mask-like expression remained; he appeared, in the dim half-light thrown off by the lamps hidden in the foliage of the vines, more formidable than ever, with his black hair coming low, forming a peak in his forehead, and that marble-like polish to his mahogany skin, a skin which seemed darker owing to the whiteness of the fine linen shirt against his neck. And his hands - long and slender and impressively strong -

they also looked darker than they really were, owing to the whiteness of his sleeves against his wrists. Attractive he undoubtedly was, she admitted, but grudgingly. How would a woman fare if he should decide to tempt her? Amazed at such thoughts, Tara shook them off... but she was to remember them later ...

'Tve given you the impression that I dislike you?' No perturbation in his lazy tones; no hint of apology or regret. Now how could you have got that impression? A decided hint of amusement was carried in his voice as this was said, and Tara felt her colour rise.

'You're not very courteous,' she accused plaintively.

His hands were clasped in front of him; his fingers flipped open and he said with a careless shrug,

'Courtesy has never been one of .my virtues. It can be taken as a weakness, especially by women, and often is.'

'Courtesy - a weakness?' she exclaimed. 'Indeed, no! I would never consider it a weakness.'

'You wouldn't?' Oddly he examined her, eyes sweeping from her soft brown hair, teased a little by the wind to her long neck and shoulders, then down lower to where curves were accentuated by the particular play of light reaching her slantwise. Her waist was tiny and nipped in by the sash of her dress; her slender legs were elegantly crossed, one slim ankle moving slightly in time to the faint strains of *bouzouki* music drifting from some distant point on the other side of the hill. 'Then you are different from the other Englishwomen whom I have met.'

'You've met many?'

'Two cousins of mine - Nicos and Gosti - were married to Englishwomen,' he replied abruptly. And as Tara made no comment,

'Both are now divorced; their wives cared for nothing except money. It was clear that they had, in each case, married for the wealth which they knew they would be able to share.'

Her chin went up.

'What makes you so sure of this?'

'My cousins are joint owners of a Greek shipping line.'

'I still think the fault might have been with your cousins - or at least one of them. It's a strange coincidence that both their marriages failed.'

'How like a woman to shift the blame,' he commented with a cynical curve of his mouth. 'Right from the first, both these women began feathering their nests. I warned Nicos the moment after I had met his wife, but he refused to listen. Costi needed no warning; his wife revealed her true colours almost immediately.'

'So you are not particularly partial to Englishwomen?'

For the first time he seemed reluctant to be as outspoken as previously.

'I may not count courtesy as one of my virtues, Tara, but rudeness has never been one of my vices.'

Tara. ... He had spoken her name before, but she had not noticed how attractively it rolled off his tongue, his accent, thought slight, enhancing the sound. Were the tones a little more gentle... or tender, then the name could have an exciting, stimulating ring— Once again she cut her thoughts, shocked by them. Better beware, for it seemed very much as if this man, disagreeable as he undoubtedly was, could affect her senses in a way that was not at all right - for a *nice* girl.

'That's a tactful answer,' she said with a faint smile, 'but it's obvious that you have an aversion to Englishwomen.'

'I'd not go as far as that. Shall we say, I haven't much interest in them. On this island we meet the tourists - or at least we see them,' he amended. 'The girls are free with their favours, and our men like this, simply because our own girls are good girls.'

'It's a very strong statement to say that all our girls are promiscuous,' she protested. 'I know some of them are, but so are girls from other countries.'

'Western countries,' he supplemented, as if he just had to, and Tara spread her hands in a gesture of agreement.

'But you did say you approved of me as a sister-in-law?' she said anxiously after a moment.

'I did, Tara.' The sudden change of tone startled her just as she had been startled at the sudden change in him a few hours earlier when after the rather trying interview he had ended by saying his brother had made an excellent choice. Was he playing with her? A frown leapt to her brow and was instantly erased before he should notice it. So strange that he should be objectionable one moment and appear to relent the next. But what sort of a game could he be playing? Chiding herself for such absurd suspicions, Tara managed to cast them aside. 'I said that I must approve,' Leon continued, 'because of your obvious devotion to Paul.'

A lean hand was raised to his mouth as he yawned, and his thick black eyelashes were lowered. It was impossible to see his face clearly, but Tara felt instinctively that his expression was far from pleasant.

The days passed, days that could have been idyllic had Ricky been here with her, Tara thought on more than one occasion. With Paul - well, it was not unpleasant, but it was several times on the fringe of boredom. They had so little in common; Tara was mature, she was well-read and highly intelligent, and although Paul was far from unintelligent, he was at the same time so immature that he would utter stupid remarks. It would not have been so bad had they been able to remain with the others, but for the sake of appearance they had to go off together at times. To her own astonishment and disbelief Tara found that the only times when she was really content were those on which she found herself alone with Leon. Dazed on first realizing this, she had sat down weakly on her bed, staring out of the window with the look of one just emerging from a dream. The man was too attractive ... but it wasn't that altogether, she decided, receiving yet another shock as the truth hit her that his forceful personality, his air of mastery, even his contempt for women - all helped to increase the magnetism of his personality. What on earth had come over her! She must be quite out of her mind to allow the man to affect her like this! It must stop, she sternly told herself... and within half an hour she was with him on the beach, his brother and sister having gone off to the cafe for refreshments. Leon was on shorts only, while Tara was in a bikini, her slender body already brown from almost a week of exposure to the sun, for she and Paul had come down to the beach every morning, and in the afternoons all four of them would invariably sunbathe on the lawn.

'One week gone already.' Tara had to speak, for Leon was gazing steadfastly out to sea and the silence was becoming oppressive. 'How quickly time flies when you're happy.'

He turned from his contemplation of the calm blue waters of the Gulf, and his black eyes flickered over her brown body.

'You're happy - completely happy?'

'Of course! I'm with Paul, so I must be happy. I'm going to miss him dreadfully when I leave.'

'You'll be meeting when he returns to England to resume his studies.'

'Oh, yes - but I mustn't take up too much of his time,' she said with a specious smile. 'It would never do for me to interfere with his studies. Those must come first, much as I would like to have Paul to myself all the time.' Paul and Androula were seated on two beach chairs, outside the cafe, and Paul waved. Tara's eyes lit up with love and tenderness as she waved back. She had made a slight turn of the head just so her companion could have a good view of her expression.

'Very commendable,' responded Leon, stretching out and leaning back, supported by his hands. 'You're going to make an ideal wife, Tara. My brother is lucky indeed.'

She blushed, and forgot all about her earlier suspicions that this man might be playing a game with her.

'You're kind, Leon,' she murmured, 'Oh, I'm going to be so very happy with my new relations!'

'I'm sure you are,' with smooth affability, and then, 'I hope it will not be long before we meet your family.'

'When will your parents be returning to England?'

'Not for some time yet.'

'When they do, you must bring them over - and your brother and his wife.'

'Yes - yes, it will be lovely having all the family together.'

'We attach a great deal of importance to family ties here in Greece,' he told her. 'We rarely move any great distance from our parents - if our parents are living, that is. Ours are dead, as you know.'

'Yes, Paul has told me all that.' A pause and then, 'Don't think I'm not concerned about leaving my family, Leon, because I am. But my love for Paul is so great that I can't help but put him first. And as he lives in Greece, then I must leave my people, and my home.'

He had been gazing out to sea again, but he turned and shot her a glance, and he moved slightly towards her as if impelled by some force that had taken hold of him unawares. His tones were deep, accented, and warm in an unexpected way which sent her nerves and senses out of control.

'I have said my brother is lucky ... yes, he is more than lucky—' Leon stopped abruptly and turned away, clearly unwilling for her to see his expression. 'Yes, he is lucky. ...' Spoken to himself, these last words, and Tara scarcely caught them. But she did manage to catch them and she bit hard on her lip. How very strange! To utter words like that, to himself, as if in a brooding regretful way. What did it mean? Bewildered, she caught at her lip again, some intense emotion gripping her and holding her fast even though she made an almost frantic effort to break free. She was trembling, and questions pressed, insistent, demanding answers which she was unable to give. Last evening... He had come far too close as they left the table, and his hand had brushed hers; later, when they had all been saying their good nights, his eyes had lingered on her face, and in their depths lay a strange shadow, as if he were brooding on some inner problem.

And now.. .. After moving closer to her in that half- intimate way, he had uttered those words, breaking off at first, and avoiding her eyes, then whispering them again, as if they had to be repeated.

Paul and Androula returned and flopped down on the sand.

'This is a very pleasant way to spend one's time.' Androula smiled at Tara, then looked across at Leon. 'We must take Tara across the channel to Galata, and on to Troezen - to the ruins, I mean. We haven't taken her anywhere yet.' This last to Paul, who was occupied in watching two delectable Scandinavian girls with long plaited blonde hair and pale bodies which gave evidence of their having only recently arrived on the island.

'What? - er - I didn't catch it, Androula?'

'We must take Tara to one or two places before she leaves. Perhaps you want to go alone - just the two of you?'

Fortunately Leon had missed his brother's interest in the two blondes, and catching his eye Tara gave him a warning look. It was no use her playing her part so effectively if he were going to act in a way that would be likely to arouse Leon's suspicions that all was not plain and above board. In case Paul had not received the message given silently she said, pouting a little,

'Darling, you're a long way from me. What are you thinking about?'

He jerked then and smiled lovingly at her.

'Sorry, dearest, I was watching that man with the boat out there. He seems to have sprung a leak - or something.'

'A leak?' blinked Androula. 'What are you talking about? He's quite unconcernedly making for the shore.'

'Oh - is he? I must have been mistaken.'

Tara drew a deep breath. Paul was not at all clever.

Androula went on about the trips which she thought Tara ought to take, but nothing definite was arranged. She was perfectly happy relaxing like this, she declared, and added,

'This lovely island's enough for the time being. I can do lots of sightseeing after Paul and I are married.' Her eyes caught those of Leon; his brief glance held the most odd expression before, frowning heavily, he turned his head away, and began talking to Paul.

'Yes,' Androula was saying, 'I suppose you can. Well, we'll see later on. There's time left, if you do decide you want to explore.'

That evening Androula went out to dine with some, friends living at the other side of the island; Paul had had a headache all day and in the end decided to go to bed.

'He's fast asleep,' Leon informed Tara after going up, just before dinner, to see how he was. 'I'm afraid, Tara, that you will have to be content with my company. Will you mind very much?'

Warning lights - *red* lights! - leapt into her consciousness. There was no particular reason for this, as Leon's face wore a rather bored expression and his whole demeanour was one of indifference. 'Of course not,' she smiled, but thought to add, 'I'm sorry about Paul. It isn't anything serious, is it?'

He eyed her frowningly. 'You're very anxious about him.'

'Naturally,' with a quiver in her voice. 'When someone you love is ill—'

'He isn't ill!' roughly, with the boredom dropping from him instantly. 'He stayed out in the sun too long, that's all.'

Bewilderedly she stared at him. 'I'm sorry. I was worried, you see.' He shrugged, but for one fleeting second she saw a sceptical expression

in his eyes. Was it possible that he didn't believe her? What an enigmatical person he was! These changes of mood; these odd glances - sometimes appearing to hold suspicion, deep and strong, then at other times they would be clear indications of his approval of her as a member of the family. Paul had even remarked on one occasion, snatching a few minutes alone with Tara as they walked home from the beach,

'He likes you no end, Tara! I knew he'd approve; I told you right at the beginning, didn't I? There's not much doubt about his allowing me to have my money.'

Tara had recalled Leon's saying he might let Paul have his money on his marriage, but naturally she had kept this from the boy. In any case, she was now fairly optimistic that she had so successfully played her part that Leon would not hesitate to let Paul have his money on his twenty-first birthday.

'As there are only the two of us,' Leon was saying, 'I think we shall eat in the small verandah room. It's cosier.'

'Yes...' Red lights again, brighter this time. 'Y-yes, it will be cosier.' Where was she going? More important, what was she hoping for? This dark formidable Greek with the pagan eyes was not the man to fall in love - he was too hard and unfeeling, his contempt for women was too strong - especially Englishwomen. Besides, who would want to find herself under his domination? Not she! That was for sure!

The meal was eaten under shaded ceiling lights, with candles on the table and flowers beautifully arranged in an ornate silver urn. Music floated, softly, and from the open window scents and sounds of the Grecian night drifted romantically in. Had some amorous lover arranged it all it could not have been more perfect, more seductive ... more nerve-activating than this. She was in a strange world of unreality, and when for a fleeting moment the face of Ricky intruded

into her vision it was frowningly thrust out, incongruous in so faultless a setting.

'Tara, my dear, you're not taking your soup.' Soft as falling snow on a drowsy hill the tone, the accented first word breathed almost silently, but caressing. She swallowed as emotion surged.

'I was - was thinking,' she mumbled, picking up her spoon.

'Of what?' he wanted to know, smiling at her.

'Nothing in particular....'

He seemed amused all at once.

'Why, I do believe you're shy — just because we're dining alone. How utterly refreshing to discover a shy young lady these days.' She made no comment and he said, his soup spoon poised, 'Have you had a young man before Paul?'

Inwardly she started, recalling that here in Greece engagements are not broken. But then it had not been her fault, so surely Leon would consider her blameless. Yet she hesitated just a second longer, loath to see this most attractive expression change to one of condemnation.

'Not a s-serious one,' she faltered, popping a small piece of bread in her mouth the instant she had told the lie.

'At twenty-five I should have thought you'd have had many admirers. You're very lovely, Tara - but I expect you know that.'

She glanced up, flushing daintily. His eyes glimmered oddly and he swallowed hard.

'Thank you, Leon. Quite frankly, I haven't had many admirers. You see, I used to go about a lot with Mum and Dad until - until ... '

'Yes?'

'Until they went abroad,' she said quickly, averting her head.

Savvas entered with the second course and silence fell on the room until he had left.

'A girl who goes about with Mum and Dad,' he mused, his eyes fixed on her bent head. 'In other words, an old-fashioned girl.'

Tara's colour spread ; she wished already that the lie had not been told. But Leon chatted on and the situation eased for her. It was a meal she would never forget as long as she lived. Of all the meals she had taken with Ricky, none had been so pleasurably exciting as this. She felt she was on the verge of some momentous event, that the evening could not end without a great change taking place in her life. Paul faded; he did not matter anyway. Her brother and Joan, her parents - none seemed real; only this was tangible, yet unreal too in many ways. To be dining in so romantic a setting with a handsome Greek whose manner was, to say the least, much more than friendly, whose voice was capable of sending exciting tremors through her body, whose black eyes, looking at her with something akin to tenderness, set her senses tingling in the most delicious kind of way. Inevitably she recalled her grudging admission that he was attractive ... and she remembered also that she had wondered how a woman would fare, should he decide to tempt her.

Thoughts such as these brought colour fluctuating delicately, and because he was watching her she lowered her long lashes, unaware of the lovely picture she made, with the colour taking on a peach tint in the reflected light from above, and the soft shadows mingling with it thrown on to her cheeks by her eyelashes. Her wide generous mouth parted slightly, as if pleading for a kiss.

She heard his intake of breath, saw his fingers tighten on the handle of his knife. She glanced up and he smiled, but in his pagan eyes there glowed the unmistakable embers of desire. She automatically touched her breast, for her heart had jerked almost painfully. This balancing on a knife-edge was too dangerous a position by far. Her nerves quickened, stimulated by the chord of expectation ... and something akin to recklessness.

Their coffee and liqueurs were served in the same room, on a small table by the open window. The music from the record player had stopped, but the trill of cicadas could still be heard and, more faintly, the sound of waves lapping the shore. Lights twinkled on the hillsides; and the summits of the mountains, enveloped in a lustrous moon-flushed radiance, stood out like silver silhouettes against the star-spangled Grecian sky.

Leon took hold of the chair which Savvas had put to one side of the table, and brought it close to where Tara sat. Reaching up, he snapped off the light, leaving just a small lamp shining from the verandah outside. It was rose-shaded and, throwing its subtle glow on to the climbing vines and bougainvillaeas, it turned the entire immediate scene into a fairyland of magic and warmth. A tightness caught at Tara's throat. Escape seemed urgent - but escape from what? And how was she to remove herself without her host adopting an attitude of astonishment at her action? After all, he hadn't done anything.

'So silent,' murmured Leon at last as he picked up his glass. 'Thoughtful, and - still a little shy?' His dark head was cocked, his voice edged with amusement. She thrilled to this teasing mood, wondering if she would ever feel the same after an evening such as this.

'I'm not shy,' she returned, a smile fluttering.

'You are, my dear. And very unsure of yourself. Are you afraid of something?'

Swiftly she shook her head - too swiftly.

'Why should I be afraid?'

He shrugged his shoulders.

'There's no reason. After all, you're with the man who eventually is to become your brother-in-law, aren't you?' She looked dumbly at him; her hand lay on the table and suddenly it was covered with his own. 'Tara,' he whispered hoarsely, then broke off. The clasp of her hand caused her to cry out and he apologized, but absently. He seemed gripped by indecision and at last he put his glass to his mouth and drank deeply. She said, because she just had to cut into this silence,

'Yes, Leon, I'm with the man who is eventually to be my brother-in-law.'

At that he seemed to take on a satanic look. She peered into those black eyes and was scared.

'You really want to marry him?' he asked her harshly. 'You're as much in love with him as you would have me believe?'

'I-I-'

'Answer me! He's a mere boy. How can you be in love with him—?' He stopped, and his shoulders sagged. 'I'm sorry,' he said in tones bitter-edged. 'Forgive me.'

A hush fell on the room after this until, their drinks finished, he said, calmly now and with nothing more to his voice than would be expected from the man whose brother she was intending to marry,

'I usually take a stroll before going to bed. As Paul isn't here perhaps you'll accompany me?'

'Of course.' The answer came spontaneously, for she had no wish to put an end to the scene at this stage. For as she sat there, at the dinner-table, in that magic setting, she had allowed the truth to emerge from where it had lain, suppressed, in her subconscious. It had not burst in upon her, staggering her or leaving her dazed and disbelieving. No, it made a gentle entry into her conscious strands of thought and, once established, it seemed as if it had always been there, since the beginning of time. With Ricky, love - or what they both believed was love - had come with a flourish. Across the dance hall their eyes had met and a sudden upsurge of emotion had caught Tara in what she thought was an inescapable vortex which was to enclose her for life.

After the break-up she had sworn to finish with men for ever, but here she was, in love with this dark arid rather frightening Greek who was under the impression that she loved his brother and was going to marry him. And Leon .. .? At this stage she dared not ask herself if he was beginning to care, simply because it seemed impossible that he could care deeply for any woman. He was too hard and unfeeling, she had already told herself; added to this was his contempt for women, especially Englishwomen.

'You're not cold?' Leon sounded anxious, she thought, hastily reassuring him. 'Perhaps you should have brought a coat, nevertheless,' he said, and she knew a slight frown had settled on his brow.

'It isn't cold,' she said, hurrying a little to keep up with him. 'It's a beautiful night!'

But even as she spoke the moon became masked, clouds having blown in from the sea, and the darkness thickened with the

lengthening distance from the house. Leon took her arm; she quivered and hoped he hadn't noticed. He was almost morosely quiet and although she several times attempted to open a conversation she gave it up in the end, having received only monosyllables in response.

'It's - eerie after the brilliance of the moonlight,' she said after a long time. 'Look at those trees on the mountains — they seem to have taken on the most grotesque shapes.' He nodded, merely glancing over to the mainland, where the forest trees were outlined in the shadows. They reached the extreme edge of the garden and he stopped under a tree. The indecision which had dropped on him a few minutes earlier was gone suddenly and before she had time even to grasp his intention she was in his arms and his hard demanding mouth was pressed to hers. Instinctively she began to struggle, but soon desisted, his very savagery sharpening her own nervous response, and she found herself giving her lips unstintingly, and even thrilling to the far-too-intimate proximity of his sinewed body against her soft and tender curves. Madness! So why didn't she make some sort of move? But sheer recklessness held her in its grip and she desired nothing more than to remain in his arms, and to surrender her lips to the passionate mastery of his.

'Tara. ...' He held her from him at last, but his mouth still caressed her cheek and her neck and would have sought pleasure lower, but she inserted a protective hand. A soft laugh escaped him before she was crushed to him once more and her head forced back as he kissed her with all the pagan ruthlessness of his unbridled ancestors. 'Tara ... say you love me. Say it!'

She shook her head, but it was stilled instantly by his imperative hands.

'Leon ... Paul.' She must mention Paul, even though he was as nebulous as a dream. Leon would consider it very strange indeed if she forgot all about her 'fiance'! 'I'm - engaged—'

'Say you love me,' he demanded harshly. 'I've seen it in your eyes tonight - yes, and before that, but you didn't know. You love *me*! Do you hear?'

'Yes, but-'

'Yes! You've said it,' triumphantly as those bands of steel took possession of her even yet again. 'You're mine, Tara, mine! Do you understand? You can't marry Paul now. You were meant for me; it was fate that brought you here ...' He allowed his voice to fall to silence as he looked deeply into her eyes. Her own eyes shone, but she rather thought he would not notice as clouds still partly obscured the moon. 'My own sweet love,' he whispered presently, 'we cannot allow three lives to be ruined. With Paul it is calf-love; I saw this at once. With you - well, my dear, I don't pretend to' know what it was. 'I'm sure you truly believed you loved him - am I right?' he asked before continuing. It was so easy a way out of what had at first appeared to be a most difficult situation, and she seized upon it instantly.

'Yes, Leon, you are right.' Such deceit - but what; did it matter so long as no one was to be hurt? She could scarcely tell Leon the truth at this stage— No, indeed not! She actually shuddered at the thought, having witnessed the great strength of him, and the ruthlessness. This in love ... so what in anger? She hoped she would never make the mistake of arousing that.

'Say you'll marry me,' he went on when she had answered him. 'Say it, my dear, beloved Tara.' The name rolled, deliciously, and her emotions soared and in a little access of desire she pressed close against him and knew the pain and pleasure of his unleashed passion as the whipcord hardness of his body came very close to demanding complete surrender. Sanity intervened and, pale and frightened, she pushed against him, and to her relief he spared her any further temptation. 'I must own you, my dearest. When will you marry me?'

Vibrant with suppressed ardour the voice. She managed to say in shaky tones, 'I'll marry you whenever you want me to, Leon.'

'Sweetheart! My dearest darling—' His lips found hers and a long, long silence fell before, reluctantly drawing away, he said, 'We must be gentle with Paul, my love. Shall I tell him, or will you?'

'I must tell him,' she returned rather quickly. Paul was too young to handle a situation like that. So amazed would he be that in all probability he would blurt out the truth - that Leon needn't be contrite because he and Tara weren't engaged anyway. Tara would have liked to mention Paul's inheritance, but refrained, admitting that this was not the time.

'He isn't going to take kindly to our marriage, but that can't be helped.' Leon seemed almost callous, she suddenly realized with a frown. Noticing it, and obviously perceiving the reason for it he added more gently, 'It's for the best, Tara dear. As I said, it's only calfllove, for no young boy of twenty knows his own mind. He'll be over it in no time at all, you'll see.'

She nodded, too much in love to think of anything except her own happiness, but at the same time wishing she could tell Leon that Paul would not need to get over it, as he had never been remotely attracted to her, much less in love with her.

CHAPTER FOUR

THEY were married in England, early in the morning, leaving soon afterwards for Poros, as Leon wanted to have their first night in their own home. This suited Tara, since she could imagine no more romantic place for a honeymoon than the villa, set in its lovely exotic gardens, with the views to the mountains of the mainland just across the strait, and the delightful little harbour with its bright fishing boats and caiques splashing colour against a background of tree-clothed hills.

Sitting in the plane, Tara mused over the events of the past three weeks. Paul - and his astonishment. He was delighted, though, as Tara promised faithfully that he would receive his inheritance, as she would use her influence with her husband. Androula was at first quite shocked, anxious for 'her poor brother' until, impatiently, Paul had told her he had already got over it.

'Already? But, Paul, then you could not possibly have been in love with Tara!'

'I wasn't,' he shrugged. 'That's obvious, because I'm so happy that she's marrying Leon. And so should you be, as you've always been troubled that he'd marry some stiff woman whom you wouldn't get on with.'

'I told you it was only calf-love,' Leon had said on perceiving Paul's reaction. 'The boy won't know his own mind for years yet,' he had added on a slightly disparaging note.

'How exciting!' Joan had said, flinging her arms round Tara on her arrival at the airport with Leon. 'I just couldn't believe it when you wrote saying you were coming home to get married!' And, later, 'He's terrific! You must have the handsomest man in all Greece!'

'Is this on the rebound?' Stewart had asked with that touch of superiority he adopted towards his sister, on account of the five years' difference in their ages. 'Are you sure you're not going to regret it?'

'I love him,' she had returned quietly. 'It's something as vastly removed from what I felt for Ricky as the Poles are from the Equator.'

He had shrugged and said,

'There's still a home here for you if everything doesn't work out as you expect.'

'Stewart!' exclaimed Joan, shocked.

'It'll work out as I expect it to,' intervened Tara with smiling confidence. 'I'll not be coming home, Stewart - only for visits, of course.'

'You're very quiet.' Leon's voice intruding into her reflection and she turned eagerly to him. Through the opposite window she saw the clouds thickening, and the thin rays of the sun trying to penetrate them. 'Are you ready for a drink?'

'No, thank you, Leon. Aren't we nearly there?'

He nodded, glancing through the window at her side.

'We shall be in Athens in about twenty minutes' time.'

'Will there be a boat, do you think?'

'We might have to wait a short while, but yes, we shall be able to get a boat all right.'

She glanced through the window again. The sun was winning - an omen, she thought, then laughed at herself. 'I've never been so happy

in the whole of my life,' she said softly, her adoring eyes settling on her husband's face. 'Thank you for loving me, Leon.'

He looked strangely at her, then beckoned to the stewardess. He ordered a drink; she wondered at his silence but attached no particular importance to it.

The sun had gone down when they reached Poros, entering the quay in the smart white coastal vessel, *Marina*, from Piraeus. The harbour was like a smooth blue lake with the opposite shore only a mile away and high mountains cutting into the sky above the vast expanse of lemon groves. The whole vista was affected by the setting sun, which spread its translucent glory over a landscape drowsy with the daytime heat. Palms silhouetted against the sky were dappled with crimson; the hills were tinted with gold, but in the vast vault of the sky purple streaks of evening were already beginning to appear, mingling with the enchanting tracery of crimson cobwebs swirling sinuously against a background of fading blue. The mountains, already growing cool and tranquil in the evening light, were bathed in subtle shades of lilac and pink and pearl.

It was magic - or heaven, or a combination of both, thought Tara, excited and expectant as she looked up at her husband, his hand lifted to bring forth the taxi standing at the quay. Within ten minutes they were at the villa.

'Home at last!' she exclaimed happily, expecting to be taken into Leon's arms. But he was picking up the pile of letters lying on a silver tray on the hall table, and he walked away, into the lounge, Tara following,

Savvas was dealing with the luggage and Tara said, feeling a tiny bit flat all at once,

'I'll go and tidy myself, ready for dinner.'

Glancing up, Leon nodded. She stood there, hurt - yet instantly telling herself not to be silly. Her husband naturally wanted to examine his mail.

Dinner, ... Another meal like the one which had made so momentous a change in her life, just as, by some uncanny instinct, she had known it would. This time, though, they would not walk in the garden ... no, Leon would have other plans....

But the meal was a disappointment to Tara, for it lacked the intimacy she expected. Leon was silent and morose; he seemed a million miles away from her. So great was her disappointment that she felt the tears prick her eyelids several times, and she found also that she wasn't hungry, because of the lump in her throat and the leaden weight that was settling in the pit of her stomach.

'Are - are you all right?' she just had to ask when a couple of her remarks had been answered merely by a nod.

'All right?' with a lift of his brow, and a sweeping glance from her pale face to her plate, with its food untouched. 'I expect so. Why do you ask?'

She started, and shook her head bewilderedly.

'You're ... not the same,' she quivered, fighting the tears. What had happened to bring about this change?

'I'm sorry,' he said in a more gentle tone. 'Eat your dinner; it's going cold.'

A smile fluttered then, and she felt a little better. But although from then on they chatted over the meal she still felt uneasy and bewildered. It would be all right later, she assured herself. Perhaps Leon had received some worrying business news, and if this were the case then obviously he would be silent and withdrawn.

She glanced at the clock. Twelve-thirty. ... She and Leon had come up over an hour ago, she entering her room and he his. He was going to take a bath, he said, and she herself took a shower. And now she was standing in the middle of the lovely bedroom, staring at the communicating door, which was closed. No sound at all. What a strange wedding night! No kiss since they had left England, no endearing words, no glances of desire or expectation. With a wildly beating heart she at last covered the distance between the door and herself and knocked timidly. *No* sound, and she knocked again, louder. Was Leon ill? she wondered, her heart taking a sudden bound as without waiting another second she opened the door. Yes, that would explain all; he was ill - had been ill all the time but didn't want to worry her with it—

'What the devil do you mean by bursting in here like this!' He was lying in bed, reading! Tara blinked, his angry question lost on her for the moment as she stood there in the open doorway, her curves enchantingly revealed under the long nightdress she wore.

'You're - reading,' she stammered stupidly. 'You're rereading a b-book!'

Insolently his eyes roved her figure. Was this cold indifferent man the same ardent lover who had carried her on the tide of his passion to the point of near surrender? - the man who, later, had insisted on the minimum amount of delay because, he said, he could not wait for her? They had waited only until they could have the house to themselves, and after Androula and Paul had attended the wedding they went on to their respective universities.

'We'll be together,' Leon had whispered, 'just the two of us, until Paul and Androula come home few:

Christmas.'

'Have you any objection to my reading a book?' inquired Leon at last, breaking into her chaotic thoughts.

Her trembling hands were spread in a sort of helpless, pleading gesture. Tears filmed her eyes and her lovely lips quivered tremulously.

'It's our wedding night,' she whispered, shaking her head and, without thinking, coming further into his room. 'Have - have I d-done something to displease you?'

'Not that I can recall, Tara.' Another sweep of those pagan eyes, but they were as cold and lifeless as obsidian and equally hard. 'Why aren't you asleep? You must be tired after all that travelling.'

Suddenly her anger surged. She was still bewildered and desperately unhappy, but her pride had been injured, and her face was burning with humiliation because of his arrogant manner and his glances of contempt, and because of the supreme embarrassment through which she was passing. But she managed successfully to stem her anger and to adopt a cold and haughty attitude which, she told herself, would provide him with far less satisfaction than a furious outburst would have done.

'I am tired, yes,' she replied stiffly. 'I merely came in to say good night - since you omitted to do so.'

The black eyes kindled; she had the unpleasant conviction that her poor little effort had afforded him immense amusement. What was his game? Suddenly she recalled an earlier suspicion....

'Good night, then—' he was saying, but she had already voiced her own question.

'Why did you marry me, Leon?' He paused a moment, considering. 'Well, you'll have to know soon,' he said with a shrug. 'I married you to save my brother.' Her face went white.

'To - to save Paul?' To save Paul! She wanted to laugh - loudly, and to shout out the truth. Hysteria had to be crushed as it rose like a flood within her, filling her right up to her throat, which felt totally blocked. To save Paul! That was the only reason why Leon had tempted her, made love to her, demanded that she marry him at once. 'To save Paul!' she repeated in a cracked and high-pitched tone when, at last she was able to articulate words at all. 'You never loved me? It was all an act?'

'Obviously it was an act,' he returned heartlessly, his cold glance matching the icy inflection of his voice. 'No man in his right senses would love a woman of your sort.'

She flinched at these words, but her voice was low and controlled as she said,

'You don't mind that you've sacrificed your freedom - that you've spoiled your life?'

'I haven't spoiled it. I shall carry on as before.' A small pause and then, continuing what he was about to say, before the interruption, 'Paul was infatuated; was too blind and inexperienced to realize that all you cared about was his money - as all Englishwomen do. His father entrusted his fortune to my care and I'd ha[^] failed in my duty had I allowed the marriage to take place. Paul is now safe from your avaricious clutches—'

'Avaricious clutches! Oh, how dare you!'

'He's a child still, whereas you're a woman of the world—'

'How have you reached that conclusion?' she demanded hotly.

'No woman of your age would fall in love with a boy like Paul.' She made no comment and he then added, 'Can you deny that?'

He knew she could not, simply because events had proved beyond doubt that she had never loved Paul. Reading her thoughts, he went on contemptuously, 'You were quick to accept my offer, weren't you, Tara? But then Paul had obviously told you that my fortune is far greater than his.'

Every vestige of colour had fled from her cheeks now. She had been thinking of telling him the whole truth, but she saw that it would do her no good and it would do Paul a great deal of harm. Leon had no love at all for her, so nothing she could say would help her in her plight. What an utter fool she had been, to think that a man like Leon could fall in love with her. Hadn't she told herself that he was cold and unfeeling? - that he held women in contempt? She deserved all she had received and with an acceptance of this she turned away, without troubling to argue with his implication that she had married him for his money. Pride would not let her remain, here in his bedroom, with him lying there, propped on one elbow, regarding her with amused contempt, and enjoying the fact of her humiliation at being thus treated, on her wedding night. That she desired him she would not deny even now, but she made a vow that he would never know this. Would she leave him? She supposed she must, but for the present her mind was in no fit condition for making decisions. In any case, there was plenty of time.

After leaving his room she closed the door softly behind her, then pressed her hands to it, bent her head, and wept bitterly, and silently until, racked by sobs, she realized she was making herself ill and she got into bed. Sleep was denied her, as was to be expected; she tossed and turned all night, asking herself over and over again how she had come to fall in love with him in the first place and, having done so, blithely accepted that he also had fallen in love. Only a fool would have been so blind and so trusting. It wasn't as if she hadn't known an

inner warning that he was playing some game with her. But even had she gone into that she would never in a thousand years have hit on the truth. To marry her to save Paul! Again she could have laughed - laughed like someone almost deranged, so ludicrous it all was. Apart from herself, and the terrible plight in which she now was, there was the fact of Leon's having shackled himself with a wife whom he did not love and never would love - and all for nothing, since there had never been any question of Paul's being in danger.

Suddenly, in the darkness of the night, there came to her the idea of revenge. She would remain here until Paul received his inheritance, and then she would tell Leon the truth. She would laugh in his face and scoff at his stupidity! It would be his turn then to suffer humiliation - and bitter chagrin, knowing that his sacrifice had been so totally unnecessary. Yes, that was what she would do. And then she would leave Poros, and never set foot on the shores of Greece again as long as she lived.

The night came to an end at last, a night so different from what she had dreamed of only a few hours ago as she got into bed in her old room at Stewart's house. Stewart! Humiliation gripped her again at the recollection of his words about there still being a home for her with him and Joan. So shocked Joan had been, while Tara herself had so confidently passed off the remark.

And now she must go back - at least, as soon as Leon made Paul's money over to him. Stewart would say 'I told you so; I suggested you were acting on the rebound.' Well, she had asked for it. Mature and levelheaded? She had acted like a scatterbrained schoolgirl, falling madly in love with a handsome face - a classical Greek face whose black eyes could at one moment burn with pagan savagery, and at another glitter with icy contempt and disdain.

At least she was saved one aspect of the humiliation that might have been hers: Leon had no idea she loved him; he truly believed she had

married him for his money - and he should continue to believe so. Never would one unguarded moment occur where he might make a guess at her emotions.

He looked at her long and hard when they met at the breakfast table. Savvas was all sly smiles, his tawny eyes glancing from Tara to Leon and back again all the time. The Greek men thought about nothing else but sex, she thought disgustedly, realizing that nothing would afford her greater pleasure than to slap the sniggering servant across his face.

'Madam is pale this morning,' he observed, and she glared at him. Leon should have said something to the man, she thought, but he was busy sprinkling sugar on his grapefruit.

Towards the end of the silent meal Tara said coldly,

'Perhaps you will tell me what I have to do - in the house, I mean? Savvas and his wife do the work,, I know, but must I supervise at all?'

The black eyes opened very wide. Their expression seemed to be an admonishment at her coldness towards him and her chin lifted. Did he think it was all to be one-sided? - that he could treat her with frigid civility and she not retaliate? He would soon learn differently!

'I have managed very well up till now,' he commented at length, helping himself to more coffee. 'I'm a well-organized person, as you have probably observed. However, I suppose Savvas and Margarita will expect to receive their instructions from you now.' He flipped a hand negligently. 'Just do what you like. So long as my house is kept as it is, my meals produced on time and the garden kept immaculate then I shall be satisfied.'

Her mouth tightened. There had been no need for all that! He knew very well that things would continue as they had before she came.

'There is little for me to do, in effect?'

'I shouldn't have thought you were interested in work of any kind?'

'I'm used to working for my living,' she reminded him frigidly.

He shrugged.

'There's no need to work now. Just do what you were doing before - go for a swim, or sunbathe on the lawn, or something.' He glanced at her plate. 'Eat your breakfast.'

'I shall not!' The retort shot out before she had time to think; he glanced at her in some amusement and said,

'Please yourself. I expect you'll eat when you've got over the shock.'

Her grey eyes met those black ones, glintingly.

'We need not keep on referring to the fiasco of our marriage, Leon.' And she just had to add, for her own particular satisfaction, 'One day it's you who'll get a shock, and it will be just as great as mine.'

His dark head lifted.

'And what,' he inquired with sudden interest, 'do you mean by that remark?'

'I have no intention of expanding on it at the present time. I said *one day* - and that day doesn't happen to be yet.'

Another shrug. Probably he considered she was bluffing. So the shock would be all the more mortifying when it did come, she thought vindictively.

He disappeared immediately after breakfast, going to a smart stone building nestling on a small rise at the far end of the garden, which was shaded from the west winds by a belt of Aleppo pine trees. Up the walls of the building climbers had been trained and it was a delightful mass of colour from the bougainvillaeas and passion flowers, and of course the vines. Hibiscus shrubs flourished nearby and little plots of garden flowers with exotic perfumes had been arranged along the front and sides of the building. Inside, the luxury had left Tara gasping. Leon Dorkas certainly allowed himself the very maximum of comfort when he was working, for this pretty little building was in fact his study. His chief source of income was tobacco, Paul had told Tara, Leon owning several large plantations. But he was also in shipping, as was almost every wealthy Greek. And so he spent much of his time working, and of course, travelling.

Tara went down to the beach for a swim, but she felt so lonely and lost that she soon returned to the house, where she sat in her room and tried to read. But it was impossible; she was in tears before very long and her book thrown on one side. What a mess she had made of her life through inserting that advertisement! Stewart had been so right when he had declared her to be childish. As she sat there on a chair by the window Tara found herself blaming first Ricky, then Freda for sending the invitation to her wedding; then she blamed Paul for answering the advertisement, and finally she admitted that the whole blame must be placed on her own shoulders. Well, this life would not be for ever; immediately on Paul's receiving his money she would leave— The ready tears flowed again, for she knew she would never be able to forget Leon, and certainly there would never be anyone else. She had said the same thing after the break with Ricky, but she had not then realized that what she felt for Ricky was in fact not much stronger than what he felt for her. What she felt for Leon was the real thing, and there never could be a repetition. This time it was for ever, and even now, when she had to face the stark truth that he would never return her love, she could not by any stretch of imagination see her own love fading.

With the sudden realization that it was lunch time she hastily bathed her eyes and went downstairs, hoping she had erased all evidence of her tears.

Obviously she had, as after a cursory glance at her as they both sat down, Leon seemed to find no occasion to look at her again.

'I shall be out this evening,' he told her when the meal was over and they were drinking their coffee. 'I dine out fairly often, with friends.'

Pale but composed, she sat a little apart from him, looking into his face.

'Won't these friends consider it strange, your not taking your wife with you?'

'It is quite customary for men to go out without their wives here,' he replied with a hint of sardonic amusement. 'I did warn you, if you remember, that ours is a patriarchal society. The wife just sits at home and does as she's told.'

Tara knew this wasn't true; not of the upper class in Greece, because she had learned a lot from Androula who, luckily for her, had not been born of peasant stock. In the remote villages, yes, the woman was just nothing, but educated Greeks were in the main very Westernized in outlook and, therefore, the women were treated as equals.

'So I won't see you again until tomorrow?' Tara hadn't meant to say anything like that, but the idea of hours of loneliness unrelieved, even by his silent company at dinner so appalled her that the words had escaped involuntarily without her being able to check them.

He looked rather oddly at her, examining her face and her eyes and her quivering mouth. He seemed to frown a little, inwardly, before he spoke.

'I'm afraid not; I shall be working until about six, when I shall come in merely to wash and change.'

'I see.' No more was said and as she had finished her coffee she got up and left him. A few minutes later she was standing at her bedroom window watching him crossing the courtyard with swift and easy strides, making for the lawn and the shrubbery, beyond which was his little garden study.

It would be better to leave at once, she thought dismally, seeing with a flash of imagination the surprise which her return would spring on her brother and his wife. And what of her parents? She had written them a letter which had brought in return,

'My dearest Tara,

What a surprise, after your dreadful experience with Ricky! We are so happy for you, because obviously you yourself are happy. It is fate, my dear, and you had to meet this man who obviously is worth a hundred Rickys. Our only regret is that we shall not be at your wedding, but we hope to see you and your husband within the next twelve months or so...

She could not go home, not quite so soon as this. Besides, there was Paul to think of. She had been so confident that she could influence Leon and that there was nothing to worry about any more. Tara rather thought that Paul would get his money anyway, but it did now occur to her that this presumption was not based on anything positive. Supposing Leon didn't give Paul his money? Impatiently she shrugged. That was their affair; she was sick of it and she wasn't going to allow it to trouble her again. She had done her best to help Paul, because she was grateful for *his* help, but all she had done was land herself in such a mess that she felt she would never completely extricate herself. If Paul did get his money, then she would go forward with her plan, which was to put Leon in possession of the

truth. He would not only be furious with himself for his stupidity, but if he had an ounce of decency in him he was going to feel inordinately sorry for misjudging his wife. He would learn that she had never intended marrying Paul - for his money or anything else. Should Paul not succeed in getting control of his money, then Tara would leave just the same, since life could not go on under these dreadful conditions. They must soon become unbearable both for her husband and herself.

CHAPTER FIVE

TARA had been married five weeks when, Leon having been away for the past four days, Savvas came to her in the sitting-room, where she was listening to records, and said there was a gentleman to see her. Frowning in puzzlement, she said automatically,

'Show him in, Savvas, please.'

And a moment later in walked Ricky.

She gaped at him, a dozen thoughts flashing through her mind before they were cut off by his voice.

Tara - I had to come! Don't be angry, but just tell me the truth. Did you marry this damned Greek on the rebound?

Haughtily she drew herself up.

'My husband's name is Leon,' she informed him icily. 'Leon Dorkas.'

He licked his lips, glancing at the chair.

'I'm sorry... can I sit down, Tara?'

She flicked a hand and he took possession of the armchair.

'Why are you here?' she wanted to know, outwardly cool and aloof but inwardly allowing the questions to crowd in again. Had his marriage broken up too? She didn't have long to wait for the answer to this question.

'We've separated,' he said, his face grey and drawn. 'I made a ghastly mistake, and I believe you have as well. I brooded and brooded when Freda left me, then suddenly I couldn't stand it any longer and I decided to come here and find out for myself if you were in love with

this - this—' He broke off as her eyes sparkled. 'Leon.' He paused. 'You *are* in love with him, then?'

She made no immediate answer, but sat down on the velvet-covered couch, her eyes examining him, comparing him with her husband. Handsome, granted, but not in the classical way peculiar to Leon. His hair was light brown, his forehead high, and with a tiny shock of surprise she saw that his hair was already receding.

'What makes you think I might not be in love with my husband?' she inquired of him at last. Other questions were clamouring. How had he come by her address?

'Because it was all so unorthodox. You didn't marry his brother - and it was all too quick anyway. You *can't* be in love with him! I won't believe it! You've done it because you were so hurt ...' His voice fell to silence and he seemed to sag inwardly, and hopelessly.

'How do you know I didn't marry Paul?'

'Because I know someone at the university. We got talking and I mentioned this Paul Dorkas - and - and I mentioned that he had been at our wedding with you - with his fiancée. I wanted to know if you were married—' He broke off, and she noticed the tiny beads of perspiration forming on his brow. 'I just had to know! Then this fellow came out with the astounding statement that you'd married this Paul's brother. I knew instantly that there was something odd, so I decided to come and see you.'

Her eyes flickered curiously.

'You were aware I'd come to Greece, then?'

'In a small town things leak out, you know that,' he answered impatiently. 'This chap at the university got your address for me, from Paul.'

'Well,' she said after a long pause, 'you've wasted your time because, you see, I am in love with my husband - very much so.'

He swallowed convulsively. The greyness below his cheeks moved upwards, and his voice was hollow when he spoke.

'It's very hard to believe, Tara,' he began, looking at her doubtfully. 'There's some mystery about the whole business; you'll not deny this, I hope?'

'I do deny it. There might have been something which as you said was unorthodox, but there's no mystery, Ricky, none at all.'

'Your husband,' he said after a while, 'he isn't here. I asked the servant and he told me his master was away until the end of the week.'

'That's correct. He does have to go away, to Athens and other places, on business.' She was getting over the shock of seeing Ricky and actually beginning to feel sorry for him. After all, she had loved him once - or thought so. She would now be married to him had it not been for the pressure put upon him by his father and, perhaps, by Freda's father as well. She wondered if their marriage would have failed, and thought that perhaps it would not, as she would never have met Leon and been swept into a whirlpool of ecstasy the like of which she had never known with her former fiancé'. No, the marriage would not have failed, she decided. It would have been one of those which survived on a doldrum sea - no ups or downs, no being swept on a tidal wave of passion, or being brought down by sudden mastery that had to be obeyed. Ricky would have been a tolerant, easy-going husband; she a dutiful wife, but dull - attending meticulously to the household chores, the washing and the ironing, the attention to buttons on shirts and holes in socks. She would always have been there when Ricky came in from work ... but she wouldn't have fled to him and thrown herself into his arms, would never have known kisses

that left her suffering exquisite pain and eagerly presenting her lips for more.

With inward blushing warmth she owned that she would trade a whole lifetime with Ricky for one night with her pagan Greek husband.

'It seems odd that he didn't ask you to go with him.' Ricky moved restlessly on the chair and she was suddenly aware that she had forgotten to give him a drink.

'I'd rather have a cup of coffee,' he said when she had corrected the omission, and she rang the bell. His eyes brooded as she did this and when Savvas had been and gone he said, 'All this luxury - I'm the world's greatest fool to have thought you'd come back to me.'

She frowned heavily at this.

'You're married, Ricky,' she reminded him gently.

'Freda wants a divorce.'

'So soon? You haven't given your marriage a chance.'

He looked at her.

'You're not a bit troubled by my plight, are you, Tara?'

'Were you troubled by my hurt?'

He bit his lip.

'I asked for that, didn't I? No, I admit I wasn't - not at the time. But at the wedding— Oh, my God, Tara - I knew then that I'd made a mistake! It's you I love, and I always will love you.' She thought for one horrified moment that he was going to cry, and indeed he did

brush a hand across his eyes. 'I've made a terrible mess of my life, Tara - and I can't see anything to live for.'

'We get over these things,' she said gently, hating to see him like this. 'Time will put everything right.'

'You're saying that, some day, I'll meet someone else - and make a proper marriage?'

'I don't think I meant that exactly. I meant that the hurt you're feeling now will eventually be healed. Why- don't you and Freda have a talk and see what can be done? You must have thought something about each other at the time you decided to get married.' How strange she could speak like this to the man who at the time had hurt her so dreadfully. It was as if she was numbed of all emotion; she felt no more than an impersonal adviser who was trying to help him.

'You know what happened. Freda's father and mine put their damned heads together and decided that there should be more than a business merger. Dad said that if I married you, and Freda married someone else, then, eventually, the business would have to be shared instead of being left as a whole.'

Tara could find nothing to say to this, and she was relieved to see the door swing open and Savvas appear with the tray.

She poured the coffee, thinking of the little bar where she and Ricky used to meet at lunchtimes. Strange that she had believed that this sort of thing was all she wanted from life. With a switch of thought she brought Leon into her vision. Had he been with her in a small coffee bar it would have been exciting—

'I wonder if I can stay here for tonight?' Ricky's anxious voice broke into her thoughts and she frowned.

'I don't know, Ricky - it isn't quite die thing, not with Leon being away. There's an hotel—'

'Please let me stay here,' he begged. 'Just for one night, Tara. Give me this, for old times' sake. I'd like to have a meal with you and - and talk.' She made no answer and he added pressingly, 'There are servants - I noticed a woman as well as the man. Surely your husband trusts you?'

'Certainly he does!' sharply as die handed him his coffee. 'It's just that, to my mind, it isn't right that you should stay here.'

'Don't you ever have guests?'

'We haven't up till now. We shall some day, I expect.'

T shall feel awful in an hotel on my own.'

She gave a small sigh. There was nothing wrong in his staying, she decided, still finding pity in her heart for him. It had been foolish of him to come, especially as he could very well have encountered Leon, and been turned away immediately, but as he *had* come Tara could understand how he felt about going into an hotel on his own.

'Very well, Ricky,' she said at last. 'You can stay.'

'Thank you,' he returned humbly. 'I'm grateful to you, Tara.'

She caught at her underlip. Being so unhappy herself, she could feel deeply for him. He too had made a complete mess of his life, as he himself had just admitted.

Having once given way on the question of his staying at the villa Tara saw no reason for not being friendly, and as the afternoon passed she and he chatted amicably enough, with Tara discovering that she was rather glad of the company, after five weeks of spending long hours

every day on her own, and many evenings as well, because Leon went out so often. As for Ricky, he dropped his dejection for a while, and it was almost like old times - almost, but not quite.

With a couple of hours to spare before the evening meal Tara suggested they go into the town and stroll around.

'Yes, indeed; I'd like that,' responded Ricky eagerly, and would have taken hold of her hand, but she pulled it out of his reach.

Tara nodded several times as she and Ricky strolled along the waterfront, as she knew a few people by sight. A good many more knew her, for the Greeks were a naturally inquisitive people, and a stranger was instantly an object of the keenest interest. Tara had entered the island unobtrusively at first, for no sooner had she stepped off the boat than she was in the car being driven by Androula. But nevertheless, her presence was known to everyone soon enough, as Savvas spent all his off time in one of the *tavernas* along the front. And of course, Savvas talked. What the Poriot thought about the English girl who had come to the island as the fiancée of one brother, then married the other, was something which, she suspected, had kept numerous tongues wagging for some considerable time.

'This is a delightful little island.' Ricky spoke after a long silence and Tara turned her attention from the scene across the strait, to him, smiling and nodding her agreement. 'You've been very lucky,' he added in a much less enthusiastic tone.

'I suppose I have.' She took care not to allow any hint of her unhappiness to enter into her voice, as she had no intention of answering any questions which might ensue were Ricky to suspect she was not perfectly nappy with her husband. Her life was complicated enough already; she was not intending to create a situation where she would be obliged to fight Ricky's persuasions to put a speedy end to her marriage. In fact, she knew for sure that, if

there were eventually to be an end to it, then all action should come from Leon. She would never divorce him because even though she would soon be living apart from him she would always feel he was hers, so long as they remained married.

'What's your husband like?' asked Ricky as they turned eventually to retrace their steps. 'You know, I would never have expected you to marry a foreigner.'

'We never know what's in store for us,' she murmured, almost to herself. 'As for what my husband is like - he's rather wonderful, Ricky,' she said softly, catching back the break in her voice. 'He's exceedingly handsome.'

'He certainly brought you to a beautiful home,' Ricky conceded graciously, glancing up to where the low white villa stood out against the sunset sky. 'He must be a millionaire?'

'I don't know, Ricky, and it doesn't matter. I'm not a very money-minded person, as you very well know.'

'Your wants were often meagre,' he said pensively, and added, 'Since the merger we're making a lot more money. You could have had anything you wanted, Tara.'

Tara appeared not to have heard him; she was watching one of the *garsonis* at the cafe which they were approaching. He had noticed her and Ricky, had drawn the attention of a customer to them and this man swung right round in his chair in order to get a better view of them. Something was said as the *garseni* bent his dark head to that of the customer and both men laughed. Tara went hot, then cold with fury. She looked straight at the *garsoni* as she and Ricky drew abreast of him; she could not miss the sly grin, and the eyes dropping to the customer whose head was tilted now as he looked up at Tara. The

garsoni then slanted her a glance and there was something animal-like in his eyes; they were fixed and liquid, and still sly.

'Those two had a jolly good look,' commented Ricky, amused. 'Do they always subject strangers to that sort of treatment?'

'Women they do,' she replied sharply, regretting her suggestion that she and Ricky should go into town. 'They're charming people really, but they're far too fond of minding other people's business. It will be all over Poros that I was walking out with you.'

He turned to her and frowned.

'What's wrong in that?'

'We're not in Britain now. In Greece one has to be circumspect.'

'I fail to see how anyone can say we're not circumspect. I'm only walking with you.'

She shrugged and changed the subject, but the man's sly expression remained with her for a very long time. She would hate anyone to talk about her, if only for Leon's sake. It would not be very nice for him if the villagers were feeling sorry for him or, even worse, laughing at him.

'What's troubling you?' asked Ricky as they sat on the patio after dinner, he smoking a cigarette and she eating a confection with her coffee. 'You looked quite angry just now.'

She managed a smile.

'It's nothing, Ricky. Tell me all about the business - and that new idea you had for holding your own fashion parades in London.'

He shook his head.

'You don't really want to hear about it.'

What else was there to talk about?

'I do,' she persisted. 'It was an exciting project at the time. Have you got it under way yet?'

'Yes, as a matter of fact we have. Dad's expecting great things from it.' He continued then and became totally immersed in outlining the firm's plans to Tara, who listened with interest, and when at last she said good night to Ricky and went along to her own bedroom she was feeling brighter than she did before he came. The company had done her good, she admitted, feeling less depressed than she had for weeks.

She had just come downstairs the following morning when Savvas emerged from the rear of the hall and told her that the gentleman was ill.

'Ill?' she repeated. 'My guest is ill?'

'Yes, Madam Leon, he is. He rang the bell before six o'clock this morning and I went to him. He seems to have the fever—' Savvas shrugged. 'Or something else. He said I must not disturb you at that time and that he would be all right in a little while, when he had had the brandy he asked for.'

'I'll go and see what's wrong.'

'Yes, madam. The breakfast?'

'Keep it hot, Savvas; we'll be having it later.'

Later? One look at Ricky and she knew he wouldn't be getting up that day.

'It's food poisoning, I think,' he said apologetically as she stood over the bed, looking at his perspiring face. 'I ate some concoction in the Greek caf' in Piraeus while waiting for the boat and I noticed a slight feeling of pain soon afterwards. It went, though, but returned after dinner last night. I didn't say anything to you because I didn't expect it to persist. But it did, and I haven't slept a wink all night.'

'Is the pain very bad?' she asked, a troubled frown on her face.

'It is, Tara. I'm beginning to think I ought to have a doctor.'

She nodded and promised to phone right away.

'Is there anything I can get you in the meantime?'

'There's a clean handkerchief in my bag.'

She opened the small zip-bag he had carried when he came yesterday, and took out the handkerchief.

'There's nothing else? I mean, wouldn't you like a drink of tea or something?'

'No, thanks, Tara. I had that brandy earlier, but I had a job to keep it down.'

'Is it the fever, madam?' Savvas wanted to know when she came downstairs again.

'No; it's his stomach. Mr. Leon's doctor - what's his number?'

'Mr. Leon never has a doctor, madam.'

'Do you have a doctor?' He nodded and she got the number from him. Within half an hour Dr. Antonakis was at Ricky's beside, and a few

minutes later he was telling Tara that he would be in bed for about two days or maybe a little longer.

'It depends on the man himself,' he went on to explain. 'He has food poisoning, but only a little bit — if you know what I mean? Some people take more days than other people. He might be very well the day aftertomorrow - if you know what I mean? But then he might take one more day - if you—?'

'Yes, Dr. Antonakis,' she intervened hastily. 'I know what you mean.'

'Ah,' he beamed, revealing three magnificent gold fillings. 'It is good that you understand. Do you want me to come again? It is not necessary - if you—'

'In that case, doctor, don't trouble to come. I'm sure you must be very busy.'

'Busy? No, we have not many people ill on this island. It is too healthy, so not good for business - if you know what I mean?'

'I do,' she smiled, 'perfectly. Good morning, doctor, and thank you very much for coming so quickly.'

'It is a pleasure. Good morning - *kalimera!*' Savvas was behind her as she closed the front door. He spread his podgy brown hands and a huge shrug hunched his thick shoulders for a moment.

'He always say this thing - "if you know what I mean?" He hear it from an English lady and he think it is the fashion in your country,' Another spread of his hands. 'So he keeps on saying it.' Tara handed him a piece of paper. 'You must get this medicine for Mr. Ricky.'

'I will, madam. I shall send Margarita immediately to the *pharmakion!*'

She stood a moment or two after he had gone. Ricky in bed for two or more days. Leon would be back in three so if all went well Ricky would be gone. But if he were still here. . . . Not that it mattered; she would have a visitor if she wanted one, but she did send up a little prayer that Ricky would get well in time to be gone before her husband's return.

And he was. She saw him off on the morning boat, which had come in loaded with passengers, most of whom were met by Poriot relatives; one or two others, late tourists, were approached by the taxi-drivers.

'Thanks for everything.' Ricky looked decidedly downcast at leaving. 'I'm sorry for all the trouble I've caused you.'

She smiled at him.

'Don't keep apologizing, Ricky. It was no trouble, you know that. I'm only too glad that it wasn't worse. Take care for a while - mind what you eat.'

'I shall!' He was on the boat and she on the quay. 'Good-bye - *dear* Tara! Can I write to you?'

'I don't think—'

'Please...'

'All right. But don't forget what I said: have a talk with Freda.'

His smile disappeared.

'I might, but it won't do any good.'

The boat: was moving; the small gathering on the quay was waving wildly. The Greeks always got excited for nothing at all. She lifted a hand as Ricky raised his. He blew her a kiss and, because she pitied

him, she did likewise. And just then she turned her head, acutely conscious of eyes fixed upon her. The *garsoni* she had noticed the other day stood about a couple of yards from her; he was now waving vigorously to someone on the boat.

Tara turned and walked away, across the *plateia* with its high clock tower and cenotaph, with its *tavernas* and steamship agents' offices, its hotel and shops, and its crowds of people, there to see the *Marina* depart.

She wondered why she should be excited at the thought of Leon's return. For the five weeks of their marriage he had scarcely spoken to her; she felt sometimes that he hardly knew she was there at all. They ate together when he was in; they took their drinks on the patio, and that was all. They never walked together, or chatted, or went out visiting. Leon had never entertained, but she knew that he used to do so because Savvas had told her. The owners of other white villas scattered about the wooded hillsides were his friends, Savvas had said, and they used to come and dine. They were Greek shipowners and oil millionaires, and some of them were in the hotel business.

Altogether it had been a dull existence . . . and yet each time he went away for a few days she experienced this feeling of excitement at the thought of his return. What was she hoping for, in her subconscious? He would never even notice her, let alone show any interest in her. As for his ever coming to care.... It was an absurd thought, and yet she would daydream sometimes, allowing her threads of imagination to unwind from the tight ball of despondency which for most of the time engulfed her, and she would live in a world of ecstasy, live through that delicious interlude when on that wonderful evening he had claimed her, and kissed her with such possessiveness and passion. She had responded, sublimely unconscious of the trap into which she was stepping. The days that had followed her promise to marry him had been ones of sheer undiluted bliss, a prelude - dangerous on more than one occasion - to more rapturous delights in store.

And now, after almost six weeks of marriage, she had never known her husband.

It was inconceivable that he could remain aloof, that he never for one single moment desired her. Inconceivable because his lovemaking had been tempestuous and passionate; he had wanted her then, she felt sure. But that had been only desire for her body which, at one particular moment, was no different from that of any other woman. Had he taken her then - and she refused to dwell on whether or not she could have resisted him - it would have been merely for convenience, for the momentary satisfaction of desire.

Tara was eternally grateful that she had never been really tempted by Leon, for she never would have wanted him to take her for that reason only. Much as she wanted him now she would not have him take her without love.

He would be home late in the evening and Tara told Savvas to have the dinner ready for half-past nine. She found herself taking a long while over her toilet, and dressing with exceptional care. Her dress was long and flowing, and tight where it ought to be tight. The neckline was high, but nevertheless she wore a silver chain and a cross which her parents had bought her before they went away. In her hair, newly-washed and gleaming, she put a tiny diamante star. This and the chain and cross were her only adornments, but as she glanced at herself in the mirror she felt more than satisfied with her appearance. What was she hoping for? she asked herself again. And she suddenly realized that she was putting up a fight, a gentle feminine fight, to win her husband's love.

He had accused her of marrying him for his money; die had neither received any from him, nor asked for any. She had very little of her own, but as she bought only bare necessities it was going a long way. Surely he would soon begin to doubt the accuracy of his conviction.

That he was waiting for her to ask she had no doubt, but while ever she had a *drachma* in her purse she would manage.

He looked tired when he arrived and she commented on this. He looked at her with an odd expression before allowing his eyes to wander over her slender figure. She flushed adorably and lowered her lashes. Her lips were parted invitingly and for a long moment Leon seemed quite unable to take his eyes off her. She saw to her surprise that a muscle was working in his throat and that those black eyes gleamed with a strange and rather frightening light. She smiled, and said again that he looked tired.

'You work too hard,' she ventured shyly. 'Have a rest, Leon.'

A half-smile broke after being suspended for a while. Her eyes lit up and she held out a hand to receive the briefcase which he held.

'The dinner will be ready in about twenty minutes. You've just time to - to. ...' She allowed her voice to fade, as his arrogant brows had risen; a gesture which admonished. 'I'm sorry - I shouldn't have said that - about your having time to wash and change, I mean.'

'You didn't say it.' Cold tones and terse. 'And don't - if you know what's good for you.' And with that he went upstairs, taking the briefcase with him.

Dinner was a disappointing meal, for Leon was not only silent, but there was something about him that filled her with a strange fear. Was he human, this unfathomable Greek who held her heart unknowingly? Or was he descended from the heathen gods who ruled the Hellenes in those far-off days of paganism? His black eyes pierced her very soul, as they regarded her across the candlelit table. She had looked forward to his homecoming; now, she desired nothing more than to escape to the safety of her room, and this she did just as soon as she could. And when she got there she stood trembling by the

bed, wondering at his brooding silence and the terrifying expression in those hard unfathomable eyes. There was something different about him tonight, something which had caused her heart to beat over-rate and her nerves to become tensed and remain so for the duration of the meal.

Tears sprang to her eyes as a result of her disappointment. She had not expected any real show of friendliness, but on the other hand she had not for one moment dreamt that her husband, by his silence alone, would put such fear into her.

She got undressed at last, and put on an enchanting nightdress of fine diaphanous nylon. After brushing her hair she opened the window and stood looking out over the pine forest to the sweep of the sandy shore below. Starlight gleamed on the water of the strait, and moonlight sprinkled the hills with silver. Palms waved against a purple sky and the inevitable cicadas broke the nocturnal silence, whirring in the olive trees growing beside the dry river bed. The breeze blew cool and refreshing on her face, teasing the hair she had so vigorously brushed only a moment ago. She turned suddenly, moved rather by instinct than by sound. Leon stood in the doorway between their rooms, clad in a black dressing gown so that he did at this moment seem like Satan himself. Her heart turned a somersault as, dry-throated, she asked,

'Wh-what d-do ydu w-want?' Fear choked her - for what reason she knew not. But that all-black figure standing there was enough to frighten the bravest heart.

'Come here,' he ordered in a very soft tone, and pointed to a spot on the carpet in front of him.

She stood very still, wondering if her heart would give up, and she would fall where she was, for undoubtedly it was undergoing a tremendous strain.

'Leon,' she faltered, putting a hand to her throbbing breast, 'I don't understand. Why have you come into my room?'

'I said, come here—'

'No! You frighten m-me— Oh, *no!*' With furious strides he had reached her and she was caught by the wrist and dragged from the window alcove into the centre of the room. 'You're hurting me!'

'Who,' he said between his teeth, 'is the man you've had here while I've been away!'

CHAPTER SIX

SHE stared for a moment, conscious only of the burning fury in his eyes, and of the excruciating pain running right up her arm, the result of his merciless grip on her wrist. The man? But why should he care?

'He was a friend,' she managed, amazed at the steadiness of her voice. 'He was a friend at home, that is, and he came to visit me.' She tried to glance through the mirror, wondering if she were as white as she felt, but the tall lean figure of her husband intruded.

'Friend!' he snarled, pure savagery glaring from his eyes. 'Friend, you say! Lover, more like! To bring him here - to my house, making me the laughing-stock of the whole island—'

'No - no, you're wrong,' she began, but stopped, crying out as he gripped her bare arms and shook her so violently that she came close to losing her senses. The room swam before her eyes; the black-clad figure with the fiendish expression seemed to be on top of her, crushing the very life out of her. Oblivion would have been welcome.

She wept, and before very long great sobs shook her whole frame.

'How c-can you accuse m-me of such a th-thing?' she cried, soothingly touching the bruises on her arms as he released her. 'Ricky came to - to see m—'

'Ricky ... and who is this Ricky?' The change of tone was staggering but no less frightening. His voice was soft now, dangerously soft; the fury still burned like molten embers beneath the surface. Frantically she glanced around. If only she could escape!

'I knew h-him at home. Leon—' She stretched out her hands. 'You're frightening me. I haven't done anything wrong - believe me.' She looked at him straightly; her grey eyes, glistening with tears, were

wide and honest, but he seemed so incensed that his vision was impaired.

'You brought your lover here - to *my house*, in my absence! No sooner had I stepped foot off that boat than I was told of it! And of your throwing kisses to him as he left - a few hours before my return - a few hours—' His teeth snapping together, he took hold of her once again and shook her so ruthlessly that, almost insensible, she gripped at the front of his dressing- gown, terrified that she was going to faint. The action seemed to sober him and he stopped. But the fire in his eyes remained and, picking her up, he dropped her on to the bed. 'You can prepare yourself for another lover,' he said, and undid the girdle of his dressing- gown.

'I won't!' She sat up, and tried to get off the bed, but a hand pressed her down again. 'Leon, for pity's sake listen to me! Allow me to explain. Ricky was ill, that's why he had to st—' The rest faded, smothered by the barbaric pressure of his mouth on hers. His dark face swam before her eyes and blackness had begun to close in on her even before, with an outstretched hand, Leon snapped off the bedside lamp.

Dawn in all its Eastern glory invaded the room and she awoke, amazed to discover that she had actually slept. She turned to look at her husband's dark head against the snowy whiteness of the pillow, and her breath caught. How could that satanic creature look like this?—calm, reposed and .. . incredible as it was, innocent, like a child almost. There was relaxation where in wakefulness his face was taut; the fine lips seemed to curve, almost imperceptibly, whereas their more familiar aspect was one of firm unsmiling severity. The black heathen eyes were masked; she stared, fascinated by the long thick lashes, before her glance moved, upwards, to the peak which cut into his forehead.

Snatches of memory sent the warm blood surging into her face ... and at that very moment he opened his eyes. A hand stole up to the cheek nearest to him, but he was already smiling with sardonic amusement at her blushes. Swiftly she slid from the bed, reaching for a *neglige*. A soft laugh escaped him at her action and her cheeks became more brilliant than ever.

'Escaping, eh?' Leon hitched himself up on one elbow and regarded her with humour as she slipped into the *neglige*. 'How far do you think you can get ... if I decide to make love to you again?'

She turned her back on him, but their eyes met through the long slender mirror fixed to the wall.

'I don't suppose it would be any use trying to get very far,' she admitted with honesty.

'You're a puzzle to me, Tara.' She saw that he frowned as these unexpected words were spoken. 'Tell me about this man whom you've had here while I was away?' No humour in the voice now, nor even a hint of softness. His eyes glinted; she could see this even from where she stood. Reaching out, she took up a hairbrush from the dressing-table and used it to sweep back the hair from her face.

'He was a friend from home.' She shuddered as with a switch of memory she lived again through that dreadful scene when, last night, she had tried to explain about Ricky. Automatically she touched her mouth, then slid her fingers away and looked through the mirror, amazed that her lips were not swollen and bruised.

'Yes - he was a friend from home. Why did you invite him here without my permission?'

Slowly she turned, the brush idle in her hand.

'Do I have to ask your permission before inviting my friends here?'

'Men friends - yes.' His mouth had gone tight suddenly ; she felt a rising fear as memory once again swept in.

'As a matter of fact I didn't invite him. He decided to come over and see me.'

Leon's eyes glittered ominously and her fear mounted. Not another scene! She couldn't endure it.

'He must have been more than a friend—' Leon broke off as Tara looked straightly at him. 'All right,' in distinctly softer tones and with a touch of that sardonic amusement that had earlier edged his voice, 'I now admit he wasn't your lover. I apologize.'

Strangely, no blush rose to portray embarrassment.

'Thank you,' she said quietly and with dignity.

'You puzzle me,' he said again, and she wondered if the subject of Ricky was to be dropped. 'What sort of a girl are you?'

She began to brush her hair.

'I don't know what you mean.'

'You're so quiet, so resigned.'

'You mean, I haven't made any complaints?'

He nodded, hitching himself further up and propping the other pillow behind his head.

'And you haven't asked me for money.'

'I still have a little, that's why. Later, I shall have to ask you for some.'
Was she still fighting? A faint smile touched her lips and hovered

there. Of course she was. Last night's experience had not weakened her love, it had strengthened it, for while her husband had taken her in anger and desire, she had given herself in love, and in the end her generosity had been her own fulfilment.

'I'll make you an allowance,' he decided, but just as she was about to thank him he added, 'A man must pay for his pleasures.'

The colour did then rush to her cheeks and, her hopes and desires forgotten in the surge of anger that enveloped her, she flung the hairbrush at him. Too late he moved his head, and a frightened hand was lifted to her cheek as she saw blood spurt from the injury to his temple.

Within a second she was there, at the side of the bed, but she made no effort to stem the blood, which was running down on to the pillow.

'Oh, dear... I'm sorry--'

'Sorry?' He looked oddly at her for a long moment and then, 'Well, don't just stand there, girl! Fetch me a towel! This damned blood's going to be everywhere if I move'

'Yes—' She ran to the bathroom and grabbed a towel. 'Shall I--?'

'Give it to me.' He cleaned up his face and then glanced at the pillow. 'You'll find plasters in the other bathroom - in mine. Bring me one.'

She obeyed, watching as he fixed the plaster while she held a small hand mirror in front of him.

'I'm very sorry,' she said again, staring, not at him, but at the huge red stain on the pillow. Leon was get-ting out of bed and automatically she handed him his dressing-gown. 'You shouldn't have provoked me,' die added defensively when all he did was to stand there, looking

down at her from his towering height, his expressing a mingling of puzzlement and humour.

'Obviously I shouldn't have provoked you. I made a mistake when I said you were quiet and resigned.' She said nothing and he went on, 'I shall have to take care, it seems - a new experience for me.'

She frowned. Was he actually teasing her? It seemed very much like it.

'It wasn't a nice thing for you to say.'

'You're a puzzle to me,' he said for the third time, and left her. She stared at the closed door for a long while before, going into the bathroom, she ran the water, slipped out of her *neglige*, and got into the bath.

That same afternoon Tara felt the first small spasm of pain in her stomach and by evening she was almost doubled up as she tried to get changed for dinner. In the end she had to call out to Leon, who came instantly, stepping through the communicating door and then striding swiftly to the bed, where she now lay.

'The pain—' She put a hand to her stomach. 'It's - it's awful!'

His hand probed despite her effort to push it off.

'Can't feel anything.' He pulled down the skin beneath her eyes and gazed into them. 'What have you eaten?' he asked sharply.

'I haven't eaten anything unusual,' she answered tearfully. 'I - I can't remember.'

Dr. Antonakis arrived within ten minutes of Leon's phoning him and the first thing he said was, as he stood by the bed,

"Well, you're a nice one, Mrs. Leon! You go and get what your friend had - if you know what I mean? But you - I'm afraid you will take longer to get better. It is the bug, you see.'

'The bug? But you said my friend had food poisoning?' Her glance flickered to Leon, who was listening with keen interest, a slight frown creasing his brow.

'I did think this at the time - if you know what I mean? But now—' He threw out his hands. 'Many people on Poros, and on Hydra, they have this bug. I expect the tourists brought it, for we never have such bugs as these in Greece - if you—?'

'We, know what you mean,' interposed Leon quietly. 'So my wife will be laid up for some time? Are you saying she has something serious?'

Despite her pain Tara looked swiftly at him, wondering if she imagined it or if there really was a degree of anxiety in his voice.

'Serious? No, it is not serious, only painful. In five - six days it will go. The gentleman was better in three days, but men are stronger than women - if—?'

'Quite, doctor. You can prescribe some medicine for my wife?'

'But of course.' The beaming smile appeared as he bade Tara good day. 'I will write this medicine down for you,' he was saying to Leon as they left the room together.

'Why didn't you explain about this Ricky?' demanded Leon on re-entering the room. 'You deliberately allowed me to misjudge you!' He stopped, and, on approaching the bed, 'Forget it for the present. You must get into bed.'

Her face was white and stiff with pain; she tried to sit up, but the pain was excruciating when she moved and she dropped back again.

'I c-can't ...'

He slid his hand under her shoulders and helped her to a sitting position.

'You'll have to get into bed,' he said firmly but with a new gentleness which only later, on recalling it, she was able to appreciate. 'Can you undress yourself now?'

She nodded vaguely, then looked at him.

'If - if you will go I'll try.'

'Try now.' He tilted his head sideways; it was a sceptical gesture. 'I rather think you're going to need my help—'

'Oh, no, it isn't at all necessary—'

'—distasteful though it might be,' he continued, bypassing the interruption. "This isn't the time for worrying about modesty, my dear, and in any case, it *is* a little late.' No mockery or satire in that last remark, simply a quietly spoken statement as he began to unfasten the neck of her dress. She made no demur, so utterly exhausted did she feel. She was biting her lip hard when at last Leon pulled up the bedclothes, and she tasted blood in her mouth. She looked up into his dark face and a weak smile fluttered.

'Thank you, Leon. You were right; I couldn't have managed alone.'

The firm mouth relaxed.

'Your medicine will be here directly; Savvas has gone for it. Perhaps you'll get some relief then, and go to sleep.'

She nodded, and her eyes became fixed on the plaster on his temple.

'I'm sorry about throwing the brush at you,' she said, and his response came roughly.

'Forget it; the incident's over and done with. Are you comfortable - apart from the pain? Is your pillow all right?'

Faintly she nodded and he went out, snapping off the main light and leaving only the bedside lamp. She felt oddly happy in spite of her pain.

Leon came up often during the next five days and when on the sixth day she was able to get up he actually carried her downstairs and laid her gently on the couch in the sitting-room. His manner during her illness had awakened a measure of hope within her. He might never ever come to care as deeply as she, Tara thought, but he could just reach the stage where he had a small amount of affection for her. Such a lot she had learned about him recently, things that pointed to the prospect of a happy life, if only she *could* make him care a little. She had learned that although he possessed those savage pagan traits which had so terrified her, he also possessed traits of sympathy and gentleness; he had been anxious about her, especially on the third day when he had been so ill as to be scarcely conscious. Never a word had he spoken that could hurt; the matter of Ricky might never have occurred.

'Yes,' he said with a satisfied glance as he made her comfortable on the couch, 'you're more yourself today.'

'I feel fine.'

'I wouldn't go as far as to say you look fine,' he observed unsmilingly. 'You've lost a lot of weight for one thing. You're as light as a doll.'

And she had felt like a doll as he carried her carefully down the stairs. She had felt helpless, too ... and she had liked the feeling enormously.

It was now late September and often she would wonder if Paul had been given control of his money. Not that she now had any intention of leaving her husband. But she would like to know how Paul was faring. And one day, when Leon had taken her out to lunch at the Sirena Island Hotel, after they had sunbathed on the beach, she plucked up sufficient courage to ask,

'Paul .. . did you decide to let him have control of his money?' Immediately she had spoken she regretted it. For the first frown she had seen for over a fortnight appeared, to darken Leon's forehead. During the past week he had given her practically all his attention, making her eat, taking her to the beach, or across the water to Galata or Troezen. He had kept her company when she was in the garden during the mornings; he had never gone off to dine with friends. In fact, he seemed to enjoy being with her and the happiness which this produced was often reflected in her expression, and on these occasions a strange flickering of her husband's eyes would tell her of his puzzlement and she would open her mouth to blurt out the truth, then close it again, thinking of the harm she could do to Paul.

'Why should you be interested in Paul and his money?' he inquired softly, and she bit her lip.

'I shouldn't have asked you, Leon. Please forget it.'

'That doesn't answer me, Tara,' he rejoined with a slight tightening of his mouth.

She went a trifle pale. How easily his change of mood could affect her! She was dejected all at once.

'Paul was - was so short of money—' She broke off as his brows shot up. Then, shrugging, she went on, 'He told me this, and said he was

hoping to have his money when he was twenty-one. I did mention this to you at first, if you remember?'

Leon toyed with his consomme. Tara was more concerned with getting rid of the blockage in her throat caused by dismay.

'I don't recall your mentioning that he was short of money,' he commented softly at last, and she remembered her own anger at his saying that Paul had a more than adequate allowance. 'Paul told you this?'

After a snail hesitation she had to admit that Paul had done so. Of course, she refrained from mentioning the fact that she *knew* Paul had been short of money; otherwise he would never have been driven to answering her advertisement.

'In my opinion Paul had a generous allowance,' Leon said stiffly at length. 'As for the question of his having control of his money - I haven't yet made up my mind.'

Tara left it at that, changing the subject in an attempt to bring her husband back to his more friendly mood. She succeeded, but somehow she knew she had lost ground by her impulsive decision to ask about Paul's money. She felt flat and her appetite had gone, despite the excellence of the lobster Thermidor and Gruyere cheese and the delicious Greek *rose* they drank with their lunch.

But that night Leon came into her room, this being the first occasion since her illness, and only the second occasion since their marriage. He was in black again, but this time she knew no fear, only pleasurable excitement, and her smile told him he was welcome. His kisses were deliriously masterful while at the same time being thrillingly gentle; his arms were strong around her yet lacking the ruthlessness of that previous occasion.

And once again her generosity proved to be her own fulfilment.

A week later he had to go to Athens; she had hoped he would invite her to go with him, but was disappointed. He would be away a week, he said - and dropped a light kiss on her cheek as she stood on the step to see him off.

'Take care,' he said a little sternly. 'I don't want to come -back and find you've been catching a bug again.'

For all her disappointment at not being asked to accompany her husband to the capital, Tara was inordinately happy, and frequently she found herself dreaming of the time when a reasonably pleasant state of companionship would develop between Leon and herself. It never dawned on her that, being a Greek, he would be almost sure to have a pillow friend; she sublimely imagined herself to be the only woman in his life - at least, at the present time. It had occurred to her that he must have had women; after he had made love to her she had no doubts about this at all, for one could not learn an art like that without practice.

The girl was Greek, and beautiful in a rather worldly sort of way in that she appeared to have just emerged from the most exclusive - and expensive - beauty salon in Paris or London. She was sitting in the lounge when Tara returned from a stroll on the beach. Savvas had met Tara half-way along the path, looking decidedly put out and agitated. There was a visitor waiting, he said, and although Tara asked who this visitor was she could not get any more out of Savvas.

He just repeated what he had already said and made a hasty departure towards the back of the villa.

The girl was sitting comfortably on the couch, one slender leg crossed over the other, a long cigarette holder between her fingers. Insolent eyes travelled over Tara from head to foot, taking in the tousled hair

and the plain cotton dress, the walking sandals filmed with dust, for the road leading from the beach was unpaved. The other girl had come by taxi, Savvas had said.

'Who are you?' Tara broke the silence, her head lifting high at the girl's insolent expression. 'Do you want my husband?'

'Husband!' The girl's teeth snapped together. Clearly she was fighting down an inner fury. 'No, not at the moment. In any case, he isn't here; Savvas tells me he's in Athens.'

'Who are you?' inquired Tara again, and was told the girl's name was Helena Komitas, and that she lived on the island of Aegina.

'Leon was with me just under three weeks ago and he never said a word about being married. How long *has* he been married?'

The colour drained from Tara's face.

'He was with you - on Aegina?' He had not said where he was going - he never had until this time - but somehow Tara had gained the impression that he was going to a business conference in Athens. He had been away five days, she recalled, so he could have been in Athens for part of the time.

'Of course. He is often with me on Aegina.'

'Often? Why sh-should he be with you - often?'

Straight, pencilled eyebrows shot up.

'Don't be obtuse,' snapped the girl. 'I've yet to discover an innocent English girl. For Leon to marry one of them! It isn't possible - he hates them! I asked how long you've been married!'

'Nearly two months.' Dazedly Tara shook her head. 'I don't understand. What are you trying to tell me?' Her mouth trembled and her eyes were far too bright. Her little tower of hope was collapsing already on its weak foundations.

An impatient click of Helena's tongue was Tara's only answer for a space and then, with flagrant disregard of delicacy,

'I'm his pillow friend, and have been for over three years!'

Shocked by this admission, even though she had guessed at Helena's relationship with Leon, Tara just stared dumbly at the girl who, for all her suppressed fury, wore an expression of triumph. It was plain that, having heard of Leon's marriage, she had deliberately come here to try and break it up.

'His p-pillow friend?' she repeated dully at last. 'And he was with you three weeks ago?'

It required no calculations to work out that he had come straight from the girl to her, Tara, and she felt quite sick. He hadn't meant to come to her, it was true; he'd done it only because of his blind fury at being told that his wife had had a man staying at the villa in his absence. No, he hadn't meant to come to her, but that fact could not mitigate the offence.

'He stayed with me,' Helena was saying, and she added with a sneer, 'Obviously he preferred me to you - new as his marriage is! But he'll have to be satisfied with you from now on, or else find another pillow friend - for I'm finished!'

White to the lips, Tara said quiveringly,

'As you appear to have said all there is to say,

perhaps I can get Savvas to show you out?'

Helena's dark eyes narrowed malevolently, and the cigarette holder suddenly snapped in her fingers.

'How dare you! I'm used to being here - I've slept here, dozens of times! How dare you order me out!'

Tara was already ringing the bell. In a voice that amazed her by its steadiness she told Savvas to show Helena out.

'But she wants a taxi,' said Savvas, evidently having been informed of this prior to Tara's appearance. 'Miss Helena will wait here until it arrives, I think?'

Tara's eyes blazed.

'Do as I say,' she ordered angrily. 'Show the woman out!'

'Yes, madam—' Savvas beckoned to Helena, his manner almost cringing as he glanced at Tara again. 'If you will please come this way?' he said to Helena, who had no option than to leave. Standing by the window, her heart racing and her nerves all to pieces, Tara watched the rather mincing steps of the Greek woman as she walked uncomfortably along the dusty lane, its surface covered with small but dangerous little boulders. Her figure was voluptuous, her black shirt tight where it ought not to be tight. What a disgusting creature, thought Tara. But she had heard of these women. Having finished with Leon, she would go into Athens and find another 'protector'.

Finished. ... Perhaps Leon would not wish to finish with her. Perhaps he and she would make it up - once she, Tara, had left the island. For she now meant to leave; she could never bear Leon near her after learning that he had stayed with Helena since his marriage.

Perhaps he considered he had a perfect right to seeing that his marriage was not normal, but this was not the way Tara looked at things, for to her marriage was sacred no matter what the

circumstances under which it had taken place. Leon had fallen in her estimation and she felt she could never respect him again as long as she lived. What he had done before his marriage - yes, she was willing to admit that it had nothing at all to do with her, but to stay with Helena after his marriage. ...

The more she dwelt on it the more unbelievable it seemed, and yet she could not doubt the Greek girl's word. If Leon hadn't been with her three weeks ago then how would she have known he was away from home? He must have been with her; there was full proof of it.

The figure of Helena disappeared round a bend in the lane and Tara turned from the window. Savvas knocked on the door and stiffly she told him to enter.

'Madam Leon, I am sorry,' he began. 'I did not mean to offend you, but Miss Helena said I must call a taxi when she told me to.'

'That's all right.' She waved him away, humiliated at his knowledge. 'You can go.'

'Yes, madam.' He paused. 'I did tell Miss Helena - when she telephoned - that Mr. Leon was away from home, but she came just the same. I did not expect her to do this.'

Tara's eyes opened wide.

'She telephoned? When?'

'Yesterday, madam. And as soon as I heard her voice I said my master was not at home.'

'What did she say then?'

'A strange thing, Madam Leon. She said she knew he was not at home. She wanted to know if you were at home.'

Tara frowned.

'She knew Mr. Leon was not at home. Are you sure?'

'Quite sure. It was you she wanted to see, madam.'

'Thank you, Savvas.'

'Shall I bring your tea in now, madam?'

She nodded.

'I'll have it on the patio.'

So Helena knew Leon was not at home. It was his wife she wanted to see. This made it even more clear that Helena had come solely to break up the marriage; she had come to inform her, Tara, that Leon had stayed with her on Aegina three weeks ago. Tara wondered from where Helena had received the information that Leon was at present away from home, then decided it did not matter. Nothing was changed; the marriage was ended as far as Tara was concerned.

CHAPTER SEVEN

ALTHOUGH her decision was definitely made, Tara soon realized that she would have to wait a while before leaving her husband. She was thinking solely of her parents, from whom she had received a letter only the day previously. They were happy because of her marriage. Her mother, who had done the writing - though the letter was signed by both Tara's parents - said how thankful she was that Tara was comfortably settled, as the broken engagement had been a great worry to them for they felt she must have been broken-hearted. Her meeting Leon proved that everything happened for the best, her mother went on, as he was obviously meant for her, and not Ricky, who was shallow, as things had turned out.

No, decided Tara, she must wait; she had no intention of upsetting her parents just yet. The blow would have to come, of course, but it was too soon to deliver it yet.

There was no eager anticipation of Leon's return this time; in fact, she would have preferred him to stay away much longer, dull as was life at the villa, with only herself for company. She felt she could not bear to look at him, much less talk to him and be friendly. Not that, she would have to be friendly, she thought. Once she had told him of Helena's visit he surely would not expect her to be friendly.

But it was to transpire that she made yet another decision: she received a letter from Paul begging her to use her influence with Leon, for as the position was at present his brother refused to budge on the matter of the inheritance. His last word had been that Paul must wait until he was twenty-five.

'I can't go on like this, in penury, for another five years,' Paul wrote. 'I shall go to one money-lender after another; I shall borrow from everywhere, but I'm not living like this. Please, Tara, do something for me. You promised you would, and I'm sure you must have tried,

but please try again, and again, until Leon relents. It's my own money, after all, and I should be able to have access to it....'

On reading this Tara felt utterly drained and depressed. What must she do? But there was only one answer so why question herself? She must try to help Paul. Yes, even though she had earlier resolved not to tease herself with the wretched matter any more, she knew she must do all in her power to help the boy. Why Leon should adopt this dictatorial attitude was beyond her. He must know that the allowance made was inadequate, in spite of his denials. It was all very puzzling, with Paul on the one hand declaring bitterly that his brother allowed him a mere pittance, while Leon maintained the allowance was adequate. It was also very puzzling that Leon refused to drop the reins altogether, giving Paul what was his by rights. It must be his innate sense of mastery and domination, Tara decided. He wanted to retain his superior position for as long as possible, that was the only feasible explanation.

If she was to succeed in helping Paul, then she must keep on the right side of her husband, create a relationship where she could eventually use her powers of persuasion to some advantage. In order to do this she would have to avoid the showdown over Helena, and if she followed this course she must then resign herself to being a proper wife to Leon because he was now expecting this. Yes, it was the only way - but once Leon relinquished those reins then he would be told more than *one* truth!

It was only to be expected that she held a little aloof from him, in spite of her newly-made resolutions, since the vision of Helena was always there before her eyes. When they dined together Tara imagined him dining intimately with his Greek mistress; when he took her arm while they walked she saw him doing the same with Helena, and even when he made love to her she was tortured by her imagination and in

consequence she gave him the impression that she was extending favours reluctantly.

'What's wrong with you?' he asked one morning when, because the strain was becoming too much to bear, she answered him sharply and impatiently. 'Are you ill or something?'

Swiftly she shook her head, remembering her promise to help Paul, a promise she had made again in her reply to his letter.

'No, of course not. I'm sorry,' she added, giving him a smile. He shook his head in puzzlement.

'It isn't often that a woman has me beaten,' he said in short and even tones. 'But you, Tara, are the one woman whom I fail to understand.' They were in the garden, Leon having donned overalls and gloves to prune the large bed of roses which ran along one side of the terrace. Tara was watching him, but now and then she would gingerly pick up one of the branches and put it in the wheelbarrow by her side.

'You talk as if you've known a great many women,' she couldn't help saying, her thoughts flying to Helena, Helena, who lived: on the island of Aegina, not very far away.

'What do you call a great many?' Leon slanted her a look before bending over the rose bush again.

A shrug and spread of hands and then,

'I don't know - half a dozen, perhaps.'

A low laugh reached her ears.

'You call that a great many?'

She stared.

'Don't you?'

'These days - when women are cheap?' He shook his head. 'Half a dozen's nothing.'

Stooping, she gathered two or three branches together and picked them up.

'And supposing a woman had half a dozen men?'

Silence. His head came up at length.

'What is this conversation all about, might I ask?'

'I expect we've nothing else to talk about.'

He looked frowningly at her.

'Something's happened to you,' he said. 'I believe I've married a woman of moods.'

'These women,' she persisted, ignoring this. 'Did - did you ever have a special one?'

His frown deepened.

'What does it matter?'

'I was curious, that's all. I don't understand this side of a man's nature. If he has lots of women, then surely one stands out above all the rest?'

'Of course. That's the one he marries, usually.'

She almost dropped the branches.

'Wh-what did you say?'

'You heard me.' But he added, as if he were making a small self-protecting move, 'Don't get me wrong, though. You know very well why I married you.'

Her spirits sank down again.

'To save Paul,' she murmured, and he replied without hesitation,

'Yes, to save Paul.'

'But... you're not sorry you married *me*?' A subtle move, this, timed well, she thought. Get him in a good mood over Paul and she might be able to extricate herself from this position which was becoming almost unbearable.

'I haven't had sufficient time to decide.'

'Oh!...'

'I have an idea you're wanting something, Tara. It would be much simpler to say just what it is?'

She blushed and stooped again, acclaiming as a thorn pierced her finger.

'Leon, it's Paul. I feel that he might do something rash if he's kept short of money.' She stopped, straightening up; he did likewise and she tilted her head to note his expression.

'Rash?' he echoed crisply. 'What gives you that idea?'

She hesitated, floundering, because words of diplomacy eluded her.

'I g-guessed - from his last letter.'

'Paul writes to you?'

'Of course. There's nothing wrong in that.'

But Leon's black eyes smouldered. He bent down and the secateurs snipped viciously at a thick side- shopfry.

'And what has he been saying to cause you to form the impression that he might do something rash?'

She could not tell him, of course, and so she said,

'Nothing definite, Leon—' She averted her head swiftly, because of the searching depths of those black eyes, and the look in them that frightened her. Why had she ever wanted him to love her? she wondered. ' life would so often be unpleasant with a man who could change his mood so quickly - change from a most attractive one to one so fiendishly formidable that it terrified Not that she was terrified just now, but she had been, and it was not an experience she would wish to go through again. 'I know how it is at a university, though. If a young man is short of money, he might be tempted to - to - well, go to a moneylender, for instance.'

Leon stared at her bent head for a space, then tilted it up, not very gently.

'Has my brother actually hinted that he will go to a moneylender?' he asked in tones of soft but dangerous intensity.

'No - no, of course not,' she answered nervously and with haste. 'No, it was just that—' She broke off, and he prompted softly,

'Yes, Tara?'

'Nothing,' she replied desperately, vowing never again to broach the subject. Paul would just have to manage his own affairs. 'Forget it, please.'

His eyes narrowed. She felt her heart thud most unnaturally, and it was a relief when at last he took his hand away.

'In your opinion,' he said, ignoring her plea to let the matter drop, 'I should give Paul complete control of his money?'

She coughed to clear her throat.

'He *is* twenty-one,' she ventured. 'That's considered a quite mature age in my country.'

'Mature?' for the moment diverted. 'His infatuation for you and his eagerness to marry you is illustrative enough of Ins maturity, or, I should say, his immaturity. Five minutes after he had lost you he'd got Over it. Do you consider such conduct consistent with maturity?'

She stared at him, wanting to laugh, as she had wanted to on another occasion. She supposed the time would come when she really would laugh, would consider the whole situation as comical, not ironical, as she did at this present moment, ironical because the act which was supposed to prove Paul capable of handling his own money, was the very one which, in Leon's opinion, proved him still to be immature. And indeed Tara in all fairness could not blame Leon, since what he said was true. Paul had got over his infatuation immediately - but what Leon didn't know was that there had never been any infatuation. Perhaps it would have been more strategic if Paul had adopted the attitude of broken-hearted lover.

'I suppose, on the surface, he did seem immature,' she said at last, aware that Leon was waiting for some comment from her.

'And yet you're of the opinion that he can handle a very large fortune?'

She shook her head.

'I don't know - please let's not talk about it!'

'You brought it up,' he reminded her curtly.

'There seems to be a great deal I don't understand.'

'There is,' was Leon's swift retort. 'And therefore you should keep out of the affair.' This was final; she bent again and began gathering up the shoots which Leon had snipped off.

This attitude of Leon's let her out, she decided in all fairness to herself. She had done her best and could do no more. She wrote and told Paul this and by return of post received the information that Paul had in fact started going to moneylenders again - or financiers, as he now called them - and that he was being threatened with court proceedings unless he paid the interest immediately. Tara's first suspicions were then born. Was Paul gambling? If so, and if Leon suspected this, then his adamant attitude would be explained. She sent off to Paul all the money she had, which was not an inconsiderable sum, as Leon had been more than generous with the allowance. However, she had had only the one up till now as he had arranged for her to have it at the end of each month. She warned Paul to be careful with the money as she could not give him any more.

Unfortunately for her she needed to have her hair done, and a manicure, as Leon was inviting a few friends over to dine with them.

'I'm going into Athens that day,' he told Tara, 'and you can come with me and go off and have your hair done while I see to the business I'm going for.'

Filled with consternation, for she had received her allowance only a week previously, she had to confess that it was all gone, and ask him to lend her some money until the end of the month. He looked questioningly at her, which was understandable, since he knew very well she hadn't been anywhere to spend the money.

'You've got through all that?' he said disbelievingly. 'It isn't possible.'

'I'm afraid it is,' she faltered, furious with Paul, but more furious with herself for sending him the whole lot. It had been sheer stupidity, but at that time she could not foresee herself requiring any money.

Leon eyed her with suspicion and she felt her colour deepening.

'It's none of my business, I know,' he said quietly, 'but do you mind telling me what you've spent it on?'

She shook her head distractedly. His eyes fell on her hands and she stopped twisting them about.

'I c-can't remember....'

'Can't remember?' he echoed in amazement. 'You've had your money only a week and you can't remember what you've done with it? What sort of a fool do you take me for?'

She sagged and owned at last that she had sent it to Paul. The information would infuriate him, she thought, and she was right.

'You—' His teeth snapped together. 'You sent the whole lot to Paul?'

'Yes - don't be angry, Leon - I - I didn't expect to b-be needing it.' Tears of mortification sprang to her eyes. Why didn't she stand up to this man? she asked herself angrily. If she went on like this he'd have her in complete submission in no time at all.

He came close, and towered above her; she thought he would shake her, for undoubtedly he was in one of his furies, and she steeled herself for the onslaught. To her relief it did not come. But he gave her such a lecture that in the end she found herself brushing tears from her cheeks.

'Dare to do it again,' he thundered, glowering at her. 'Just you dare send him money and by God you'll wish you hadn't. What I give him

is adequate - *adequate*! Do I have to repeat that even yet again - or shall I knock it into you!

Automatically she stepped back, shaking her head vigorously.

'I won't ever send him money again,' she promised, white to the lips. 'I didn't kn-know he - he had enough.'

'I've told you he has enough - more than once! And while we're about it you can show me the letters he's sent to you!'

'I've destroyed them!' she cried, not daring to look at him while she voiced the deliberate untruth. 'I always do destroy letters once I've read them.'

His swift sceptical intake of breath was sufficient to inform her that he knew she had lied, but he obviously knew also that he was unable to force her to give him the letters, so he allowed the matter to drop.

Drained and exhausted by the scene, she went up to her bedroom and remained there until the evening. When she came down to dinner Leon was already at the table. He had obviously been going to start without her, a circumstance that hurt out of all proportion. And yet why should she allow herself to be hurt? She had made plans, plans which would take her a long way from her husband, and from Greece, and this tiny island in the sun, enchanting Poros with its hills and forests, its lovely little harbour that was in effect its own private sea. She would miss it, and everything she had come to love about it; she would miss Leon, and the tempestuous nature of his that could both thrill and terrify. But she meant to go; she knew she must go, now that she had learned of his staying with Helena since his marriage.

Feeling that she might never visit Athens again - apart from going there to get the plane for home - Tara decided not to allow her dejection to mar her visit. She enjoyed it all, right from boarding

the *Marina* with Leon very early in the morning, up till the time when she stepped off it again in the early evening.

The boat docked at Piraeus from where they took a taxi to the city. Leon left her then, arranging to meet her at three o'clock in Piraeus. She had made an appointment and she was out of the hairdressers by half- past twelve. The first person she saw on emerging into the busy thoroughfare was Androula who, having no lectures that day, was doing some shopping. She was loaded with parcels and exciting-looking carrier bags, and after the two girls had greeted each other, having got over their surprise, Tara couldn't help saying,

'You must be well off. You look as if you've spent a fortune.'

Androula grimaced.

'I have, as a matter of fact. Good thing Leon doesn't see what my allowance goes on. He'd be sure to say it was all rubbish - you know how stuffy he is—' She stopped, looking decidedly comical in her dismay. 'Forgive me, Tara; I quite forgot for the moment that you're his wife.' She stopped again and then, 'You know what I mean, don't you?'

'Of course,' laughed Tara, happy at meeting her sister-in-law like this. She tentatively asked if Androula had had her lunch and on receiving a negative reply invited her to lunch with her.

T know of a good place where you get Greek food/ said Androula, and instantly called a taxi.

Tara was still wondering about the allowance and she was just pondering how to broach the subject again when she was saved the trouble by Androula's bringing a very expensive evening bag from one of the carriers and saying,

'Do you think it's worth nine hundred drachmae? Leon wouldn't mind, I think. He doesn't like me to buy inferior things - not things like this. I've bought shoes to match - there's a dance at the university on Saturday, you see. I haven't been able to find a dress yet, but if we don't take too long over lunch then you can help me choose one. You haven't to meet Leon until three, you said?'

That's right.' She hesitated a minute. 'Paul - does he get as large an allowance as you?'

'He gets more, and it's not fair! Leon says it's because he's older, but I say it's because he's a *male*! Males are treated differently from females here!'

'No one would really notice this where you are concerned,' declared Tara with a laugh. 'You're very different from the meek little village girls.'

'I'm fortunate in my birth,' Androula admitted. 'Those little things you mention have a pretty grim life: early marriage, babies, work, premature ageing - it's not like your country, Tara.' She was bringing out a dainty hand-embroidered blouse, holding it up for Tara to see. The price ticket was still on it and Tara gave an involuntary gasp. Androula laughed delightedly and the next moment had told Tara the amount of her monthly allowance. 'Paul gets half as much again. Now do you think that's fair?'

'You get all that?' breathed Tara, 'and Paul receives even more?'

Androula shrugged carelessly.

'Paul must have told you that we're disgustingly rich? - or perhaps Leon has - no, he won't have, because he never mentions money if he can help it.'

'Paul seems not to be as good a manager as you.'

'Good!' Androula stopped to bang on the window,

indicating to the taxi-driver that he should have turned left. 'He's the rottenest manager in the world! He's always in debt, I can't think what he does with his money, and he won't tell me. He wrote to me last week trying to borrow two thousand drachmae, but I wouldn't lend him ten! - because I know very well I'd never get it back.'

The taxi-driver had corrected his mistake and was now slowing down. Androula collected up her parcels, helped by Tara, who paid the driver from money borrowed from her husband. She could not help thinking with disgust of the money she had sent on to Paul. How she had misjudged Leon ! He knew what he was doing when he refused to allow the boy his inheritance. And Paul's father must have put his whole trust in Leon, knowing he'd never let him down. To think she had taken in everything Paul had told her, condemning the dictatorial brother whom she had never met. She had lent herself to Paul's plan - and landed herself in this mess! And it had all been lies on Paul's part, lies that had led Tara to this point in her life where all she could see was a broken marriage. She could willingly have strangled the boy!

'Thanks a lot for a lovely lunch!' Androula was saying as she stood by the taxi which was taking Tara to the port. 'And thanks for helping with the dress. My boy-friend will love it!'

'You have a boy-friend?' The driver opened the door and Tara got in.

'I have several - but don't tell Leon. He's still of the opinion that a girl mustn't go out with boys. She must come to her husband never having been kissed. If he knew one half he'd have a dreadful shock! But I'm clever. 'Bye! See you at Christmas!'

Leon was at the quay; he looked appreciatively at her hair and said a word of approval.

'I met Androula,' she told him as they boarded the boat. 'She had no lectures today, so she was out shopping.'

'No lectures?' sharply. 'I'd rather believe she'd skipped them!'

'Oh, no! I'm sure she wouldn't.' Tara felt convinced that if Androula had skipped her lectures she would most certainly have asked Tara to keep quiet about their meeting.

'Wouldn't?' with a lift of one eyebrow. 'You don't know Androula. She thinks I don't either,' he went on to add, but in a voice slightly edged with humour. 'The trouble with both those children is that they underrate other people's intelligence.'

So he wasn't totally hoodwinked by Androula after all. But Tara was sure that he knew nothing about all these boy-friends she had.

The boat was leaving the quay and Tara and Leon stood by the rail. It was a beautifully clear day with the sea like a pond. Leon's arm slid around her as he pointed something out to a man at her side who had put a question to her husband in Greek. She quivered at the contact, even though she knew it had been an automatic move on Leon's part. She missed it when his arm was withdrawn. But as she turned to him he smiled at her, in a gentle sort of way, and she was happy, forgetting everything except the lovely day she had had and that she had learned that Leon wasn't such a martinet after all, that he was perfectly right in withholding Paul's money until he was twenty-five.

The dinner at night was a fitting end to the day; the two couples lived in gleaming white villas on the hills above the harbour and had been friends of Leon for years. Both men, and one of the women, were Greeks, the other, Grace, being English. She had married Takis a year ago, having met him when she was on holiday in Poros.

'We never thought Leon would marry an English girl, though,' she said when she and Tara found themselves together on the couch, a

little apart from the others. 'His two cousins had rotten experiences - but perhaps you know?' Grace was tall and beautiful in a film star kind of way, her ash-blonde hair being coiffured so immaculately that not a strand was out of place. It was drawn away from her face, then taken up to form a bun on top of her head. Her dress was long and slinky and she wore rather more jewellery than was compatible with good taste. Her husband was one of the oil millionaires who had come to the lovely island to settle, away from the bustle of the mainland. Tara liked her enormously and when Grace declared that they would become friends she felt a small pang of regret that this would not be so. But she agreed to go over to Grace's home the following day and spend the afternoon with her, Leon having already told her he would be going away on business and would not be back until the following day.

Similar to Leon's home, the villa was spacious and luxuriously appointed, with grounds sweeping right down the hillside. Grace presided like a queen, telling Tara that they had no less than five servants.

'Five?' blinked Tara, looking round and feeling she could have managed the place all on her own, for the carpets were all fitted and everything was ultramodern. 'We have just a married couple, as you know. We have two gardeners, though.'

We have three. But it's only for prestige value. The five in the house have a marvellous time.'

'I suppose it's a good thing that you employ so many; the people here are quite poor, I think?'

'The locals are, yes.' Grace poured tea: from a silver pot, and passed a matching sugar basin over to Tara. 'Leon is more modest than us - than most wealthy Greeks in fact. Usually when a Greek is rich he likes to let everyone know - he flaunts his wealth. But Leon's never

been like that.' She gave a small laugh. 'You'll have to educate him. It's nice to have lots of servants round you.'

'I like it just as it is,' Tara smiled, helping herself to sugar, and she added unthinkingly, 'Leon wouldn't make any alterations anyway - not just because I wanted them.'

'No, I don't expect he would.' Grace looked curiously at Tara. 'Leon's a little too masterful a type for me. Takis is easy-going; it's anything for a quiet life. Whatever I say goes.'

'I thought all Greek men were - er - bossy?'

'Most are, but not my Takis. I wouldn't have married him if he had been. I enjoy having all my own way.'

Unconsciously a smile fluttered to Tara's lips. Grace saw it and gave a small grimace, saying it was easy to read Tara's thoughts. She went slightly red and Grace laughed.

'Frankly, I never thought Leon would get married at all,' she said. 'I didn't think there was a woman brave enough to take him on.'

'Brave?' But yes, thought Tara instantly, one would have to be brave to marry anyone like Leon. Her own bravery had been an unconscious thing, though, overshadowed by her love.

'Yes, brave. He's handsome, I'll admit - but the devil himself looks out from those black eyes!'

Tara had to laugh, even though she gave a little inward shudder at the recollection of that night when she herself could very well have believed it was the devil who stood there, and then had subjected her to such violence.

'I think they're most unusual - and attractive,' she confessed, lifting the fine china cup to her lips.

'Certainly unusual and certainly attractive, but—' Grace shook her head. 'Not for me. I actually think I'd be scared of him.'

Tara gave another laugh. But it was all for Grace's benefit, including the words,

'Scared? Nonsense! Leon's only a man ... like any other.'

'If you think so,' shrugged Grace, and passed Tara the biscuits.

The afternoon sped and at last Tara said she must be moving.

'Leon's away until tomorrow,' she said, and to her surprise Grace nodded.

'Yes, I know. I took Takis to the boat this morning- he's in Athens today - and Leon was there, buying a ticket for Aegina. The man asked him if he wanted a day return and Leon said no, he wasn't coming back until tomorrow.'

Leon on Aegina. And staying the night. Had Helena changed her mind about giving him up? Tara asked herself as she walked blindly along the drive towards the road. It seemed like it - for otherwise she would have written to him, telling him all was over between them. But how would she receive him now that she had visited his wife, and told her everything? And what of Leon's state of mind when he learned from Helena that his wife knew all? He must surely consider it strange that she had not murmured one word about it. Suddenly it struck Tara with definite conviction that once Helena realized that Tara had kept silent about her visit to Poros, then Helena herself would also refrain from mentioning it. Tara was later to learn that this conclusion was correct, for on his return Leon was to make no

reference to it and it seemed that he was still in ignorance of the Greek girl's visit and her intention of breaking up his marriage.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TARA stood on the verandah watching the ever- changing pattern of light and shade as the sun sank below the rim of the sea. Leon had said he would be in on the six o'clock boat; it was now half-past nine and Savvas had been keeping the dinner hot for well over an hour.

Broodingly, she turned into the room behind her, a deep sigh escaping her as she sank into the cushions on the couch. She was destined to be unlucky in love; this she accepted with fatalistic conviction as she dwelt first on Ricky and the way he had let her down, and then on Leon, who, having captured her heart in no time at all, was also letting her down. Helena had said she was having nothing more to do with him, but obviously they had had an assignment. Leon had stayed with her last night; she hadn't sent him away, for if this were the case he would have returned last evening. Was he staying again tonight? Suddenly Tara was overwhelmed by an inferiority complex. Both Ricky and Leon had found other women more attractive and desirable than she. With Leon, it served her right. Hadn't she vowed, after being let down by Ricky, that she was finished with men for ever? She should have kept that vow in mind from the very moment of meeting Leon, when she was almost immediately affected by the power of his magnetism.

Gradually, as the lonely silent minutes passed, Tara's dejection was replaced by anger and had it been possible she would have packed her clothes and left Poros at once, thereby subjecting Leon to humiliation, for he would be faced with having to tell his friends that his wife had left him. But of course she was unable to leave at this time of the night, and the more she brooded on the prospect of leaving the more impossible and fraught with difficulties such an action seemed to become. True, her obligation towards Paul was no longer a restraining factor, simply because he had from the beginning misled her over the matter of the allowance. But there were other factors, chief among them being the hurt which a separation would inflict on

her parents. Then there was the humiliating prospect of Stewart's I told you so', and the even more humiliating picture of Ricky's satisfaction, and the astonishment of her friends, who would all say, as Stewart had said, that she had married on the rebound ... married in haste on being jilted. No, she would not subject herself to all this - but how was she to live with her husband while he was at the same time having an affair with Helena?

Her anger had faded by the time Leon did arrive, and a new dignity had taken full possession. She would treat him with such cool indifference that he would very soon decide she was better left to her own devices. This would do very well until, some more time having passed, she was able to leave him without creating too much gossip, or inflicting too much hurt on her parents. After all, many marriages broke up after a couple of years or so— A couple of years! Must she stay that long? Tears sprang to her eyes. It would be utter agony to live in the same house with Leon and there be nothing between them and, in addition, to be forced to carry the knowledge that he was regularly visiting Helena on the island of Aegina.

He entered the room where she sat, and stood for a strange and prolonged moment in the doorway, staring intently at her, his expression an unreadable mask, yet behind it Tara sensed, much to her puzzlement, a darkling look, and censorious. There was no indication that he had learned of Helena's visit.

Pale-faced but composed, she stood up.

'You're very late. I'm afraid you'll find that the meal is spoiled.'

'I was kept longer than I expected.' Her swift glance of contempt was lost on him as, closing the door behind him, he took a few long and easy strides which brought him into the middle of the room. His briefcase was tossed on to the couch and there was a most strange

inflection in his tone as he said, 'You're pale, Tara. Is something the matter?'

She shook her head, an automatic gesture.

'I'm perfectly all right,' she lied. 'What could be the matter?'

The dark eyes flickered with a strange unfathomable light.

'In that case, my dear, we'll get down to our meal at once. Give me ten minutes or so to wash and change and then tell Savvas to serve it up.'

'Did - did you have a successful visit to Athens?' she was inquiring coolly when, after dinner, they sat on the patio drinking coffee by the reflected light from shaded wall lamps in the room behind.

'As usual,' casually as he lifted his cup to his lips. 'I conducted the business which I went there to conduct.'

She lowered her eyes, for of a certainty she must give herself away, revealing to him her knowledge that he had-not been in Athens at all, but on the island of Aegina.

'I expect you'll be going again very soon?'

Quite suddenly, and solely from instinct, since she was still avoiding his gaze, Tara knew that anger surged within him - unfathomable anger, as she could think of no reason for it. Certainly her comment could not have sparked it off. His voice, low and finely- modulated as usual, came after a pause which seemed to carry an order for her to look at him. But she resolutely kept her head averted.

'Why should you expect that?'

Taken aback slightly, she floundered about for an answer.

'You appear to have a good deal of business in the city,' she managed at last, and she did then glance up. Leon limited his response to the merest hint of a nod, while his dark eyes narrowed and she had the impression that he was keeping some impulse in check only by the greatest effort. Without doubt there was something odd about his manner this evening - had been since the moment he had come into the sitting-room an hour or so earlier, and stood by the door, regarding her intently for a long moment before entering. Her mind leapt for one fleeting moment to the possibility that Helena had in fact mentioned her visit to Poros and the meeting between her and his wife, but instantly this was dismissed. Had Helena changed her mind, and confessed, then Leon would have mentioned it long before this. And he would not have asked, on entering the sitting-room, if anything was the matter. He would have known what was the matter! - and been prepared for a scene. A scene? Tara gritted her teeth. He would have the scene - yes, sure enough he would have it - just as soon as she decided to leave him! True,' he murmured at length in reply to her comment. 'But it will be some weeks before I have to go into Athens again.'

Her eyes widened .. . while his narrowed even more, so that they became mere slits.

'Some weeks?' she echoed disbelievingly. Surely Helena, having decided against giving him up, would expect him to visit her fairly frequently.

'Yes, Tara,' he answered softly, 'some weeks.' She made no comment and he added, 'You appear to be surprised at this information.'

Tara shrugged with exaggerated nonchalance. His eyes became keenly perceptive. Perceptive of what? she wondered bewilderedly.

'I did think you'd be going away before then,' she murmured lamely at length.

'You would like me to be going away more often?' Subtle the tone, and he waited with a strange sort of interest for her reply.

Another careless shrug and then,

'It doesn't matter to me one way or the other, Leon.'

'You've suddenly become totally indifferent to me, is that it?'

She gave a start, but recovered instantly.

'I've never been anything else,' she retorted coldly. 'You told me why you married me, and you know why I married you, so there can't be anything other than indifference - on both sides, can there?' She was still very pale, and the hand resting on the table moved a little convulsively, the smooth skin tightening over the knuckles now and then. Leon's eyes dropped, and he watched this movement for a moment in silence, his dark eyes narrowed.

'I know why you married me...His voice was low almost to a whisper and she made no intrusion into his thoughts. 'I believe I said you'd married me for my money.'

'That's right.' Tara picked up her cup, discovered that her coffee was cold, and returned the cup to its saucer, pushing it from her to the side of the table.

'And did you, Tara?' he questioned softly, and once again she gave a start. What was he getting at?

'Of course,' defensively and with a swift lowering of her long lashes in an attempt at quick escape from those piercing, all-seeing eyes. 'What other reason could there be? As you yourself said, you had more money than Paul, so from my point of view, the exchange was most profitable.'

Silence. She glanced up, to see an expressionless mask. But the lines from nose to mouth were slightly more pronounced than usual, and there was an arrogant and almost harsh curve to his mouth.

'You speak far too freely for your safety,' he warned with a darkling glint as his eyes met hers. 'Our women are not permitted to treat their husbands with such disrespect,'

Her chin went up.

'I am not a Greek,' she reminded him softly. 'And in any case, I spoke only the truth. I expect I'm allowed to do that?'

'The truth, eh?' He paused a moment, reflectively, then added, watching her closely, 'You spoke just now of indifference; can you say you've been totally indifferent to me, Tara?'

She gazed out to the dramatic silhouette of the mountain summits of the Argolid, moonlit bathed against a purple sky, her mind irresistibly drawn from the aloneness of her hurt and misery to those nights of sheer bliss when she had been one with her husband. How could she lie to him? And yet she must - for the sake of her pride.

'I cannot recall any particular occasion when I was not totally indifferent to you,' she began, then stopped, her lie cut short by the sharp exclamation emitted from her husband's angry lips. Swift as lightning he rose and without warning she was wrenched to her feet.

'You can't? Well, let's see if we can *create* an occasion when you're not totally indifferent to me!' His mouth came down even as he crushed her slender body to him.

'Let me go—!'

'When I'm ready!' he cut in harshly, and his lips found hers again, cruel and ruthless in their primitive possession. She tried to struggle,

then abandoned the futile use of her strength. But her clenched fists were fastened against his chest and she felt his heart beating rapidly and sensed desire in every sensual movement of his body - one hand as it slid to her back under the shoulder strap of her dress, the other as it sought the place where her own heart was beating with almost painful speed; the sheer possessive pressure of his hard and sinewed frame. His intention was clear, but although she tried with every degree of mental strength she possessed she knew his power over her emotions and desires would in the end crush all resistance. And it did she sensed his triumph as her body went limp and her lips parted eagerly to receive his kisses. Carried on the tide of his passion, she thrust away the lurking self- condemnation and criticism at her weakness. The moment was for living; what had gone before and what was to come later had no meaning, and her arm slid round his neck when, lifting her right off her feet, he carried her with ease and mastery up to her bedroom. 'Well,' he said with the arrogance of the victor as he put her down, 'can you still look at me and say you are totally indifferent to me?'

She coloured hotly arid despite her awakened desire for him she would undoubtedly have flung at him some caustic reply, but, anticipating this, Leon caught her to him and any words she would have liked to utter were smothered by his kiss.

'It's dangerous to lie to a Greek,' he told her presently when, although still imprisoned by his firm hold upon her arms, he held her from him. 'We have our own methods of dealing with obstinate females - and those methods can be painful,' he added darkly, 'so take care.'

This was too much. Pliable under his unconquerable power she might be, but she was no meek and spineless woman otherwise. Wrenching herself away despite the pain it caused and the bruises it was to leave on her arms, she ran to the communicating door and swung it open. Once through it she slammed it closed, and turned the key. Breathless and trembling, she stood with her back against the door, terrified as

she awaited her husband's reaction. And it was only when several uneventful moments had passed that she realized she had actually been allowed to escape. Leon could quite easily have caught her and dragged her back into her room, had he wished. It was plain, then, that he didn't really want her.

This realization left her empty, drained of all except v.. was it disappointment? Furiously shaking off this preposterous idea, she moved over to the other door and turned that key also, even though she was quite convinced by this time that locking herself in was quite unnecessary. But she was in Leon's room, and he m hers; she had no night clothes to wear and neither had he. She listened, but heard nothing. Perhaps he had gone downstairs again, she thought, wondering if she dared unfasten the door and take a look. Better not, she at last decided and, getting undressed, she slipped into Leon's bed.

To her surprise she soon found herself dozing and when she awoke the following morning quite refreshed, she was more than a little astonished that she could have slept so soundly. Had Leon slept? She vindictively hoped he had not.

She bathed in his bathroom, but had only her long dress to put on, and as this seemed absurd she ventured to knock on the communicating door and then turn the key.

'Come in.'

Feeling somewhat foolish, in the clear light of day, Tara pushed the door inwards and stood there for a space before moving forward. Leon was leant on one elbow, reading, just as he had been on their wedding night. He lowered his book and regarded her mockingly from his most comfortable position against her snow-white pillows.

'I want my clothes,' she mumbled almost inaudibly, wrapping Leon's huge dressing-gown over at the front as it was about to fall open. 'If - if you don't mind - I mean,' she added awkwardly, 'I'm sorry to disturb you.' What was the matter with her? she wondered irritably. Why couldn't she be as haughty as he? - or as cool, or mocking? All her plans involving her husband seemed to be half-hearted - the plan to leave him had been amended several times, and last evening's decision to treat him with cool indifference had collapsed within minutes of his taking her into his arms. This was what love did; it conquered all else with its potency and strength.

'You're not disturbing me,' he assured her affably, waving a hand towards her wardrobe. 'Help yourself; it's your room.'

Slowly she went to the wardrobe and took out what she wanted. Then she opened a drawer and found clean underwear.

'Thank you. ...' She turned, but his voice stopped her.

'Come here.'

She came round again, finding herself deliberately groping for snatches of the conversation she had had with Helena. She desired only to breed a little hatred for her husband - just sufficient to provide her with some protection against his power.

'What do you want?' She was remembering that Helena had said she had slept here - dozens of times. In this bed? wondered Tara. Or was it in Leon's? Both were large enough for two... .

'Why the great distance?' with sudden satirical amusement. 'Afraid of me?'

She frowned at this, temper rising.

'Is this a game, Leon?' she asked, managing to inject an icy inflection into her voice. 'If so, I find it far from amusing.'

His dark eyes glinted suddenly; she remembered the anger and harshness that had flared last evening, and she found herself waiting for it to happen again. His lips were tight and a movement in his cheek denoted a muscle out of control. What an unpredictable man he was! Even if he could have loved her, and they could have entered into a normally happy marriage, life would always be precarious; there would always be fear to offset the joy.

'You'll find it even less amusing if you don't take care,' he said softly at length. 'I warned you last night Ours is a patriarchal society, as I've told you before. You'll have to learn that you have acquired not only a husband, but a master. You're not in England now, and the sooner you resign yourself to our customs the more comfortable you'll feel.'

Fury rose like an unleashed volcano. The only handy thing to throw at him was his shoe, there beside the dressing-table. It went hurtling over to him, hit the bedside lamp, which exploded, then, missing his raised, protecting hand by inches, it crashed against the bedhead and dropped on to the white satin coverlet.

'There!' she cried, backing to lengthen the distance between them. 'That's what I think of your patriarchal society! Master indeed! Resign myself! Never in a hundred years! It's you who'll have to resign yourself - to the fact that I'm your equal - equal, do you hear?'

She was at the door, but with what seemed no more than one single leap her husband was off the bed and had grasped her wrist. She was shaken mercilessly, and for one incredulous second she thought he would hit her also. White to the lips, and staunching the tears only by the greatest effort, she stood there when he released her, his dressing-gown hanging off her bare shoulders, revealing alluring and

delicate curves which caught and held his attention for a very brief spell before, catching her to him, he sought these curves with his lips.

'You're even more desirable when you're in a fury,' he said thickly, leaving her curves to seek her mouth. 'I let you go last night, but now ... now, my adorable wife, you're just asking to be loved!'

A few hours later Tara was answering the telephone, her husband having gone off immediately after lunch to work in his study.

'Paul...? Is something wrong?'

'Is Leon there?' The voice came softly from the other end of the line. 'I did ask Savvas and he said Leon was working in his study. That's right, is it? The coast is clear?'

Frowning, Tara said yes, Leon was in his study, and asked again,

'Is something wrong?'

'No - not really. But listen, Tara. Leon has been on to me, wanting to know more about our engagement. He seemed to think there was something phoney about it.'

'He did? What exactly did he say to you?' Astute as her husband was, it had never entered Tara's head that the time might come when he would stop to think more deeply about that engagement. He had said more than once that she puzzled him, and now she came to dwell on this it seemed quite feasible that his mind should follow an investigating path, finding new thoughts and testing them - weighing them against the doubts that had begun to creep in.

'He phoned me last week, and began asking questions—'

'Last week? Then why didn't you get in touch with me before this?'

'I tried to, but each time I rang Leon answered the phone, so I had to hang up. Yesterday and the day before it was impossible to get through; I think there must have been something wrong with the line. Anyway, that's not important now that I've got you at last. For heaven's sake, Tara, don't spill the beans, will you - no matter how much he questions you? I was scared that you'd already have done so, but obviously you haven't. He's not questioned you, then?'

'No; he hasn't said a word. You've not told me what he said to you,' she went on to remind him.

'He asked how we met and I had to remember the lies we told. Then he said it was very odd that I hadn't been upset about it when you broke it off. He wanted to know how it was that I got engaged to someone I didn't love.'

'You told him you did love me, at the time?'

'I did, but somehow I felt it wasn't convincing. He sounded most sceptical about the whole thing, and when I wanted to know what it was all about - why he was asking all these questions - he said, in a most curious kind of tone, that you didn't strike him as the sort of girl who would look twice at a boy five years younger than yourself. I then got the impression that, at first, he had believed you'd intended marrying me for my money, but that he had now changed his ideas about this. It's so peculiar that he's said nothing to you. I expect you're quite happy together? I mean, he loves you - and you love him?'

'Of course—' She broke off, wondering whether or not to tell Paul the truth. But she decided against it, simply because there was nothing to be gained by such a confidence. But his information had set her thinking, and had it not been for the looming figure of Helena it could also have set her hopes soaring. For it was certainly significant that

Leon should take the trouble to phone his brother in order to find out more about the engagement - the engagement which he had come to regard as so strange as not to be feasible. How puzzled he must be, she thought, but did wonder if he would eventually hit upon the truth. Both she and Paul would come out of it in a very bad light, and Tara wished with all her heart that she had never agreed to the boy's proposal. She would then never have met Leon, and fallen in love with him, only to suffer an ever greater hurt than the hurt she had suffered at Ricky's hands so short a time ago.

And yet, as she tried to imagine Leon's never having entered into her life, she felt she would be the poorer for it. Loving, even if it were not returned, was a thing that enriched, that took possession of one compartment of one's mind where treasures could be stored in the form of memories. And she did have a few happy memories to store. There had been that period of her illness when Leon was a totally different man from the black-robed Satan who had ruthlessly taken her in anger. He had been gentle and anxious, and afterwards when he had come to her he had been a tender lover, coaxing a response where previously he had forced it.

Yes, she had a few memories ... memories gathered before she knew that Leon was betraying her by continuing his affair with the woman he had had before their marriage.

'I'd better go.' Paul's voice broke into her musings and she gave him her attention. 'The call's going to cost a bomb. Oh, by the way, have you made any progress about my money?'

She hesitated and then,

'Leon hasn't made up his mind, Paul. And in any case, I'm not at all sure that you're capable of handling a large fortune—'

'What! Are you on his side suddenly?'

'I believe you receive an adequate allowance, Paul. Are you gambling?'

A long pause that told her all she wanted to know.

'I have a flutter on a horse now and then,' he admitted sulkily.

'More than a flutter,' she responded with conviction. 'No, Paul, don't expect any help from me. Were you to get your fortune you would probably squander it in no time at all. In my opinion Leon knows exactly what he's doing and if you want your money you'll have to convince him that you can take care of it.'

'Well,' he exploded, 'I never thought you'd turn like this! So you're not going to put in a good word for me after all?'

'I've just told you I'm not.' A small silence and then, resignedly, 'But you won't give away our deception, either?'

'Obviously I won't. I've no wish that Leon shall learn about the part I played in that. You misled me; I know this now.'

'I only wanted what's my own,' snapped Paul in the same sulky tones. 'I'll have to ring off,' he added abruptly. 'I haven't the money for the call as it is.'

Hanging up the receiver, she drew an exasperated breath. It was no wonder Leon had branded his stepbrother immature. He could just as easily have sent a letter; Tara would have received it three days after it was posted. But Paul preferred to use the phone - without thought of what the cost would be. At least, he hadn't thought about the cost until after the call was made. The main trouble with Paul was that he never did stop to think.

Tara glanced through the window as Leon appeared, striding easily across the lawn on his way from his study. A half-smile touched his

lips as their eyes met on his reaching the patio. He tapped on the window and she stepped forward to open it for him. The smile still played about his mouth, amused, sardonic, because of her heightened colour and the way she hid her expression by lowering her lashes. A finger tilted her head and his eyes lit with humour.

'Shy?' He shook his head and was grave suddenly. 'Strange, unfathomable girl. Tell me, why did you become engaged to Paul?'

The question, coming so unexpectedly, resulted in a stunned silence, during which Leon's searching gaze never left her face, nor was his hand removed from her chin.

'You know why. For his money—'

'Careful, Tara,' came the dangerously quiet warning. 'You do ask for it, don't you?'

He was puzzled; she had known this, of course, before hearing what Paul had to say. He was suspicious too, and she scarcely knew how to adopt a cautious enough attitude, one that would allay these suspicions.

'You said yourself that I was too old for Paul. I was tempted by his money— Yes, I was, Leon! Don't you dare ill-treat me again or I'll walk out on you!' she added as his eyes smouldered suddenly.

'Walk out?' He seemed to be jerked into a sober mood by this threat, and his hand dropped to his side. 'You'd leave me?' She failed to answer and with returning confidence he added, 'I think not, Tara. You and I have a need of one another.'

Her cheeks flooded with colour. She lifted her chin, and her eyes glinted with fire. 'That's not true! I haven't the least need of you - or of any man, for that matter—'

'What a typically feminine statement,' he interrupted sardonically. 'Why do your sex always emphatically deny any desire for the pleasures of nature?'

She swallowed, and glanced away, embarrassed.

'Have you no delicacy?' she asked.

'It's indelicate to discuss intimacies with my wife?'

'If - if I were your proper wife....' She allowed her voice to trail away to silence as her husband opened his eyes, very wide.

'Aren't you my proper wife?'

Again she swallowed. She tried to think of Helena, just so she could keep in mind the fact of his infidelity. But somehow, as he looked at this moment - assured and possessive as his eyes stared straightly into hers — it was practically impossible to believe in his betrayal of her.

'In s-some ways I suppose I am your - your proper wife.'

Amusement edged his voice when after a small hesitation he spoke.

'Your delicacy makes up for my lack of it. In some ways. . . .' He laughed quietly. 'A pretty and subtle way of putting it.' And then, more firmly and with emphasis, 'You're very much my proper wife, Tara, and no matter how strongly you deny it, you do have a need of me ... and you always will have.'

CHAPTER NINE

As the days passed and Tara dwelt on these words of her husband's, spoken with such confidence and strength, she came to the conclusion that he had been right. She did have a need of him, and always would have. But it was not quite so simple as he assumed; she did need him physically, true, but greater needs by far occupied the forefront of her mind. She needed his companionship, his interest, his attention. She yearned for a tenderness to be shown her, for concern ... for love in its entirety. As the days passed she also thought about his firm statement that he would not be going into Athens again for some weeks, as she knew that this meant that he would not be going away at all, since Athens must inevitably be the excuse he would use when he visited Helena; How strange that, after visiting the Greek girl so recently, he should now so calmly and indifferently keep away from her. Tara's heartbeats increased as the idea took root that perhaps he *had* decided to finish with her - or it could have been the other way round: Helena could have decided that, after all, she wanted nothing more to do with him now that he was married.

However, in spite of his staying at home his manner towards his wife underwent no change whatsoever; he was cool but civil, remote but not actually unkind. There were no violent scenes, but no tender ones. On the whole, Leon appeared to be in a state where he bided his time, waiting for something. But what? She often surprised a darkling expression in his eyes; she just as often sensed that he was wrapped in a cloak of obstinacy where he himself could have cleared the air but was determined that his waiting game should be maintained. Puzzled in the extreme, she one evening spoke her thoughts aloud. She and Leon were on their way home from a visit to Takis and Grace, where they had dined and wined and, in all, passed a most delightful evening. Leon was driving the car, quite slowly, into the hills that rose up behind the harbour with its shining private 'lake'. It was a cool night but clear, with a myriad stars reflected in the calm dark waters and a crescent moon peeping from behind one jagged peak that stood,

almost grotesquely silhouetted against the deep purple sky. Leon had not spoken since they left the villa with its lights and fountain and rather flamboyantly-set-out gardens. He seemed absorbed and even brooding, just as if he were not quite happy about something.

'You're so often quiet, Leon - the way you are at this moment. I wish I knew what you were thinking?' She felt in a soft and pliable mood; a tender word from her husband would have lifted her spirits to the sky.

He half-turned his head to glance at her profile.

'You'd like to know my thoughts, eh?' A slight curve of his mouth accompanied this, but there was no humour in the smile. On the contrary, Tara felt that he was on the borders of anger. 'That goes for me too,' he added presently. 'I'd be interested in knowing what you were thinking about at times.' Something very subtle indeed here, she thought with a frown. He might almost be throwing out a challenge for her to come right out into the open. ... But in that case it would mean that he knew she was aware of his continued association with Helena, and this was not the case.

Helena had kept silent about her visit to Poros, that was quite plain, for otherwise Leon himself must inevitably have broached the matter. Tara gave a deep sigh; it was all so puzzling, and she had the unhappy conviction that it would continue to be puzzling.

'I have no idea what you mean by that,' she said at length. 'I haven't anything important to think about.'

'No?' with a slight compression of his mouth. Then neither have I.' His foot went down on the accelerator and the car shot forward up the hill, crunching on the gravel covering the rather primitive, narrow road leading right up to the gates of the villa grounds. They were open and the car went swiftly through them. 'Good night,' said Leon abruptly as soon as they were in the house. 'I'm going to bed.'

'Good night...' Her spirits sank right into her feet. What had she done to bring about so sudden a change in her husband? At the villa, with Takis and his wife, Leon had been in a most attractive mood and his glances for his wife were affectionate and smiling. For the benefit of his friends? Perhaps, but even so the present change was so marked as to be almost dramatic, What was he trying to do to her? He had told her he had married her to save Paul, and this she knew was the truth. But his subsequent acceptance of her as his wife had brought with it a certain measure of - tolerance, at least. But recently - since his return from Aegina - he had adopted a distinctly offhand attitude towards her with, at times, a marked hostility. And this was one of those times. She sighed, quiveringly, and after a few minutes followed him upstairs. Just when life was becoming bearable, and she was beginning to be optimistic about a gradually improving relationship developing between her and Leon, he would suddenly switch again to a man who was almost unapproachable.

And the following day his hostility was even more marked; it was taken to the point where his voice when he spoke to her was almost harsh. And his manner was one of condemnation and, strangely, that of a man who has been grossly injured or misjudged. Puzzling as this impression was to Tara, she could find no explanation for it and she resolutely dismissed it from her mind, sure she was allowing her imagination to run away with her.

During November Androula came home for a few days, as she had not been too well.

'I've been working too hard,' she replied in answer to Leon's inquiry a moment after she had arrived at the quay. He and Tara had gone to meet the ferry and he adopted a sceptical expression almost before his sister had finished speaking.

T doubt it,' he returned, taking her suitcase from her and putting it into the boot of the car. 'Probably too many parties, and late nights. When I was there I worked!'

Androula sighed and gave a grimace, which was meant for Tara's eyes only.

'You're so stodgy, Leon,' she complained, sitting in the back seat and crossing her elegant legs. 'I don't expect you worked all the time. Nobody does.'

% don't know why I allow you to stay there. I ought to marry you off to someone who would school you.'

Androula seemed tensed suddenly, as if deeply affected by his words. But she merely produced the retort which Tara would have expected of her.

'You know very well I'd not let you marry me off! I shall choose my own husband. You've always known that.'

'Careful,' he warned, getting into the car after having assisted Tara into her seat. 'You're going to find yourself waiting until you're thirty for your money, my girl!'

Androula fell silent immediately, but later, when she and Tara were alone, she asked what was wrong with Leon.

'He's so bad-tempered,' she added petulantly, as if the matter was of some importance to her comfort. 'And his letters recently haven't been nice at all. He seems to be in some sort of a horrid mood. You're happy together?' She looked apologetically at Tara, but added, when she received no answer, 'If you weren't it might explain everything.'

'We're perfectly happy,' returned Tara at length, hoping the lie was successfully hidden by her calm and untroubled tone.

'I thought you must be. Then what,' added Androula with a sigh, 'is wrong with my brother? I've always found favour with him, because I'm steady and good—' She broke off, having the grace to blush as Tara's brows rose, though quite unintentionally. 'Well, he thinks I'm good.'

Tara had to laugh, but she was remembering that Leon was not quite so unobservant as his sister would believe. However, she naturally kept to herself this fact and went on to say,

'It could be that Leon has business worries at present. This mood will pass before very long.'

'I sincerely hope so,' with feeling from Androula who was hanging a cocktail dress in the wardrobe. 'I have something important to ask him.'

'Something important?'

Androula turned.

'I want to get married.'

'You—!' Tara was recalling what Paul had said about Androula's boy-friend being English, and poor. She also remembered that Androula herself had admitted to having several boy-friends. 'Is he Greek?'

Androula shook her head.

'There mightn't be any problem if he were. No, he's English, and he hasn't any money. I've known him a long time - met him when he was on holiday in Athens and we've corresponded ever since. He comes to Athens whenever he can afford the fare, but he doesn't have much money, not really. He came over a fortnight ago and I knew I wanted to marry him, Tara.' Androula looked almost pained as she paused for

a moment, reflectively. 'I just - ached for him! He asked me to marry him - because he knew I wanted that. And so I decided to come home and see Leon - although it's quite true that I haven't been •well. I'm almost sick with worry, as I'm sure I shall have trouble with Leon.' She turned to take another dress from her suitcase and Tara said,

'You told me you had several boy-friends.'

'So you're thinking I can't be in love with Martin? I am, Tara, and it's because of the others that I'm so sure. You see,' she said, straightening up and holding the dress over her arm, 'I thought it best to forget Martin as I was sure I'd never get my money at twenty-five if I insisted, against my brother's advice—' she gave a shrug and amended, '—order, I should say. Leon would order me not to marry him; so I went about with others, trying to forget, and I did have one particular one at the time you met me in Athens. The one who, I said, would like my dress.' She fell into a brooding silence for a space and then, in a forlorn voice that wasn't at all like the vivacious and bright girl who had picked Tara up on her landing on the island, or the girl with whom she had spent those few hours in Athens, 'All the time I'm with any of the others I'm thinking about Martin. He's so handsome, and so kind, Tara - not at all like our boys, who think only of one thing - sex. A wife here is thought of only in that sense, but Martin loves me for other things as well—' She broke off, catching her breath in a little horrified exclamation that was also an apology. 'What have I said! Leon isn't like that, of course,' she hurriedly corrected. 'He wouldn't look upon you only in that light. He would love you for yourself.'

'Of course,' Tara responded, but dryly, and Androula bit her lip in vexation at her lack of diplomacy. 'Tell me about Martin,' encouraged Tara in an endeavour to ease the situation. 'How old is he?'

'Twenty-six - not so young that Leon can say he doesn't know his own mind, or anything like that. He works in an office, but he's very much

appreciated by his boss, Tara, and one day he hopes to be promoted to 'manager of his particular department.'

'If you married him you'd have to leave the university and go to England. Is that a wise course, Androula? Surely your studies are important?'

Androula nodded unhappily.

'They are, I must admit it. I love my work, really, and it would certainly be a wrench if I left the university.' She paused a moment, biting her lip. 'I love Martin, though, and I do want to marry him, more than anything else.' She went on to explain that Martin was a highly intelligent and cultured young man and that if she finished her studies and obtained /her degree she felt she would make him a much more suitable wife.

£In that case,' said Tara reasonably, 'the wiser course is for you to wait. If you did finish your studies I'm sure you would have a far better chance of bringing Leon round to accepting Martin.' What a lot of responsibility Leon had taken on, she thought, admiring him for doing so. It would have been far easier for him to have refused to look after these two children who were proving so troublesome to him.

'You think he would come round to accepting him?' Androula's eyes brightened with hope. T had an awful feeling that he would never give his consent to my marrying an Englishman, because he did have an aversion to your country people after his cousins' experiences, and their divorces. But I expect it's changed him, being married to you,' she added, smiling. 'Tara, will you help me?'

A wry smile touched the corners of Tara's mouth. The question had been anticipated almost from her first hearing of this Englishman whom Androula wanted to marry.

'How, Androula?' she asked, taking a seat on the edge of the bed and looking up into her companion's face. A very heavy sigh rose to Androula's pretty lips.

'I rather hoped you could influence my brother?'

Influence. .. . How little she knew! thought Tara with sudden dejection.

'Surely you know Leon well enough to be sure that neither I nor anyone else could influence him,' she responded gently, and again Androula gave a sigh.

'What am I to do, Tara?'

'You're not going to wait?'

Androula shook her head.

'I can't— *We* can't! We're in love, Tara, so why should we wait?'

It was Tara's turn to sigh.

'You just said your studies are important to you, and that you would make Martin a better wife if you were to finish them before getting married.'

'I did say that, and it's true. But I also said that I want to marry Martin more than anything else.'

Tara spread her hands helplessly.

'Then there's nothing for it but to tackle Leon.'

Androula looked at her perceptively.

'You know that I haven't a hope, don't you?'

A small pause and then, thoughtfully,

'You're free to marry? I mean, you can marry without Leon's consent?'

'Of course,' with a toss of Androula's head. But then she added, the little gesture of defiance instantly forgotten, 'He can make me wait until I'm thirty for my money, though. You heard what he said about that a few minutes ago.'

Tara nodded.

'I don't think you've much chance of bringing him round to accepting the idea of your marrying just yet,' she said, feeling that Androula should be prevented from cherishing even one small measure of hope. 'He'll be cross at the idea of your willingness to abandon your studies, let alone anything else.'

'Yes, you're right.' Androula moved to the wardrobe again. 'I can't wait until I'm thirty for my money,' she cried, suddenly becoming angry. 'Martin and I could never manage on his salary!' Tara's eyes widened.

'Did Martin say this?' she asked swiftly.

'Certainly not! But I'm saying it. Look at what I spend now - on clothes and things. I shall need even more money to spend when I'm married.'

'I shouldn't mention this to Leon,' warned Tara seeing her husband immediately branding Martin, a fortune-hunter who meant to exploit his young wife. If you talk like this you'll never get him even to consider Martin as a husband for you - neither now nor at some future date.'

'He must - oh, I'll make him! I can get round him, just you wait and see. I've always been able to. It's Paul whom he gets angry with, because he doesn't know how to take care of his money, and he never manages on his allowance. I know this because he's terribly in debt.'

'He told you this?' swiftly as Tara recalled Paul's threatening to go to moneylenders again.

'Yes, he has. He wanted to borrow from me, as I told you. Last week he wrote again, saying he was in a dreadful jam. But I shall never lend him a single drachma, simply because he gets a lot more than I do, anyway. Why should I go short in order to give it to him?'

'I'm worried about Paul.' Tara was frowning heavily. 'He's going to be in real trouble with Leon before he's much older.'

'It won't be the first time. He's been in debt before, more than once. And Leon's had to go over to England and sort everything out for him, clearing off all his ^ debts and putting him right again.' Androula shrugged, just as if this was a matter of no import whatsoever. 'He'll never get *his* money until he's twenty-five, you can be sure of that !'

Tara fell into a thoughtful silence, dwelling on the tale she was told by Paul on their first meeting. He had gained her sympathy at the outset, and she had immediately branded Leon as stingy, and a dictator. Now she knew that he was absolutely right in his treatment of Paul. The boy was totally incapable of taking care of his fortune, and Leon had had plenty of proof of this, if what Androula said was true, and Tara could not for one moment doubt her word.

No more was said on the matter, as Androula, having finished her unpacking, said she was going to take a shower. But during the afternoon she broached the subject to Leon, in Tara's presence.

'Leon ... I want to get married,' she said, and immediately glanced away. A rather stunned silence followed before Leon said, very quietly,

'You want to get married? This is sudden, isn't *it*?

'I've known him - Martin - a long time. I do know my own mind, Leon?' Her voice pleaded and so did her eyes, as she turned them to him after giving an appealing glance to her sister-in-law, begging for her support.

'Martin?' sharply and with a swift and heavy frown. 'It isn't a Greek you're wanting to marry?'

'He's English,' Androula informed him. 'And he's dreadfully poor.'

Tara could have appreciated the humour of this blurting out of the whole - just as if Androula was resignedly throwing in her hand already - had it not been for the expression on her husband's face. It certainly looked as if Androula's chances of getting her inheritance were as remote as those of her brother's getting his.

, 'You say you *want* to get married. There's nothing to stop you.' Leon's voice was smooth, but there was no missing the underlying inflexibility which warned even before he added, 'I am in no position to prevent your marrying, but of course you will wait another seven and a half years for your money. You have thought of this, I hope?'

Androula started to cry.

'I want it when I'm twenty-five. It will be awful as it *is*, my having to go short—' She broke off, slanting Tara a glance as she realized she had forgotten her warning. 'Please, Leon, let me have it. It's not fair to make me wait until I'm thirty. That's middle age!'

'Middle age, is it?' without humour but in distinctly dry tones. 'I must be approaching my dotage, then.' 1 'I'm very sorry; it was a stupid thing to say.'

Tara rose from her chair.

'I'll go,' she said, 'and leave you to talk in private.'

'No, don't—' from Androula beseechingly, while Leon gestured for Tara to take possession of the chair again.

'Why should you go?' he asked. 'You're one of the family.'

She sat down again, feeling decidedly uncomfortable.

'I will take very good care of my money, Leon,' Androula promised in a low tone. 'I take care of my money now - you know that.'

He looked at her narrowly. 'This Martin. What does he do for a living that he is going to keep you short of money?'

'He isn't going to keep me short!' she flashed. 'What I meant was that I wouldn't have what I'm used to - not without my own money.'

'A man usually keeps his wife. I asked you what he did for a living?'

'He works in an office. And he's going to be a manager some day.'

'He is?' Leon raised one eyebrow and added, 'How old is he?' Androula told him, adding as she had when Tara asked the same question,

'He's old enough to know his own mind; you'll have to admit that?'

He remained thoughtfully silent for a space and then,

'You, Androula, are you quite sure you know *your* own mind?'

'I love Martin,' she said quietly.

'And are you quite determined to marry him?'

'Quite.' A small pause. 'I want to marry him soon.'

Leon gave a slight shrug and said,

'In that case, the matter ends there—'

'My money? You'll let me have it in two and a half years?'

'I think I said seven and a half,' he corrected softly, his face expressionless as Androula's tears flowed once more.

'It isn't fair! I don't know why my father gave you this authority! I won't wait all that time -I won't!'

'Kindly lower your voice,' he commanded sternly. 'And you can stop crying, as tears won't do you any good at all. If you choose to marry against my wishes then you must take the consequences. I had hoped to see you pursue your studies diligently until you'd taken your degree. As you're content to give up these studies there's no more to be said. I have no authority to keep you at university.' Androula said nothing: she was dabbing her eyes with a handkerchief and both Leon, and Tara watched her for a moment and then Tara spoke, for the first time entering the conversation.

'Leon, couldn't you have this young man over and see for yourself what he is like? He could be a most suitable husband for Androula.'

'As Paul was for you,' he could not help saying, in the driest of tones. Tara flushed hotly, while Androula, having dried her eyes, said without thinking,

'It's not fair of you to compare Martin and me with Paul and Tara, Leon. It was obvious that they weren't in love.'

Leon's eyes flickered to Tara's hot face and a smile of sardonic amusement touched the fine outline of his mouth.

'I agree. But that circumstance isn't going to profit you anything, Androula. This Martin is plainly a fortune-hunter, but when he learns he's to wait many years to get his hands on your money you'll find that he isn't so eager to marry you after all.'

Tara's head came up with a jerk. The solution had been pondered by him, it would seem, and in his opinion was simple: Martin would throw Androula over and so there would be no further complications.

'You won't see the young man?' persisted Tara on noting the almost anguished expression that mingled with the sudden flash of indignation that had entered Androula's eyes at Leon's assessment of her beloved. 'It's the least you can do, Leon.'

He was already shaking his head and Androula started to cry again.

'You had better go to your room,' he ordered curtly. 'Come down when you're more controlled.'

Tara watched her leave, footsteps flagging.

^'You've no idea what Martin is like,' said Tara with more sharpness than she intended. 'It's most unreasonable of you to judge him without even meeting him. You've no proof whatsoever that he's interested in her money.'

Leon's eyes glinted; but the icy and arrogant retort for which she prepared herself was not forthcoming. Surprised, she regarded him intently, and felt that he was carefully selecting his words.

'We shall soon see, shan't we? If he's still keen on marriage, once he knows Androula isn't going to be wealthy in two and a half years' time, then perhaps I shall change my opinion of him.' Leon's mouth was set and he appeared to be lost in reflections. Tara sensed that he was thinking about her and Paul, remembering just how weak was the link which bound them. The circumstance of her own 'engagement' to his brother was causing Leon to be more adamant with Androula than perhaps he would have been, and Tara once again felt her anger rise against Paul. Should she tell Leon the whole truth? After debating this question for a moment she reluctantly decided against it. For more reasons than one she would have liked to make a full confession of the wretched business, but, as before, she could visualize only the arousing of her husband's contempt for herself and his anger against Paul.

CHAPTER TEN

SINCE his visit Ricky had sent Tara several letters, all of which she had answered, and all of which had arrived at times when Leon was absent from home. For this Tara was glad, but she wanted to end the correspondence before Leon discovered that she and Ricky were writing to one another, as she knew for sure that the knowledge would infuriate her husband. He had allowed the matter of Ricky's visit to drop without too much fuss, because she had been ill, but Tara strongly suspected that it would not take much to stir her unpredictable husband into an angry mood again, and, therefore, she had given Ricky several hints that she wished to put an end to the correspondence. These hints had been deliberately ignored, and the thing which Tara most feared occurred while Androula was still at home. Savvas collected the post as usual from the box and gave it to Leon. He flicked through the half dozen or so letters and after putting one addressed to Androula on the hall table, he handed another one to Tara, his eyes having been fixed intently on the handwriting for some moments while Tara, instinctively guessing that Ricky had written, waited in a sort of fearful silence.

'Thank you, Leon.'

'From your brother?' he inquired in a very soft tone, his gaze still on the letter even after it had changed hands.

'Er - n-no,' she answered, quite unable to voice the untruth hovering on her lips.

It's a man's handwriting,' smoothly and with an inflection of inquiry.

Tara swallowed hard.

'It's from Ricky,' she admitted at last, angry with her former fiance for his insistence on writing, and even more angry with herself for this fear of arousing her husband's wrath. 'I - we've been writing since his

visit,' she went on, anticipating Leon's question even as he opened his mouth to utter it.

His eyes darkened ominously.

'Since his visit? Who is this Ricky—? Yes, I know you said he was a friend,' he went on swiftly as she would have spoken, 'but I'm afraid I don't believe you.' His glance flickered to the stairs; Androula was coming down from her room and he said abruptly, 'We'll talk in here!' and he ushered Tara before him into the lounge, closing the door behind him. 'Well?'

Tara hesitated, then with a gesture of resignation she told him that she had been engaged to Ricky, and that he had thrown her over for another girl. Tara kept her head averted as she spoke, because of the rising colour in her cheeks caused by humiliation at having to make this admission to Leon who himself had preferred another woman to her.

'You were engaged?' His voice was almost harsh and, glancing up, she noted the dark under-film of colour creeping up at the sides of his mouth. 'So you've been engaged before you met Paul?'

That dark colour seemed slowly to increase. With a sort of stunned disbelief she was aware of the word 'jealousy' rippling through her mind like a flash of lightning before it was gone, dismissed as impossible.

'Yes,' she admitted in a low tone, 'I was engaged to Ricky for several months.' His eyes glimmered in a way that set her nerves on edge.

'So it was your former fiance whom you entertained here while I was away?'

'Entertained!' she flashed, driven to retaliate before this husband of hers had her quivering with fear. 'You know why he stayed. He was ill!'

'He became ill as soon as he arrived?' The tones were very soft now and in spite of herself Tara felt a tremor pass through her.

'Well... no, not exactly.'

'No?' he prompted gently.

'He would have had to stay at an hotel, so I said he could stay here for the night - just one night, of course. The following morning he was ill, and I had to get the doctor - but you know that.'

A silence fell on the room. Walking over to the fireplace Leon stood to one side of it, resting an arm on the corner of the mantelpiece with a sort of lazy indolence and regarding Tara through half-closed eyes. Tara sat down, and endeavoured to appear cool and composed.

'Why did he come?' Leon wanted to know at last, 'You said you didn't invite him, but it seems very strange to me that he should come over here without an invitation. I take it that he knew you were married?'

'Yes, he did.' She thought, naturally, of the fact that Ricky, discovering she wasn't married to the 'fiance' he had met at the wedding, but to his brother, had assumed there was something most odd about the marriage.

'Yet he came here - without being invited. How very interesting. What sort of a reception could he have expected, I wonder?' Sarcasm now in the tones, but this in no way obliterated the underlying fury in them, and now Tara was reminded of the violent scene enacted after Leon had learned of Ricky's having stayed here in his absence, and involuntarily she shivered, a gesture that was not lost on her husband who at any other time might have derived some sort of amused

satisfaction from it. But not now. His face was a set mask of anger, although his manner was one of languid ease still and he actually raised a hand to his mouth to stifle a yawn.

'I suppose the best thing is to explain a little further,' she decided at last, and her husband said,

'I assure you it is, Tara.'

'Ricky jilted me under pressure from his father, and the father of my best friend. They had done a business merger and so decided that it would be a good thing if Ricky married Freda, which he did—'

'So he's married too?'

She nodded.

'The marriage has broken up, and Ricky, thinking that my marriage wasn't - well, that there was something odd about it, hoped we would come together again.'

'He did?' with a raising of Leon's straight black brows. 'Now why should he cherish a hope like that? Did you give him any reason to believe that your marriage was-er-odd, as you term it?'

'Of course not. I hadn't written to Ricky at that time/

'I see ..thoughtfully and with a slow and audible intake of his breath. 'How long was the interval between your being jilted and becoming engaged to my brother?'

A pregnant silence followed. This was the question Tara had been expecting, and the one she dreaded. She wished she had prevaricated instead of telling Leon so much about Ricky and herself. But there was nothing now but to confess that a mere three months had elapsed between Ricky's jilting her and her 'engagement' to Paul. Leon was

surveying her with the most odd expression and because she feared he might hit upon the truth - that she was in love with him - she added swiftly, without thinking, T decided to marry for money, and that's why I became engaged to Paul. ...' She faltered to silence; her husband's eyes glinted dangerously and she recalled on the instant his earlier scepticism - and warning - about this particular statement. Yet she half-wished she could convince him, just so he wouldn't fasten on to the idea that she might have married him for love.

His eyes still glinted as they fixed hers, although his voice was toned to the same quiet thoughtfulness as before, when at last he spoke.

'You decided to marry for money ...' He appeared to be pondering on what he had heard during the past few minutes and as she watched his changing expression Tara did begin to wonder whether his powers of perception were successfully unravelling the whole situation, the situation that, puzzling him immensely, had led to his telephoning his brother in an attempt to discover more about the circumstances of his engagement to Tara. Tara herself was more than a little puzzled as to why Leon should do this, for as he had no love for her it really did not matter that he should know the truth about the engagement. And yet he desired to do so, knowing instinctively that there was some mystery. And what he had just heard must without doubt strengthen this idea, she decided, hoping fervently that he would not continue to question her, for in that event she would be forced to lie to him, which was so very difficult, with those dark and probing eyes looking into hers with such intentness that he might be examining her very soul.

'You're extraordinarily eager to remind me of this mercenary trait,' he told her softly at last. 'It just isn't convincing, Tara. A gold-digger doesn't go talking about her aspirations; she keeps silent about them.'

She gave a start and his eyes narrowed to mere slits, The involuntary twist of his lips was scarcely a smile, but his anger had disappeared altogether, much to Tara's surprise, and relief. The fact that he did not

believe her about her mercenary trait, as he called it, afforded her a large measure of satisfaction while at the same time paradoxically causing her some alarm since it seemed inevitable that he would come right out into the open and demand a fuller explanation. To her amazement all he said was, 'Have you nothing to say about that, Tara?'

'I don't know what you mean,' she returned with well-simulated innocence, and Leon drew a sharp breath of impatience.

'If I don't end up by doing you an injury it'll be a miracle!' he snapped, astounding her. She had seen him in various moods, but never in one like this. No longer was he the aloof and unapproachable Greek god poised on his high pedestal, but a mere human, exasperated and looking very much as if he would carry out his half-threat and do her an injury. 'You're an enigma to me in more ways than one,' he told her grittingly. 'In more ways than one!' he repeated, glaring at her. 'But I expect you'll come across when life becomes too unbearable - as it will,' he went on to warn darkly as she blinked uncomprehendingly at him, 'if you continue like this!' And with that he left her, striding furiously across the room and almost colliding with Androula, who had decided to enter at that particular moment.

'Oh, Leon, I've had a letter from Martin. He wants to come and see you—'

'Tell him to go to the devil!' he said, and left the room.

'Well!' Androula glanced from the closed door to Tara. 'Have you two had a quarrel or something?'

'No - I mean, not exactly,' answered Tara quiveringly. 'It was just a - a sort of argument.'

Androula shook her head.

'I can't think what's come over Leon. He's always been so calm and composed. He looked just now as if he were in a sort of frenzy, almost.'

'Not quite that,' Tara contended with a frown. 'Leon would never allow himself to lose control to that extent.'

'Perhaps you're right.' Androula had the letter in her hand and idly she allowed her eyes to fall on it, flicking the pages and half-smiling as she lingered over whatever was written at the end. 'I'm going to phone Martin and tell him to come. Leon will have to see him then, and if he doesn't admit to having a favourable impression of Martin then I shall hate him for the rest of my life!'

It was to be expected that Tara would dwell on the scene that had taken place between Leon and herself, and the more she thought about it the more she began to wonder if it were possible that her husband could care for her. Staggered at-first, and determinedly trying to throw off the idea, she found it impossible to do so and naturally her trend of thought followed on to the question of Helena, and to her husband's relatively recent visit to Aegina. She, Tara, had attached to the visit her own particular ideas ... but could she have been wrong? She frowned, baffled and at the same time conscious of a hint of dejection creeping over her. Delude herself she would if she could... but she had to be realistic and admit that there was nothing on the small island of Aegina that could possibly interest Leon other than Helena.

His ill-humour remained throughout the entire evening and several times Tara noticed his darkling glances which were sent in her direction. Androula seemed not to notice; she was preoccupied, and all in all it was a most unpleasant time and Tara was relieved when,

quite early, Leon got up from his chair and left the room, saying he was going to bed.

'Well,' gasped Androula, 'just imagine that! Leon's going to bed at this time! Do you suppose he's ill?'

Tara shook her head.

'It could be business that's worrying him,' she offered, and her companion shrugged.

'Whatever it is I sincerely hope it soon passes. I've told Martin to come at once.'

'He's able to come - just when he likes?'

'He has some holidays due to him - a few days, that's all, but he can fly.'

'So he's not exactly a pauper, not if he has the money to fly?'

'He's very thrifty. He doesn't have girls to take about, you see, so he can save a fair proportion of his salary.'

Martin arrived two days later and the moment she met him Tara liked him immensely. He was grave and sincere, good-looking in a mature kind of way. Androula had met him at the quay and after alighting from the car they walked across the lawn hand in hand. Leon was in his study, but he came to the house within five minutes of the young man's arrival. Watching the introduction, and the intense examination of Martin's features, Tara could not help recalling vividly her own experience on meeting the formidable brother of Paul.

'So you're going to marry Androula?' After inviting him to be seated Leon put the question without further hesitation.

'Yes,' replied Martin quietly, 'I am.'

'When?'

The young man frowned a little.

'We'd like to marry at once, but Androula has her studies—'

'We've talked about this, Martin,' she interrupted. 'I'd like to finish them, but I want to get married.'

Perceptively her brother glanced at her.

'So it's only you who wants to get married right away, is it?'

Androula coloured, and looked away.

'Yes,' she admitted after the question had been repeated.

'Please don't misunderstand,' put in Martin in an attempt to ease the situation for Androula. 'I also want to marry soon, but I feel that, later, Androula will regret not having taken her degree, for she really is interested in her work.'

'In other words,' said Leon quietly, 'you're afraid that Androula will eventually realize that she was too precipitate?'

Martin nodded, though reluctantly as his eyes met those of Androula.

Strangely, Leon made no mention of Androula's fortune and Tara knew instinctively that Martin had, by some stroke of good fortune, made a most favourable impression on her husband. Undoubtedly Martin's anxiety over Androula's studies, voiced with obvious sincerity, had strengthened his position. He and Leon conversed for some time, uninterrupted either by Tara or Androula, and all the while he seemed to be gaining the esteem of his host.

'I want to marry Androula,' he said seriously, 'but I want also your approval, as I know this is usual in Greece. That's why I came over to see you. I hope that you will consider me a suitable husband for your sister?'

Leon smiled faintly, without humour.

'My approval isn't necessary; you're aware of that.'

'Yes, but I'd be happier if you approved of me.' There was respect in Martin's voice, but no humility. Tara saw at once that this attitude found favour with Leon who, she suspected, would have treated humility with the utmost contempt.

'Perhaps you and I can talk privately, later - after we've dined.' Leon's words brought Androula's head up with a jerk; she glanced swiftly at Tara and her eyes were shining with hope.

'He'll let me have my money!' she was saying when just before dinner she and Tara were chatting together upstairs in Tara's bedroom. 'He's taken to Martin - but I knew he would! Oh, Tara, I am very happy!'

'You've still a long time to wait for your money,' Tara reminded her, adding that she really ought to consider a long engagement, during which she could finish her studies. Androula frowned.

'I'm torn; I want to be with Martin all the time.' Tara spread her hands.

'You're determined, then, to get married quite soon?'

'If Martin will.'

'You said he too was in a hurry.'

'I know. That was a little white lie.'

'You think Martin will agree to an early marriage?'

'Of course. He will do what I want to do.'

The result of the private talk was one which brought looks of amazement to both girls when they heard of it from Martin the following morning. Leon was absent from the room and Martin informed Androula that Leon had offered him a post in his office in Athens, H he showed promise he would be given a position of authority - even that of manager in six months' time when the present manager retired.

'He - he's offered you that !' Androula seemed quite unable to take this in. 'Imagine Leon becoming so mellowed that he'd go as far as that!' After the first shock of surprise she was jubilant 'So we'll be able to get married and I shall be able to stay on at the university!'

'That was your brother's idea,' Martin said happily. And. he added on a faintly anxious note, 'I hope I shan't disappoint Leon.'

Tara ventured to speak to her husband on the subject when, the young couple having gone off somewhere together, she and he were in the garden. Tara had gone out earlier with a book, and was rather surprised to be joined by Leon, whose attitude towards her was becoming even more markedly cold, with the impression growing on her that he was still waiting for something ... and waiting with swiftly-increasing impatience!

'You've made Androula very happy.' Tara spoke as Leon took possession of a chair and looked across at her.

'I like the young man,' he said casually. 'I believe that, in time, he'll be a great asset to my firm.'

'This attitude is unexpected—' She broke off, not having meant to voice what were merely her own thoughts. Leon looked at her with a sort of exasperated expression.

'You don't know very much about me, do you?' His voice seemed to hold a bitter edge and once again she had the impression that he was like a man who had been grossly misjudged. Why should she have this idea? It persisted even though there was no explanation for it.

'I haven't had much time to learn,' she pointed out at length.

'Time means nothing. You can learn a lot in five minutes. It would be more correct to say that you haven't had the inclination to learn about me.'

Amazed, she stared at him, and her manner seemed only to aggravate him, because he rose abruptly and said,

'I have to go to Athens tomorrow, and I shan't be back until Thursday.' He would have moved away, but Tara spoke, impulsively asking if he were going to the city on business. He turned, and stood gazing down at her, his mouth compressed. She was in attractive shorts and sun-top; her tan was almost as deep as his, and the dark hair had been lightened at the front and temples by the sun. His eyes moved and his jaw relaxed. He seemed on the one hand to be fully appreciative of the lovely picture his wife made, while at the same time being possessed of the strongest anger against her. And suddenly he appeared to have reached a decision.

'In Athens I shall be seeing to business, but then I shall be calling on Aegina, where I shall stay for a couple of nights or so.'

'Aegina?' Her eyes closed for one fleeting second as an almost physical pain shot through her heart. 'You - you are staying on the island?'

His eyes glinted in the most extraordinary kind of way. Tara had the staggering impression that nothing would have afforded him greater satisfaction than to subject her to some form of physical chastisement!

'That's what I said, Tara. I have a friend there, so this part of my trip will be for pleasure - not business.' And without giving her time for any further comment he strode away in the direction of the house.

She watched the tall arrogant figure disappear ... and then white-hot fury took possession of her. That jealousy had ignited it she would not deny, although the conscious thought was not pronounced, since she was so consumed by her wrath that all else was vague and unimportant. Rising, she went swiftly into the house. Leon was not about and she went upstairs. Not there, either, and she realized he must have gone to his study, going round the back of the house and the small wooded enclosure that hid the small building from the rest of the garden.

Without even knocking she entered, her cheeks on fire, her small fists clenched tightly by her sides.

'Aegina!' she cried, glaring at him. 'So you're going to Aegina, are you? Well, you can stay there! - for as long as you like! And when you come back I shan't be here. I'm leaving you - for ever!' He was standing at the other side of the large desk and had been staring through the window, but had turned swiftly on her entry. His eyes darkened and narrowed, and their expression should have warned. But with Tara in her present mood there was no handhold for caution or restraint; her fury crushed all thought of danger. 'You seem to consider me a complete fool, don't you? Well, let me tell you that I know why you go to Aegina - to deep with your pillow friend, that's why! You've slept with her more than once since our marriage— You, who caused so much fuss over my having Ricky here! You're a hypocrite - and I hate you!' To her dismay she was desperately

fighting tears that clouded her vision. She had burned her boats now, and the marriage was ended.

Leon was glowering at her; deep shades of crimson appeared at the sides of his mouth and his eyes glinted like steel.

'I go to Aegina for that reason, do I?' he thundered, striding to her side of the desk. 'It's out at last, is it!' Before she could escape he had caught her arms, uncaring that his unmerciful grip caused her to cry out. 'And about time too! I wondered how long you'd be before tackling me with my infidelity.' Furiously he gave her a shake. 'I've been visiting Helena since my marriage - according to your deductions. *Thank you very much!*'

Tara went staggering back as he thrust her from him, tears automatically springing to her eyes at his rough treatment of her. Her heart was throbbing painfully, but as she stared into those dark and smouldering eyes the recollection of an idea came flooding in on her, the idea that her husband cared for her... Dejectedly she had dismissed it, she recalled, deciding it was impossible for him to care. But now it could not be denied; it occupied her mind to the exclusion of all else and it was some time before the significance of her husband's wrathful words impressed itself on her consciousness.

'You must have been aware - all the time - that I knew about Helena,' she murmured at last in wondering tones. 'Why didn't you say something? How did you know anyway?'

'Yes,' he admitted between his teeth, 'I've known for some time that she visited you here, that she told you I'd been with her just before your illness—'

'But how did you know?' pressed Tara again, wanting only to hasten the explanation ... and then to see what happened ... For in spite of

that glowering expression there seemed to be something far less frightening behind her husband's grim exterior.

'Savvas let it out that Helena had been here. I thought it most odd that you'd said nothing. However, in order to get the picture right I went to Aegina—'

'And stayed the night.' It was out before she could give the matter a restraining thought and it did seem for one terrifying moment that Leon would handle her roughly again. However, apart from an audible gritting of his teeth and the cutting delivery of his words when he spoke, there was nothing to portray a renewal of his fury which during the past moment had been swiftly dissolving.

'I spent a couple of hours only on the island. Then I caught the ferry to Piraeus as I had business in Athens, where I stayed the night - *alone!*'

She bit her lip, and after a moment went on to say quickly, 'Helena told you everything - that she was trying to break up our marriage, I mean?'

He nodded.

'Yes, I made her tell me everything,' he replied grimly, his eyes darkening with recollection. 'It was a spiteful act because women of her kind accept, from the start, that when the man they're having an affair with eventually marries they are finished. I sent her a letter a few weeks before our marriage, but it was lost in the post. She knew I'd been on Aegina, looking to some citrus plantations I have there, and was piqued - and puzzled perhaps - at my not having called upon her. After making some inquiries she discovered I was married—' Leon broke off, spreading his hands in a careless gesture, 'It was then that she decided on that spiteful action, hoping to turn you against me by saying I'd been with her since our marriage.' He was speaking in a more modified voice, but the grimness remained for all that, and Tara

knew he had been deeply hurt by her assumption that he had been unfaithful to her. She apologized, in a small voice, and he said, 'If you hadn't been so busy branding me an adulterer you might have found the opportunity of perceiving things which really did exist. I could kill you for harbouring thoughts like that about me,' he added with a returning spark of anger.

Tara scarcely noticed; she was dwelling on his statement that she might have found the opportunity of perceiving things that really did exist. She looked up at him, and gasped as she saw something in his eyes besides the anger which was already flickering out anyway - something she had never seen before, and which sent her heart thudding madly against her ribs. So he did care! And so much was explained now. She knew why he had appeared to be labouring under a sort of obstinacy, when it seemed that although he could have come out into the open and cleared the air, he was instead bent on playing a waiting game ... waiting for her to denounce him, it now transpired. Also explained of course was that air of being misjudged. He *had* been misjudged, and thinking about it now Tara did wonder why she hadn't given the whole matter more concentrated consideration, for Leon never once wore the air of guilt. On the contrary, she had, more than once, found it most difficult to believe that he was being false to her.

'You could have said something - about Helena's visit, I mean,' said Tara at last, for the deep silence which had fallen on the room was now oppressive, even though through it there filtered the whirring of cicadas in the trees outside the study window.

'I was waiting for you to do so - waiting to see just how long you would continue to misjudge me.' He paused a moment, glaring at her darkly, mouth tight and thin. Tara lowered her head, wondering how she could have been so quick to condemn, without any real proof. Intruding into these unhappy thoughts came the statement of the Greek girl about having slept here, at the villa, many times. This too

was a lie. Tara had no doubts whatsoever about that now. What had taken place between her and Leon had done so on Aegina, not on Poros, where Leon's friends lived. Looking back, Tara failed entirely to understand how she could have taken in what she now saw must be an untruth. A man in Leon's position would never flaunt his amours so close to home. 'Heaven knows how long you would have put off the showdown,' Leon was saying, coldly, but without too sharp a sting to his voice, 'had I not come to the end of my patience and forced it by saying I was going to Aegina—'

'When you weren't! That was very mean and unkind of you!'

'Mean and unkind! What about you - and your treatment of me? What about the lies you believed, and the readiness to condemn - without even opening up and giving me the chance of defending myself? Unkind, you say! I ought to give you a sample of what unkindness can really be - and by God I will if ever anything like this happens again! I'm not used to being branded a profligate, without decency or honour!' His eyes blazed again, and only now did Tara realize how hurt he had been by her silent condemnation.

'I do realize now that I should have spoken up,' she admitted in a small contrite voice. But then she went on to explain why she had kept silent, without at this stage mentioning Paul. She merely gave as her excuse her own humiliation at having to go home, admitting her marriage was a failure, and that of the hurt to her parents, which must surely result from her leaving her husband so soon after the marriage. The explanation did have the effect of clearing his brow somewhat, but he scathingly reminded her that, had she spoken up, there would have been a clearing of the air and not, as she so stupidly supposed, an immediate ending of the marriage.

Tara nodded, and swallowed hard, then looked up into his face, her expression begging for forgiveness. For a long moment he seemed to retain a hardness which lent such austerity to his face that he seemed

more inaccessible than ever she had seen him. But quite suddenly his features relaxed and as she watched with a sort of fascinated expectation and swiftly increasing excitement she saw that his anger was actually being replaced by a hint of humour. This was portrayed in the glimmer in his eyes, and the slight twitching at the corner of his mouth.

'I rather thought my mention of Aegina would produce some reaction, and it did. I should have done it before.' A pause as his amusement grew. Without sparing her he said, 'On a previous occasion when I was given a display of your wrath, I found you quite irresistible, remember?'

She coloured, as he knew she would, and anticipating her move to turn her head away he took her chin firmly in his hand and forced her to look at him. 'Don't worry, my dear, I'm not going to make love to you here, in the study. There's a much more pleasant time, and place.' He watched with a sort of merciless enjoyment as her colour increased and her long lashes came down to conceal her expression. 'Why did you become engaged to Paul?' he asked unexpectedly, releasing her and taking a seat on the corner of the desk. He folded his arms; so cool and confident he looked, she thought, with all his superiority in evidence, and just a tinge of that innate arrogance that was so often seen in the marble statues of the Greek gods. 'Paul? I-I-'

'Before you go any further,' he interrupted in a very soft voice, 'let me give you some good advice. I'll expect the truth, and if I don't get it the first time, my cautious wife, I shall most certainly get it the second time. I hope I make myself clear?'

Her chin lifted and her eyes sparkled.

'Are you threatening me with violence, Leon?'

'Extreme violence,' was his cool but emphasized warning, quite putting his wife out of countenance, since she could find no retort at all to offer, much less the cutting one she would have liked to produce. She told him the truth, but omitted to mention how she and Paul met. It did not surprise her that Leon should ask about this and with a shrug of resignation she told him, adding swiftly as she saw him stiffen and colour with anger at her revelation,

'Don't hold it against Paul, Leon. And promise you'll never mention it to him, as I promised I wouldn't tell you about it-

'Ten pounds!' Leon exploded into her entreaty, seeming not even to have heard it. 'A paltry ten pounds -- to answer an advertisement, like a pauper—' Leon fritted his teeth. 'And you! I can scarcely believe you'd act so irrationally as to insert such an advertisement What kind of a girl are you?'

She hung her head, hearing not only her husband's scathing homily, but her brother's as well.

'I wanted to get my own back on Ricky,' she muttered when after a long and unpleasant silence it seemed that Leon was determined to have a reply. He made no response; she felt instinctively that he was unable to find words sufficiently cutting to convey his contempt. She ventured after a while to repeat her request that he should not hold anything against his brother,

'Not hold anything against him, you say? For your information I am at the present time negotiating with three moneylenders, one in England and two in Athens. That's the reason I have to go there tomorrow -- to see these sharks and pay them off.' She bit her lip.

'I do see now that you can't allow him to have control of his fortune,' she said.

'I should be betraying a trust if I did.' His anger had once more died down and Tara sincerely hoped it would not come into evidence again, at least, not at present. 'Although,' Leon was adding as the thought occurred to him, 'my life would be far less complicated were I to wash my hands of him completely.'

'But you wouldn't?'

He shook his head.

'I only hope he'll improve with time, and that by the age of twenty-five he will be able to handle his money.'

'I'm sure he will. He's bound to realize the futility of such waste before he's very much older.'

'Yes, I believe you're right.' He paused and frowned. But his tones were much softer as he went on to say that this talk had certainly cleared up many puzzling things, adding that he had soon realized she had not been at all interested in Paul's money, while Paul on the other hand had certainly not become engaged to her because he was in love. 'The mystery grew when you made no requests to me for money. I tried to get an explanation from Paul, but it's easy to see now why he evaded my questioning.' He glanced sternly at his wife, but there was no sign of anger as he said, 'That you could lend yourself to such a trick! I can scarcely believe it. It's almost impossible that you'd take part in such a deception without even a thought to the possible consequences.'

Tara averted her head.

'It was the impression I got of you,' she said in a low, apologetic tone. 'It seemed, on the evidence I had, that you were being stingy with what was not yours, and that you were being most high-handed with your brother.'

'I was stingy and high-handed, eh?' A small pause and then, 'Well, I suppose I must forgive you both, since I would never have met you if the circumstances had not been what they were.'

'You - you're glad you married me?' Soft the question, and accompanied by a tender look of imploring. Within seconds she was in her husband's arms, just where she wished to be, and his lips had found hers in a kiss that was to leave her breathless and panting, and yet eager for more. 'Dear Leon,' she whispered close to his mouth, 'I'm sorry for everything—' The rest was smothered and for a long while the only sound was the whirring of the cicadas outside. But eventually Leon took his lips from hers and decided to finish her sentence in his own particular way.

'Sorry for wrong conclusions, for misjudging me, for throwing things at me. I rather think,' he decided presently, 'that I shall have to take you seriously in hand - give you regular reminders of that patriarchal society I earlier mentioned.'

She laughed shakily and clung to him.

'I'm sure you wouldn't, darling.'

Then just you wait and see,' he warned, but his eyes were tender as they looked deeply into hers, and she knew instinctively that he would never give her cause to be afraid of him again.

'When did you begin to love me?' she just had to ask, and Leon gave an amused laugh.

'Isn't it just like a woman to ask that?' he teased, adding that he really did not know just when it was that he had begun to realize that he cared. 'All I know is,' he went on to add, 'that when I heard of Ricky's having stayed here I was mad with jealousy.' He reminded her that she had denied ever having had a serious young man, and once again she hung her head.

'I had to lie,' she offered lamely. 'I loved you, you see, and didn't want you to know I'd been engaged to anyone before I met Paul.'

Leon nodded, as if he fully understood how she had felt on that occasion, but told her that in future there would never be any need for deception between them. His lips were close to her throat as he spoke; she felt a thrill of sheer ecstasy as his clean cool breath caressed her like the gentle touch of a summer breeze.

'Do you recall, my dearest one, that I said you and I had a need of each other?' Leon's question was answered with a nod and a sigh and he smiled tenderly down at her. 'I stressed that you had a need of me, after you had so emphatically denied it, do you remember, my love?'

'Yes, I remember.' A dreamy nod accompanied her reply. She really had no wish to talk, not just now.

'I didn't mean what you concluded I meant, Tara.' His voice became vibrant, and edged with emotion; deep tenderness looked out of his eyes. 'I meant that you needed my love, just as I need yours... for always, Tara, my own dearest wife... for always.'

She shone up at him, glowing, and even more beautiful because of the way she felt and because of the ecstasy of being in her husband's arms, and because of the way he looked at her with those dark attractive eyes. No words were spoken in response to his tender communication; Tara merely conveyed her agreement by tilting her head and offering him her lips.