

The Right Path

Nora Roberts

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Contents

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Copyright](#)

Chapter One

The sky was cloudless—the hard, perfect blue of a summer painting. A breeze whispered through the roses in the garden. Mountains were misted by distance. A scent—flowers, sea, new grass—drifted on the air. With a sigh of pure pleasure, Morgan leaned farther over the balcony rail and just looked.

Had it really only been yesterday morning that she had looked out on New York’s steel and concrete? Had she run through a chill April drizzle to catch a taxi to the airport? One day. It seemed impossible to go from one world to another in only a day.

But she was here, standing on the balcony of a villa on the Isle of Lesbos. There was no gray drizzle at all, but strong Greek sunlight.

There was quiet, a deep blanketing stillness that contrasted completely with the fits and starts of New York traffic. If I could paint, Morgan mused, I'd paint this view and call it *Silence*.

"Come in," she called when there was a knock on the door. After one last deep breath, she turned, reluctantly.

"So, you're up and dressed." Liz swept in, a small, golden fairy with a tray-bearing maid in her wake.

"Room service." Morgan grinned as the maid placed the tray on a glass-topped table. "I'll begin to wallow in luxury from this moment." She took an appreciative sniff of the platters the maid uncovered. "Are you joining me?"

"Just for coffee." Liz settled in a chair, smoothing the skirts of her silk and lace robe, then took a long survey of the woman who sat opposite her.

Long loose curls in shades from ash blond to honey brown fell to tease pale shoulders. Almond-shaped eyes, almost too large for the slender face, were a nearly transparent blue. There was a straight, sharp nose and prominent cheekbones, a long, narrow mouth and a subtly pointed chin. It was a face of angles and contours that many a model starved herself for. It would photograph like a dream had Morgan ever been inclined to sit long enough to be captured on film.

What you'd get, Liz mused, would be a blur of color as Morgan dashed away to see what was around the next corner.

"Oh, Morgan, you look fabulous! I'm so glad you're here at last."

"Now that I'm here," Morgan returned, shifting her eyes back to the view, "I can't understand why I put off coming for so long. *Efxaristo*," she added as the maid poured her coffee.

"Show-off," Liz said with mock scorn. "Do you know how long it took me to master a simple Greek hello, how are you? No, never mind." She waved her hand before Morgan could speak. The symphony of

diamonds and sapphires in her wedding ring caught the flash of sunlight. “Three years married to Alex and living in Athens and Lesbos, and I still stumble over the language. Thank you, Zena,” she added in English, dismissing the maid with a smile.

“You’re simply determined not to learn.” Morgan bit enthusiastically into a piece of toast. She wasn’t hungry, she discovered. She was ravenous. “If you’d open your mind, the words would seep in.”

“Listen to you.” Liz wrinkled her nose. “Just because you speak a dozen languages.”

“Five.”

“Five is four more than a rational person requires.”

“Not a rational interpreter,” Morgan reminded her and dug wholeheartedly into her eggs. “And if I hadn’t spoken Greek, I wouldn’t have met Alex and you wouldn’t be *Kyrios* Elizabeth Theoharis. Fate,” she announced with a full mouth, “is a strange and wonderful phenomenon.”

“Philosophy at breakfast,” Liz murmured into her coffee. “That’s one of the things I’ve missed about you. Actually, I’d hate to think what might have happened if I hadn’t been home on layover when Alex popped up. You wouldn’t have introduced us.” She commandeered a piece of toast, adding a miserly dab of plum jelly. “I’d still be serving miniature bottles of bourbon at thirty thousand feet.”

“Liz, my love, when something’s meant, it’s meant.” Morgan cut into a fat sausage. “I’d love to take credit for your marital bliss, but one brief introduction wasn’t responsible for the fireworks that followed.” She glanced up at the cool blond beauty and smiled. “Little did I know I’d lose my roommate in less than three weeks. I’ve never seen two people move so fast.”

“We decided we’d get acquainted after we were married.” A grin warmed Liz’s face. “And we have.”

“Where is Alex this morning?”

“Downstairs in his office.” Liz moved her shoulders absently and left half her toast untouched. “He’s building another ship or something.”

Morgan laughed outright. “You say that in the same tone you’d use if he were building a model train. Don’t you know you’re supposed to become spoiled and disdainful when you marry a millionaire—especially a foreign millionaire?”

“Is that so? Well, I’ll see what I can do.” She topped off her coffee. “He’ll probably be horribly busy for the next few weeks, which is one more reason I’m glad you’re here.”

“You need a cribbage partner.”

“Hardly,” Liz corrected as she struggled with a smile. “You’re the worst cribbage player I know.”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Morgan began as her brows drew together.

“Perhaps you’ve improved. Anyway,” Liz went on, concealing with her coffee cup what was now a grin, “not to be disloyal to my adopted country, but it’s just so good to have my best friend, and an honest-to-God American, around.”

“*Spasibo.*”

“English at all times,” Liz insisted. “And I know that wasn’t even Greek. You aren’t translating government hyperbole at the U.N. for the next four weeks.” She leaned forward to rest her elbows on the table. “Tell me the truth, Morgan, aren’t you ever terrified you’ll interpret some nuance incorrectly and cause World War III?”

“Who me?” Morgan opened her eyes wide. “Not a chance. Anyway, the trick is to think in the language you’re interpreting. It’s that easy.”

“Sure it is.” Liz leaned back. “Well, you’re on vacation, so you only have to think in English. Unless you want to argue with the cook.”

“Absolutely not,” Morgan assured her as she polished off her eggs.

“How’s your father?”

“Marvelous, as always.” Relaxed, content, Morgan poured more coffee. When was the last time she had taken the time for a second cup in the morning? Vacation, Liz had said. Well, she was damn well going to learn how to enjoy one. “He sends you his love and wants me to smuggle some ouzo back to New York.”

“I’m not going to think about you going back.” Liz rose and swirled around the balcony. The lace border at the hem of her robe swept over the tile. “I’m going to find a suitable mate for you and establish you in Greece.”

“I can’t tell you how much I appreciate your handling things for me,” Morgan returned dryly.

“It’s all right. What are friends for?” Ignoring the sarcasm, Liz leaned back on the balcony. “Dorian’s a likely candidate. He’s one of Alex’s top men and really attractive. Blond and bronzed with a profile that belongs on a coin. You’ll meet him tomorrow.”

“Should I tell Dad to arrange my dowry?”

“I’m serious.” Folding her arms, Liz glared at Morgan’s grin. “I’m not letting you go back without a fight. I’m going to fill your days with sun and sea, and dangle hordes of gorgeous men in front of your nose. You’ll forget that New York and the U.N. exist.”

“They’re already wiped out of my mind ... for the next four weeks.” Morgan tossed her hair back over her shoulders. “So, satiate and dangle. I’m at your mercy. Are you going to drag me to the beach this morning? Force me to lie on the sand and soak up rays until I have a fabulous golden tan?”

“Exactly.” With a brisk nod, Liz headed for the door. “Change. I’ll meet you downstairs.”

Thirty minutes later, Morgan decided she was going to like Liz's brand of brainwashing. White sand, blue water. She let herself drift on the gentle waves. *Too wrapped up in your work.* Isn't that what Dad said? *You're letting the job run you instead of the other way around.* Closing her eyes, Morgan rolled to float on her back. Between job pressure and the nasty breakup with Jack, she mused, I need a peace transfusion.

Jack was part of the past. Morgan was forced to admit that he had been more a habit than a passion. They'd suited each other's requirements. She had wanted an intelligent male companion; he an attractive woman whose manners would be advantageous to his political career.

If she'd loved him, Morgan reflected, she could hardly think of him so objectively, so ... well, coldly. There was no ache, no loneliness. What there was, she admitted, was relief. But with the relief had come the odd feeling of being at loose ends. A feeling Morgan was neither used to nor enjoyed.

Liz's invitation had been perfectly timed. And this, she thought, opening her eyes to study that perfect sweep of sky, was paradise. Sun, sand, rock, flowers—the whispering memory of ancient gods and goddesses. Mysterious Turkey was close, separated only by the narrow Gulf of Edremit. She closed her eyes again and would have dozed if Liz's voice hadn't disturbed her.

“Morgan! Some of us have to eat at regular intervals.”

“Always thinking of your stomach.”

“And *your* skin,” Liz countered from the edge of the water. “You're going to fry. You can overlook lunch, but not sunburn.”

“All right, Mommy.” Morgan swam in, then stood on shore and shook like a wet dog. “How come you can swim and lie in the sun and still look ready to walk into a ballroom?”

“Breeding,” Liz told her and handed over the short robe. “Come on, Alex usually tears himself away from his ships for lunch.”

I could get used to eating on terraces, Morgan thought after lunch was finished. They relaxed over iced coffee and fruit. She noted that Alexander Theoharis was still as fascinated with his small, golden wife as he had been three years before in New York.

Though she’d brushed off Liz’s words that morning, Morgan felt a certain pride at having brought them together. A perfect match, she mused, Alex had an old world charm—dark aquiline looks made dashing by a thin white scar above his eyebrow. He was only slightly above average height but with a leanness that was more aristocratic than rangy. It was the ideal complement for Liz’s dainty blond beauty.

“I don’t see how you ever drag yourself away from here,” Morgan told him. “If this were all mine, nothing would induce me to leave.”

Alex followed her gaze across the glimpse of sea to the mountains. “But when one returns, it’s all the more magnificent. Like a woman,” he continued, lifting Liz’s hand to kiss, “paradise demands constant appreciation.”

“It’s got mine,” Morgan stated.

“I’m working on her, Alex.” Liz laced her fingers with his. “I’m going to make a list of all the eligible men within a hundred miles.”

“You don’t have a brother, do you, Alex?” Morgan asked, sending him a smile.

“Sisters only. My apologies.”

“Forget it, Liz.”

“If we can’t entice you into matrimony, Alex will have to offer you a job in the Athens office.”

“I’d steal Morgan from the U.N. in a moment,” Alex reminded her with a move of his shoulders. “I couldn’t lure her away three years ago. I tried.”

“We have a month to wear her down this time.” She shot Alex a quick glance. “Let’s take her out on the yacht tomorrow.”

“Of course.” He agreed immediately. “We’ll make a day of it. Would you like that, Morgan?”

“Oh, well, I’m constantly spending the day on a yacht on the Aegean, but”—her lake-blue eyes lit with laughter—“since Liz wants to, I’ll try not to be too bored.”

“She’s such a good sport,” Liz confided to Alex.

It was just past midnight when Morgan made her way down to the beach again. Sleep had refused to come. Morgan welcomed the insomnia, seeing it as an excuse to walk out into the warm spring night.

The light was liquid. The moon was sliced in half but held a white, gleaming brightness. Cypresses which flanked the steps down to the beach were silvered with it. The scent of blossoms, hot and pungent during the day, seemed more mysterious, more exotic, by moonlight.

From somewhere in the distance, she heard the low rumble of a motor. A late-night fisherman, she thought, and smiled. It would be quite an adventure to fish under the moon.

The beach spread in a wide half circle. Morgan dropped both her towel and wrap on a rock, then ran into the water. Against her skin it was so cool and silky that she toyed with the idea of discarding even the brief bikini. Better not, she thought with a low laugh. No use tempting the ghosts of the gods.

Though the thought of adventure appealed to her, she kept to the open bay and suppressed the urge to explore the inlets. They’d still

be there in the daylight, she reminded herself. She swam lazily, giving her strokes just enough power to keep her afloat. She hadn't come for the exercise.

Even when her body began to feel the chill, she lingered. There were stars glistening on the water, and silence. Such silence. Strange, that until she had found it, she hadn't known she was looking for it.

New York seemed more than a continent away; it seemed centuries away. For the moment, she was content that it be so. Here she could indulge in the fantasies that never seemed appropriate in the rush of day-to-day living. Here she could let herself believe in ancient gods, in shining knights and bold pirates. A laugh bubbled from her as she submerged and rose again. Gods, knights, and pirates ... well, she supposed she'd take the pirate if she had her pick. Gods were too bloodthirsty, knights too chivalrous, but a pirate ...

Shaking her head, Morgan wondered how her thoughts had taken that peculiar turn. It must be Liz's influence, she decided. Morgan reminded herself she didn't want a pirate or any other man. What she wanted was peace.

With a sigh, she stood knee-deep in the water, letting the drops stream down her hair and skin. She was cold now, but the cold was exhilarating. Ignoring her wrap, she sat on the rock and pulled a comb from its pocket and idly ran it through her hair. Moon, sand, water. What more could there be? She was, for one brief moment, in total harmony with her own spirit and with nature's.

Shock gripped her as a hand clamped hard over her mouth. She struggled, instinctively, but an arm was banded around her waist—rough cloth scraping her naked skin. Dragged from the rock, Morgan found herself molded against a solid, muscular chest.

Rape? It was the first clear thought before the panic. She kicked out blindly as she was pulled into the cover of trees. The shadows were deep there. Fighting wildly, she raked with her nails wherever she

could reach, feeling only a brief satisfaction at the hiss of an undrawn breath near her ear.

“Don’t make a sound.” The order was in quick, harsh Greek. About to strike out again, Morgan felt her blood freeze. A glimmer of knife caught the moonlight just before she was thrust to the ground under the length of the man’s body. “Wildcat,” he muttered. “Keep still and I won’t have to hurt you. Do you understand?”

Numb with terror, Morgan nodded. With her eyes glued to his knife, she lay perfectly still. I can’t fight him now, she thought grimly. Not now, but somehow, somehow I’ll find out who he is. He’ll pay.

The first panic was gone, but her body still trembled as she waited. It seemed an eternity, but he made no move, no sound. It was so quiet, she could hear the waves lapping gently against the sand only a few feet away. Over her head, through the spaces in the leaves, stars still shone. It must be a nightmare, she told herself. It can’t be real. But when she tried to shift under him, the pressure of his body on hers proved that it was very, very real.

The hand over her mouth choked her breath until vague colors began to dance before her eyes. Morgan squeezed them tight for a moment to fight the faintness. Then she heard him speak again to a companion she couldn’t see.

“What do you hear?”

“Nothing yet—in a moment.” The voice that answered was rough and brisk. “Who the devil is she?”

“It doesn’t matter. She’ll be dealt with.”

The roaring in her ears made it difficult to translate the Greek. Dealt with? she thought, dizzy again from fear and the lack of air.

The second man said something low and furious about women, then spat into the dirt.

“Just keep your ears open,” Morgan’s captor ordered. “And leave the woman to me.”

“Now.”

She felt him stiffen, but her eyes never left the knife. He was gripping it tighter now, she saw the tensing of his fingers on the handle.

Footsteps. They echoed on the rock steps of the beach. Hearing them, Morgan began to struggle again with the fierce strength of panic and of hope. With a whispered oath, he put more of his weight on her. He smelt faintly of the sea. As he shifted she caught a brief glimpse of his face in a patchy stream of moonlight. She saw dark, angular features, a grim mouth, and narrowed jet eyes. They were hard and cold and ruthless. It was the face of a man prepared to kill. *Why?* She thought as her mind began to float. I don’t even know him.

“Follow him,” he ordered his companion. Morgan heard a slight stirring in the leaves. “I’ll take care of the woman.”

Morgan’s eyes widened at the sharp glimmer of the blade. She tasted something—bitter, copper—in her throat, but didn’t recognize it as terror. The world spun to the point of a pin, then vanished.

The sky was full of stars, silver against black. The sea whispered. Against her back, the sand was rough. Morgan rose on her elbow and tried to clear her head. Fainted? Good God, had she actually fainted? Had she simply fallen asleep and dreamed it all? Rubbing her fingers against her temple, she wondered if her fantasies about pirates had caused her to hallucinate.

A small sound brought her swiftly to her feet. No, it had been real, and he was back. Morgan hurled herself at the shadow as it approached. She’d accepted the inevitability of death once without a struggle. This time, he was going to have a hell of a fight on his hands.

The shadow grunted softly as she struck, then Morgan found herself captured again, under him with the sand scraping her back.

“*Diabolos!* Be still!” he ordered in furious Greek as she tried to rip at his face.

“The hell I will!” Morgan tossed back in equally furious English. She fought with every ounce of strength until he pinned her, spread-eagle beneath him. Breathless, fearless in her rage, she stared up at him.

Looking down, he studied her with a frown. “You’re not Greek.” The statement, uttered in surprised and impatient English, stopped her struggles. “Who are you?”

“None of your business.” She tried, and failed, to jerk her wrists free of his hold.

“Stop squirming,” he ordered roughly, as his fingers clamped down harder. He wasn’t thinking of his strength or her fragility, but that she wasn’t simply a native who had been in the wrong place at the wrong time. His profession had taught him to get answers and adjust for complications. “What were you doing on the beach in the middle of the night?”

“Swimming,” she tossed back. “Any idiot should be able to figure that out.”

He swore, then shifted as she continued to struggle beneath him. “Damn it, be still!” His brows were lowered, not in anger now but concentration. “Swimming,” he repeated as his eyes narrowed again. He’d watched her walk out of the sea—perhaps it was as innocent as that. “American,” he mused, ignoring Morgan’s thrashing. Weren’t the Theoharises expecting an American woman? Of all the ill-timed ... “You’re not Greek,” he murmured again.

“Neither are you,” Morgan said between clenched teeth.

“Half.” His thoughts underwent some rapid readjustments. The Theoharises’ American houseguest, out for a moonlight swim—he’d

have to play this one carefully or there'd be hell to pay. Quite suddenly, he flashed her a smile. "You had me fooled. I thought you could understand me."

"I understand perfectly," she retorted. "And you won't find it an easy rape now that you don't have your knife out."

"Rape?" Apparently astonished, he stared at her. His laughter was as sudden as the smile. "I hadn't given that much thought. In any case, Aphrodite, the knife was never intended for you."

"Then what do you mean by dragging me around like that? Flashing a knife in my face and nearly suffocating me?" Fury was much more satisfying than fear, and Morgan went with it. "Let me go!" She pushed at him with her body, but couldn't nudge him.

"In a moment," he said pleasantly. The moonlight played on her skin, and he enjoyed it. A fabulous face, he mused, now that he had time to study it. She'd be a woman accustomed to male admiration. Perhaps charm would distract her from the rather unique aspect of their meeting. "I can only say that what I did was for your own protection."

"Protection!" she flung back at him and tried to wrench her arms free.

"There wasn't time for amenities, fair lady. My apologies if my ... technique was unrefined." His tone seemed to take it for granted that she would understand. "Tell me, why were you out alone, sitting like Lorelei on the rock and combing your hair?"

"That's none of your business." His voice had dropped, becoming low and seductive. The dark eyes had softened and appeared depthless. She could almost believe she had imagined the ruthlessness she'd glimpsed in the shadows. But she felt the light throbbing where his fingers had gripped her flesh. "I'm going to scream if you don't let me go."

Her body was tempting now that he had time to appreciate it, but he rose with a shrug. There was still work to be done that night. “My apologies for your inconvenience.”

“Oh, is that right?” Struggling to her feet, Morgan began to brush at the sand that clung to her skin. “You have your nerve, dragging me off into the bushes, smothering me, brandishing a knife in my face, then apologizing like you’ve just stepped on my toe.” Suddenly cold, she wrapped her arms around herself. “Just who are you and what was this all about?”

“Here.” Stooping, he picked up the wrap he had dropped in order to hold her off. “I was bringing this to you when you launched your attack.” He grinned as she shrugged into the wrap. It was a pity to cover the lengthy, intriguing body. “Who I am at the moment isn’t relevant. As for the rest”—again the smooth, easy shrug—“I can’t tell you.”

“Just like that?” With a quick nod, Morgan turned and stalked to the beach steps. “We’ll see what the police have to say about it.”

“I wouldn’t if I were you.”

The advice was quiet, but vibrated with command. Hesitating, Morgan turned at the base of the steps to study him. He wasn’t threatening now. What she felt wasn’t fear, but his authority. He was quite tall, she noticed suddenly. And the moonlight played tricks with his face, making it almost cruel one moment, charming the next. Now it held all the confidence of Lucifer regrouping after the Fall.

Looking at him, she remembered the feel of hard, wiry muscles. He was standing easily, hands thrust into the pockets of jeans. The aura of command fit him perfectly. His smile didn’t disguise it, nor did his casual stance. Damn pirates, she thought, feeling a quick twinge. Only lunatics find them attractive. Because she felt vulnerable, Morgan countered with bravado.

“Wouldn’t you?” She lifted her chin and walked back to him.

“No,” he answered mildly. “But perhaps, unlike me, you look for complications. I’m a simple man.” He took a long, searching look of her face. *This is not, he decided instantly, a simple woman.* Though in his mind he cursed her, he went on conversationally. “Questions, reports to fill out, hours wasted on red tape. And then, even if you had my name”—he shrugged and flashed the grin again—“no one would believe you, Aphrodite. No one.”

She didn’t trust that grin—or the sultry way he called her by the goddess’s name. She didn’t trust the sudden warmth in her blood. “I wouldn’t be so sure,” Morgan began, but he cut her off, closing the slight distance between them.

“And I didn’t rape you.” Slowly, he ran his hands down her hair until they rested on her shoulders. His fingers didn’t bite into her flesh now, but skimmed lazily. She had the eyes of a witch, he thought, and the face of a goddess. His time was short, but the moment was not to be missed. “Until now, I haven’t even given in to the urge to do this.”

His mouth closed over hers, hot and stunningly sweet. She hadn’t been prepared for it. She pushed against him, but it was strictly out of reflex and lacked strength. He was a man who knew a woman’s weakness. Deliberately, he brought her close, using style rather than force.

The scent of the sea rose to surround her, and heat—such a furnace heat that seemed to come from within and without at the same time. Almost leisurely, he explored her mouth until her heart thudded wildly against the quick, steady beat of his. His hands were clever, sliding beneath the wide sleeves of her robe to tease and caress the length of her arms, the slope of her shoulders.

When her struggles ceased, he nibbled at her lips as if he would draw out more taste. Slow, easy. His tongue tempted hers then retreated, then slipped through her parted lips again to torment and savor. For a moment, Morgan feared she would faint for a second time in his arms.

“One kiss,” he murmured against her lips, “is hardly a criminal offense.” She was sweeter than he had imagined and, he realized as desire stirred hotly, deadlier. “I could take another with little more risk.”

“No.” Coming abruptly to her senses, Morgan pushed away from him. “You’re mad. And you’re madder still if you think I’m going to let this go. I’m going—” She broke off as her hand lifted to her throat in a nervous gesture. The chain which always hung there was missing. Morgan glanced down, then brought her eyes back to his, furious, glowing.

“What have you done with my medal?” she demanded. “Give it back to me.”

“I’m afraid I don’t have it, Aphrodite.”

“I want it back.” Bravado wasn’t a pose this time; she was livid. She stepped closer until they were toe to toe. “It’s not worth anything to you. You won’t be able to get more than a few drachmas for it.”

His eyes narrowed. “I didn’t take your medal. I’m not a thief.” The temper in his voice was cold, coated with control. “If I were going to steal something from you, I would have found something more interesting than a medal.”

Her eyes filled in a rush, and she swung out her hand to slap him. He caught her wrist, adding frustration to fury.

“It appears the medal is important,” he said softly, but his hand was no longer gentle. “A token from a lover?”

“A gift from someone I love,” Morgan countered. “I wouldn’t expect a man like you to understand its value.” With a jerk, she pulled her wrist from his hold. “I won’t forget you,” she promised, then turned and flew up the stairs.

He watched her until she was swallowed by the darkness. After a moment he turned back to the beach.

Chapter Two

The sun was a white flash of light. Its diamonds skimmed the water's surface. With the gentle movement of the yacht, Morgan found herself half-dozing.

Could the moonlit beach and the man have been a dream? she wondered hazily. Knives and rough hands and sudden draining kisses from strangers had no place in the real world. They belonged in one of those strange, half-remembered dreams she had when the rush and demands of work and the city threatened to become too much for her. She'd always considered them her personal release valve. Harmless, but absolutely secret—something she'd never considered telling Jack or any of her co-workers.

If it hadn't been for the absence of her medal, and the light trail of bruises on her arms, Morgan could have believed the entire incident had been the product of an overworked imagination.

Sighing, she shifted her back to the sun, pillowing her head on her hands. Her skin, slick with oil, glistened. Why was she keeping the whole crazy business from Liz and Alex? Grimacing, she flexed her shoulders. They'd be horrified if she told them she'd been assaulted. Morgan could all but see Alex placing her under armed guard for the rest of her stay on Lesbos. He'd make certain there was an investigation—complicated, time-consuming, and in all probability fruitless. Morgan could work up a strong hate for the dark man for being right.

And what, if she decided to pursue it, could she tell the police? She hadn't been hurt or sexually assaulted. There'd been no verbal threat she could pin down, not even the slimmest motivation for what had happened. And what had happened? she demanded of herself. A man had dragged her into the bushes, held her there for no clear reason, then had let her go without harming her.

The Greek police wouldn't see the kiss as a criminal offense. She hadn't been robbed. There was no way on earth to prove the man

had taken her medal. And damn it, she added with a sigh, as much as she'd like to assign all sorts of evil attributes to him, he just didn't fit the role of a petty thief. Petty anything, she thought grudgingly. Whatever he did, she was certain he did big ... and did well.

So what was she going to do about it? True, he'd frightened and infuriated her—the second was probably a direct result of the first—but what else was there?

If and when they caught him, it would be his word against hers. Somehow, Morgan thought his word would carry more weight.

So I was frightened—my pride took a lump. She shrugged and shifted her head on her hands. It's not worth upsetting Liz and Alex. Midnight madness, she mused. Another strange adventure in the life and times of Morgan James. File it and forget it.

Hearing Alex mount the steps to the sun deck, Morgan rested her chin on her hands and smiled at him. On the lounge beside her, Liz stirred and slept on.

“So, the sun has put her to sleep.” Alex mounted the last of the steps, then settled into the chair beside his wife.

“I nearly dozed off myself.” With a yawn, Morgan stretched luxuriously before she rolled over to adjust the lounge to a sitting position. “But I didn't want to miss anything.” Gazing over the water, she studied the clump of land in the distance. The island seemed to float, as insubstantial as a mist.

“Chios,” Alex told her, following her gaze. “And”—he gestured, waiting for her eyes to shift in the direction of his—“the coast of Turkey.”

“So close,” Morgan mused. “It seems as though I could swim to it.”

“At sea, the distance can be deceiving.” He flicked a lighter at the end of a black cigarette. The fragrance that rose from it was faintly sweet and exotic. “You'd have to be a hardy swimmer. Easy enough

with a boat, though. There are some who find the proximity profitable.” At Morgan’s blank expression, Alex laughed. “Smuggling, innocence. It’s still popular even though the punishment is severe.”

“Smuggling,” she murmured, intrigued. Then the word put her in mind of pirates again and her curious expression turned into a frown. A nasty business, she reminded herself, and not romantic at all.

“The coast,” Alex made another gesture, sweeping, with the elegant cigarette held between two long fingers. “The many bays and peninsulas, offshore islands, inlets. There’s simple access from the sea to the interior.”

She nodded. Yes, a nasty business—they weren’t talking about French brandy or Spanish lace. “Opium?”

“Among other things.”

“But Alex.” His careless acceptance caused her frown to deepen. Once she’d sorted it through, Morgan’s own sense of right and wrong had little middle ground. “Doesn’t it bother you?”

“Bother me?” he repeated, taking a long, slow drag on the cigarette. “Why?”

Flustered with the question, she sat up straighter. “Aren’t you concerned about that sort of thing going on so close to your own home?”

“Morgan.” Alex spread his hands in an acceptance of fate. The thick chunk of gold on his left pinky gleamed dully in the sunlight. “My concern would hardly stop what’s been going on for centuries.”

“But still, with crime practically in your own backyard ...” She broke off, thinking about the streets of Manhattan. Perhaps she was the pot calling the kettle black. “I supposed I’d thought you’d be annoyed,” she finished.

His eyes lit with a touch of amusement before he shrugged. “I leave the matter—and the annoyance—to the patrols and authorities. Tell me, are you enjoying your stay so far?”

Morgan started to speak again, then consciously smoothed away the frown. Alex was old world enough not to want to discuss unpleasanties with a guest. “It’s wonderful here, Alex. I can see why Liz loves it.”

He flashed her a grin before he drew in strong tobacco. “You know Liz wants you to stay. She’s missed you. At times, I feel very guilty because we don’t get to America to see you often enough.”

“You don’t have to feel guilty, Alex.” Morgan pushed on sunglasses and relaxed again. After all, she reflected, smuggling had nothing to do with her. “Liz is happy.”

“She’d be happier with you here.”

“Alex,” Morgan began with a smile for his indulgence of his wife. “I can’t simply move in as a companion, no matter how much both of us love Liz.”

“You’re still dedicated to your job at the U.N.?” His tone had altered slightly, but Morgan sensed the change. It was business now.

“I like my work. I’m good at it, and I need the challenge.”

“I’m a generous employer, Morgan, particularly to one with your capabilities.” He took another long, slow drag, studying her through the mist of smoke. “I asked you to come work for me three years ago. If I hadn’t been”—he glanced down at Liz’s sleeping figure—“distracted”—he decided with a mild smile—“I would have taken more time to convince you to accept.”

“Distracted?” Liz pushed her sunglasses up to her forehead and peered at him from under them.

“Eavesdropping,” Morgan said with a sniff. A uniformed steward set three iced drinks on the table. She lifted one and drank. “Your manners always were appalling.”

“You have a few weeks yet to think it over, Morgan.” Tenacity beneath a smooth delivery was one of Alex’s most successful business tactics. “But I warn you, Liz will be more persistent with her other solution.” He shrugged, reaching for his own drink. “And I must agree—a woman needs a husband and security.”

“How very Greek of you,” Morgan commented dryly.

His grin flashed without apology. “I’m afraid one of Liz’s candidates will be delayed. Dorian won’t join us until tomorrow. He’s bringing my cousin Iona with him.”

“Marvelous.” Liz’s response was drenched in sarcasm. Alex sent her a frown.

“Liz isn’t fond of Iona, but she’s family.” The quiet look he sent his wife told Morgan the subject had been discussed before. “I have a responsibility.”

Liz took the last glass with a sigh of acceptance. Briefly she touched her hand to his. “We have a responsibility,” she corrected. “Iona’s welcome.”

Alex’s frown turned into a look of love so quickly, Morgan gave a mock groan. “Don’t you two ever fight? I mean, don’t you realize it isn’t healthy to be so well balanced?”

Liz’s eyes danced over the rim of her glass. “We have our moments, I suppose. A week ago I was furious with him for at least—ah, fifteen minutes.”

“That,” Morgan said positively, “is disgusting.”

“So,” Alex mused, “you think a man and woman must fight to be ... healthy?”

Shaking back her hair, Morgan laughed. “I have to fight to be healthy.”

“Morgan, you haven’t mentioned Jack at all. Is there a problem?”

“Liz.” Alex’s disapproval was clear in the single syllable.

“No, it’s all right, Alex.” Taking her glass, Morgan rose and moved to the rail. “It’s not a problem,” she said slowly. “At least I hope it’s not.” She stared into her drink, frowning, as if she wasn’t quite sure what the glass contained. “I’ve been running on this path—this very straight, very defined path. I could run it blindfolded.” With a quick laugh, Morgan leaned out on the rail to let the wind grab at her hair. “Suddenly, I discovered it wasn’t a path, but a rut and it kept getting deeper. I decided to change course before it became a pit.”

“You always did prefer an obstacle course,” Liz murmured. But she was pleased with Jack’s disposal, and took little trouble to hide it.

The sea churned in a white froth behind the boat. Morgan turned from her study of it. “I don’t intend to fall at Dorian’s feet, Liz—or anyone else you might have in mind—just because Jack and I are no longer involved.”

“I should hope not,” Liz returned with some spirit. “That would take all the fun out of it.”

With a sigh of exasperated affection, Morgan turned back to the rail.

The stark mountains of Lesbos rose from the sea. Jagged, harsh, timeless. Morgan could make out the pure white lines of Alex’s villa. She thought it looked like a virgin offering to the gods—cool, classic, certainly feminine. Higher still was a rambling gray structure which seemed hewn from the rock itself. It faced the sea; indeed, it loomed over it. As if challenging Poseidon to claim it, it clung to the cliff. Morgan saw it as arrogant, rough, masculine. The flowering vines which grew all around it didn’t soften the appearance, but added a haunted kind of beauty.

There were other buildings—a white-washed village, snuggled cottages, one or two other houses on more sophisticated lines, but the two larger structures hovered over the rest. One was elegant; one was savage.

“Who does that belong to?” Morgan called over her shoulder. “It’s incredible.”

Following her gaze, Liz grinned and rose to join her. “I should have known that would appeal to you. Sometimes I’d swear it’s alive. Nicholas Gregoras, olive oil, and more recently, import-export.” She glanced at her friend’s profile. “Maybe I’ll include him for dinner tomorrow if he’s free, though I don’t think he’s your type.”

Morgan gave her a dry look. “Oh? And what is my type?”

“Someone who’ll give you plenty to fight about. Who’ll give you that obstacle course.”

“*Hmm.* You know me too well.”

“As for Nick, he’s rather smooth and certainly a charmer.” Liz tapped a fingernail against the rail as she considered. “Not as blatantly handsome as Dorian, but he has a rather basic sort of sex appeal. Earthier, and yet ...” She trailed off, narrowing her eyes she tried to pigeonhole him. “Well, he’s an odd one. I suppose he’d have to be to live in a house like that. He’s in his early thirties, inherited the olive oil empire almost ten years ago. Then he branched into import-export. He seems to have a flair for it. Alex is very fond of him because they go back to short pants together.”

“Liz, I only wanted to know who owned the house. I didn’t ask for a biography.”

“These facts are part of the service.” She cupped her hands around her lighter and lit a cigarette. “I want to give you a clear picture of your options.”

“Haven’t you got a goatherd up your sleeve?” Morgan demanded. “I rather like the idea of a small, white-washed cottage and baking black bread.”

“I’ll see what I can do.”

“I don’t suppose it occurs to you or Alex that I’m content to be single—the modern, capable woman on her own? I know how to use a screwdriver, how to change a flat tire ...”

“ ‘Methinks she doth protest too much,’ ” Liz quoted mildly.

“Liz—”

“I love you, Morgan.”

On a frustrated sigh, Morgan lifted her drink again. “Damn it, Liz,” she murmured.

“Come on, let me have my fun,” she coaxed, giving Morgan a friendly pat on the cheek. “As you said yourself, it’s all up to fate anyway.”

“Hoist by my own petard. All right, bring on your Dorians and your Nicks and your Lysanders.”

“Lysander?”

“It’s a good name for a goatherd.”

With a chuckle, Liz flicked her cigarette into the churning water. “Just wait and see if I don’t find one.”

“Liz ...” Morgan hesitated for a moment, then asked casually, “do many people use the beach where we swam yesterday?”

“*Hmm?* Oh.” She tucked a pale blond strand behind her ear. “Not really. It’s used by us and the Gregoras villa for the most part. I’d have to ask Alex who owns it, I’ve never given it any thought. The

bay's secluded and only easily accessible by the beach steps which run between the properties. Oh, yes, there's a cottage Nick owns which he rents out occasionally," she remembered. "It's occupied now by an American. Stevens ... no," she corrected herself.

"Stevenson. Andrew Stevenson, a poet or a painter or something. I haven't met him yet." She gave Morgan a frank stare. "Why? Did you plan for an all over tan?"

"Just curious." Morgan rearranged her thoughts. If she was going to file it and forget it, she had to stop letting the incident play back in her mind. "I'd love to get a close look at that place." She gestured toward the gray villa. "I think the architect must have been just a little mad. It's fabulous."

"Use some charm on Nick and get yourself an invitation," Liz suggested.

"I might just do that." Morgan studied the villa consideringly. She wondered if Nick Gregoras was the man whose footsteps she had heard when she had been held in the bushes. "Yes, I might just."

That evening, Morgan left the balcony doors wide. She wanted the warmth and scents of the night. The house was quiet but for the single stroke of a clock that signaled the hour. For the second night in a row she was wide awake. Did people really sleep on vacations? she wondered. What a waste of time.

She sat at the small rosewood desk in her room, writing a letter. From somewhere between the house and the sea, an owl cried out twice. She paused to listen, hoping it would call again, but there was only silence. How could she describe how it felt to see Mount Olympus rising from the sea? Was it possible to describe the timelessness, the strength, the almost frightening beauty?

She shrugged, and did what she could to explain the sensation to her father on paper. He'd understand, she mused as she folded the stationery. Who understood better her sometimes whimsical streaks

of fancy than the man she'd inherited them from? And, she thought with a lurking smile, he'd get a good chuckle at Liz's determination to marry her off and keep her in Greece.

She rose, stretched once, then turned and collided with a hard chest. The hand that covered her mouth used more gentleness this time, and the jet eyes laughed into hers. Her heart rose, then fell like an elevator with its cable clipped.

"Kalespera, Aphrodite. Your word that you won't scream, and you have your freedom."

Instinctively she tried to jerk away, but he held her still without effort, only lifting an ironic brow. He was a man who knew whose word to accept and whose word to doubt.

Morgan struggled for another moment, then finding herself outmatched, reluctantly nodded. He released her immediately.

She drew in the breath to shout, then let it out in a frustrated huff. A promise was a promise, even if it was to a devil. "How did you get in here?" she demanded.

"The vines to your balcony are sturdy."

"You climbed?" Her incredulity was laced with helpless admiration. The walls were sheer, the height was dizzying. "You must be mad."

"That's a possibility," he said with a careless smile.

He seemed none the worse for wear after the climb. His hair was disheveled, but then she'd never seen it otherwise. There was a shadow of beard on his chin. His eyes held no strain or fatigue, but rather a light of adventure that drew her no matter how hard she tried to resist. In the lamplight she could see him more clearly than she had the night before. His features weren't as harsh as she had thought and his mouth wasn't grim. It was really quite beautiful, she realized with a flood of annoyance.

“What do you want?”

He smiled again, letting his gaze roam down her leisurely with an insolence she knew wasn't contrived but inherent. She wore only a brief cinnamon-colored teddy that dipped low at the breast and rose high at the thighs. Morgan noted the look, and that he stood squarely between her and the closet where she had left her robe. Rather than acknowledge the disadvantage, she tilted her chin.

“How did you know where to find me?”

“It's my business to find things out,” he answered. Silently, he approved more than her form, but her courage as well. “Morgan James,” he began. “Visiting friend of Elizabeth Theoharis. American, living in New York. Unmarried. Employed at the U.N. as interpreter. You speak Greek, English, French, Italian and Russian.”

She tried not to let her mouth fall open at his careless rundown on her life. “That's a very tidy summary,” she said tightly.

“Thank you. I try to be succinct.”

“What does any of that have to do with you?”

“That's yet to be decided.” He studied her, thinking again. It might be that he could employ her talents and position for his own uses. The package was good, very good. And so, more important at the moment, was the mind.

“You're enjoying your stay on Lesbos?”

Morgan stared at him, then slowly shook her head. No, he wasn't a ruffian or a rapist. That much she was sure of. If he were a thief, which she still reserved judgment on, he was no ordinary one. He spoke too well, moved too well. What he had was a certain amount of odd charm, a flair that was hard to resist, and an amazing amount of arrogance. Under different circumstances, she might even have liked him.

“You have incredible gall,” she decided.

“You continue to flatter me.”

“All right.” Tight-lipped, Morgan strode over to the open balcony doors and gestured meaningfully. “I gave you my word I wouldn’t scream, and I didn’t. But I have no intention of standing here making idle conversation with a lunatic. Out!”

With his lips still curved in a smile, he sat on the edge of the bed and studied her. “I admire a woman of her word.” He stretched out jean-clad legs and crossed his feet. “I find a great deal to admire about you, Morgan. Last night you showed good sense and courage—rare traits to find together.”

“Forgive me if I’m not overwhelmed.”

He caught the sarcasm, but more important, noted the change in her eyes. She wasn’t as angry as she tried to be. “I did apologize,” he reminded her and smiled.

Her breath came out in a long-suffering sigh. She could detest him for making her want to laugh when she should be furious. Just who the devil was he? He wasn’t the mad rapist she had first thought—he wasn’t a common thief. So just what was he? Morgan stopped herself before she asked—she was better off in ignorance.

“It didn’t seem like much of an apology to me.”

“If I make a more ... honest attempt,” he began with a bland sincerity that made her lips twitch, “would you accept?”

Firmly, she banked down on the urge to return his smile. “If I accept it, will you go away?”

“But I find your company so pleasant.”

An irrepressible light of humor flickered in her eyes. “The hell you do.”

“Aphrodite, you wound me.”

“I’d like to draw and quarter you. Are you going to go away?”

“Soon.” Smiling, he rose again. What was that scent that drifted from her? he wondered. It was not quite sweet, not quite tame. Jasmine—wild jasmine. It suited her. He moved to the dresser to toy with her hand mirror. “You’ll meet Dorian Zoulas and Iona Theoharis tomorrow,” he said casually. This time Morgan’s mouth did drop. “There’s little on the island I’m not aware of,” he said mildly.

“Apparently,” she agreed.

Now he noted a hint of curiosity in her tone. It was what he had hoped for. “Perhaps, another time, you’ll give me your impression of them.”

Morgan shook her head more from bafflement than offense. “I have no intention of there being another time, or of gossiping with you. I hardly see why—”

“Why not?” he countered.

“I don’t *know* you,” she said in frustration. “I don’t know this Dorian or Iona either. And I don’t understand how you could possibly—”

“True,” he agreed with a slight nod. “How well do you know Alex?”

Morgan ran a hand through her hair. Here I am, wearing little more than my dignity, exchanging small talk with a maniac who climbed in the third-story window. “Look, I’m not discussing Alex with you. I’m not discussing anyone or anything with you. Go away.”

“We’ll leave that for later too, then,” he said mildly as he crossed back to her. “I have something for you.” He reached into his pocket, then opened his hand and dangled a small silver medal by its chain.

“Oh, you did have it!” Morgan grabbed, only to have him whip it out of her reach. His eyes hardened with fury.

“I told you once, I’m no thief.” The change in his voice and face had been swift and potent. Involuntarily, she took a step away. His mouth tightened at the movement before he went on in a more controlled tone. “I went back and found it in the grove. The chain had to be repaired, I’m afraid.”

With his eyes on hers, he held it out again. Taking it, Morgan began to fasten it around her neck. “You’re a very considerate assailant.”

“Do you think I enjoyed hurting you?”

Her hands froze at the nape of her neck. There was no teasing banter in his tone now, no insolent light of amusement in his eyes. This was the man she recognized from the shadows. Waves of temper came from him, hardening his voice, burning in his jet eyes. With her hands still lifted, Morgan stared at him.

“Do you think I enjoyed frightening you into fainting, having you think I would murder you? Do you think it gives me pleasure to see there are bruises on you and know that I put them there?” He whirled away, stalking the room. “I’m not a man who makes a habit of misusing women.”

“I wouldn’t know about that,” she said steadily.

He stopped, and his eyes came back to hers. Damn, she was cool, he thought. And beautiful. Beautiful enough to be a distraction when he couldn’t afford one.

“I don’t know who you are or what you’re mixed up in,” she continued. Her fingers trembled a bit as she finished fastening the chain, but her voice was calm and unhurried.

“Frankly, I don’t care as long as you leave me alone. Under different circumstances, I’d thank you for the return of my property, but I don’t feel it applies in this case. You can leave the same way you came in.”

He had to bank down on an urge to throttle her. It wasn't often he was in the position of having a half-naked woman order him from her bedroom three times in one evening. He might have found it amusing if he hadn't been fighting an overwhelming flood of pure and simple desire.

The hell with fighting it, he thought. A woman who kept her chin lifted in challenge deserved to be taken up on it.

“Courage becomes you, Morgan,” he said coolly. “We might do very well together.” Reaching out, he fingered the medal at her throat and frowned at it. With a silent oath, he tightened his grip on the chain and brought his eyes back to hers.

There was no fear in those clear blue pools now, but a light, maddening disdain. A woman like this, he thought, could make a man mad, make him suffer and ache. And by God, a woman like this would be worth it.

“I told you to go,” she said icily, ignoring the sudden quick thud of her pulse. It wasn't fear—Morgan told herself she was through with fear. But neither was it the anger she falsely named it.

“And so I will,” he murmured and let the chain drop. “In the meantime, since you don't offer, I take.”

Once again she found herself in his arms. It wasn't the teasing, seductive kiss of the night before. Now he devoured her. No one had kissed her like this before—as if he knew every secret she hoarded. He would know, somehow, where she needed to be touched.

The hot, insistent flow of desire that ran through her left her too stunned to struggle, too hungry to reason. How could she want him? her mind demanded. How could she want a man like this to touch her? But her mouth was moving under his, she couldn't deny it. Her tongue met his. Her hands gripped his shoulders, but didn't push him away.

“There’s honey on your lips, Morgan,” he murmured. “Enough to drive a man mad for another taste.”

He took his hand on a slow journey down her back, pressing silk against her skin before he came to the hem. His fingers were strong, callused, and as clever as a musician’s. Without knowing, without caring what she did, Morgan framed his face with her hands for a moment before they dove into his hair. The muttered Greek she heard from him wasn’t a love word but an oath as he dragged her closer.

How well she knew that body now. Long and lean and wiry with muscle. She could smell the sea on it, almost taste it beneath that hot demand as his mouth continued to savage hers.

The kiss grew deeper, until she moaned, half in fear of the unexplored, half in delight of the exploration. She’d forgotten who she was, who he was. There was only pleasure, a dark, heavy pleasure. Through her dazed senses she felt a struggle—a storm, a fury. Then he drew her away to study her face.

He wasn’t pleased that his heartbeat was unsteady. Or that the thoughts whirling in his head were clouded with passion. This was no time for complications. And this was no woman to take risks with. With an effort, he slid his hands gently down her arms. “More satisfying than a thank you,” he said lightly, then glanced with a grin toward the bed. “Are you going to ask me to stay?”

Morgan pulled herself back with a jolt. He must have hypnotized her, she decided. There was no other rational explanation. “Some other time, perhaps,” she managed, as carelessly as he.

Amusement lightened his features. Capturing her hand, he kissed it formally. “I’ll look forward to it, Aphrodite.”

He moved to the balcony, throwing her a quick grin before he started his descent. Unable to prevent herself, Morgan ran over to watch him climb down.

He moved like a cat, confident, fearless, a shadow clinging to the stark white walls. Her heart stayed lodged in her throat as she watched him. He sprang to the ground and melted into the cover of trees without looking back. Whirling, Morgan shut the doors to the balcony. And locked them.

Chapter Three

Morgan swirled her glass of local wine but drank little. Though its light, fruity flavor was appealing, she was too preoccupied to appreciate it. The terrace overlooked the gulf with its hard blue water and scattering of tiny islands. Small dots that were boats skimmed the surface, but she took little notice of them. Most of her mind was occupied in trying to sort out the cryptic comments of her late-night visitor. The rest was involved with following the conversation around her.

Dorian Zoulas was all that Liz had said—classically handsome, bronzed, and sophisticated. In the pale cream suit, he was a twentieth-century Adonis. He had intelligence and breeding, tempered with a golden beauty that was essentially masculine. Liz's maneuvers might have caused Morgan to treat him with a polite aloofness if she hadn't seen the flashes of humor in his eyes. Morgan had realized immediately that he not only knew the way his hostess's mind worked, but had decided to play the game. The teasing challenge in his eyes relaxed her. Now she could enjoy a harmless flirtation without embarrassment.

Iona, Alex's cousin, was to Morgan's mind less appealing. Her dark, sultry looks were both stunning and disturbing. The gloss of beauty and wealth didn't quite polish over an edge that might have come from poor temperament or nerves. There was no humor in the exotic sloe eyes or pouting mouth. Iona was, Morgan mused, like a volcano waiting to erupt. Hot, smoky, and alarming.

The adjectives brought her night visitor back to her mind. They fit him just as neatly as they fit Iona Theoharis, and yet ... oddly, Morgan found she admired them in the man and found them

disturbing in the woman. Double standard? she wondered, then shook her head. No, the energy in Iona seemed destructive. The energy in the man was compelling. Annoyed with herself, Morgan turned from her study of the gulf and pushed aside her disturbing thoughts.

She gave Dorian her full attention. “You must find it very peaceful here after Athens.”

He turned in his chair to face her. With only a smile, he intimated that there was no woman but she on the terrace—a trick Morgan found pleasant. “The island’s a marvelous place ... tranquil. But I thrive on chaos. As you live in New York, I’m sure you understand.”

“Yes, but at the moment, tranquility is very appealing.” Leaning against the rail, she let the sun play warm on her back. “I’ve been nothing but lazy so far. I haven’t even whipped up the energy to explore.”

“There’s quite a bit of local color, if that’s what you have in mind.” Dorian slipped a thin gold case from his pocket, and opening it, offered Morgan a cigarette. At the shake of her head, he lit one for himself, then leaned back in a manner that was both relaxed and alert. “Caves and inlets, olive groves, a few small farms and flocks,” he continued. “The village is very quaint and unspoiled.”

“Exactly what I want.” Morgan nodded and sipped her drink. “But I’m going to take it very slow. I’ll collect shells and find a farmer who’ll let me milk his goat.”

“Terrifying aspirations,” Dorian commented with a quick smile.

“Liz will tell you, I’ve always been intrepid.”

“I’d be happy to help you with your shells.” He continued to smile as his eyes skimmed her face with an approval she couldn’t have missed. “But as to the goat ...”

“I’m surprised you’re content with so little entertainment.” Iona’s husky voice broke into the exchange.

Morgan shifted her gaze to her and found it took more of an effort to smile. “The island itself is entertainment enough for me. Remember, I’m a tourist. I’ve always thought vacations where you rush from one activity to the next aren’t vacations at all.”

“Morgan’s been lazy for two full days,” Liz put in with a grin. “A new record.”

Morgan cast her a look, thinking of her nighttime activities. “I’m shooting for two weeks of peaceful sloth,” Morgan murmured. *Starting today*, she added silently.

“Lesbos is the perfect spot for idleness.” Dorian blew out a slow, fragrant stream of smoke. “Rustic, quiet.”

“But perhaps this bit of island isn’t as quiet as it appears.” Iona ran a manicured nail around the rim of her glass.

Morgan saw Dorian’s brows lift as if in puzzlement while Alex’s drew together in disapproval.

“We’ll do our best to keep it quiet during Morgan’s visit,” Liz said smoothly. “She rarely stays still for long, and since she’s determined to this time, we’ll see that she has a nice, uneventful vacation.”

Morgan made some sound of agreement and managed not to choke over her drink. Uneventful! If Liz only knew.

“More wine, Morgan?” Dorian rose, bringing the bottle to her.

Iona began to tap her fingers on the arm of her wrought iron chair. “I suppose there are people who find boredom appealing.”

“Relaxation,” Alex said with a slight edge in his voice, “comes in many forms.”

“And of course,” Liz went on, skimming her hand lightly over the back of her husband’s, “Morgan’s job is very demanding. All those foreign dignitaries and protocol and politics.”

Dorian sent Morgan an appreciative smile as he poured more wine into her glass. “I’m sure someone with Morgan’s talents would have many fascinating stories to tell.”

Morgan cocked a brow. It had been a long time since she had been given a purely admiring male smile—undemanding, warm without being appraising. She could learn to enjoy it. “I might have a few,” she returned.

The sun was sinking into the sea. The rosy light streamed through the open balcony doors and washed the room. Red sky at night, Morgan mused. Wasn’t that supposed to mean clear sailing? She decided to take it as an omen.

Her first two days on Lesbos had been a far cry from the uneventful vacation Liz had boasted of, but that was behind her now. With luck, and a little care, she wouldn’t run into that attractive lunatic again.

Morgan caught a glimpse of her own smile in the mirror and hastily rearranged her expression. Perhaps when she got back to New York, she’d see a psychiatrist. When you started to find lunatics appealing, you were fast becoming one yourself. Forget it, she ordered herself firmly as she went to the closet. There were more important things to think about—like what she was going to wear to dinner.

After a quick debate, Morgan chose a drifting white dress—thin layers of crepe de chine, full-sleeved, full-skirted. Dorian had inspired her to flaunt her femininity a bit. Jack, she recalled, had preferred the tailored look. He had often offered a stern and unsolicited opinion on her wardrobe, finding her taste both inconsistent and flighty. There might be a multicolored gypsy-style skirt hanging next to a prim business suit. He’d never understood

that both had suited who she was. Just another basic difference, Morgan mused as she hooked the line of tiny pearl buttons.

Tonight she was going to have fun. It had been a long while since she'd flirted with a man. Her thoughts swung back to a dark man with tousled hair and a shadowed chin. Hold on, Morgan, she warned herself. *That* was hardly in the same league as a flirtation. Moving over, she closed the balcony doors and gave a satisfied nod as she heard the click of the lock. And that, she decided, takes care of that.

Liz glided around the salon. It pleased her that Morgan hadn't come down yet. Now she could make an entrance. For all her blond fragility, Liz was a determined woman. Loyalty was her strongest trait; where she loved, it was unbendable. She wanted Morgan to be happy. Her own marriage had given her nothing but happiness. Morgan would have the same if Liz had any say in it.

With a satisfied smile, she glanced around the salon. The light was low and flattering. The scent of night blossoms drifting in through the open windows was the perfect touch. The wines she'd ordered for dinner would add the final prop for romance. Now, if Morgan would cooperate ...

"Nick, I'm so glad you could join us." Liz went to him, holding out both hands. "It's so nice that we're all on the island at the same time for a change."

"It's always a pleasure to see you, Liz," he returned with a warm, charming smile. "And a relief to be out of the crowds in Athens for a few weeks." He gave her hands a light squeeze, then lifted one to his lips. His dark eyes skimmed her face. "I swear, you're lovelier every time I see you."

With a laugh, Liz tucked her arm through his. "We'll have to invite you to dinner more often. Did I ever thank you properly for that marvelous Indian chest you found me?" Smiling, she guided him toward the bar. "I adore it."

“Yes, you did.” He gave her hand a quick pat. “I’m glad I was able to find what you had in mind.”

“You never fail to find the perfect piece. I’m afraid Alex wouldn’t know an Indian chest from a Hepplewhite.”

Nick laughed. “We all have our talents, I suppose.”

“But your work must be fascinating.” Liz glanced up at him with her wide-eyed smile as she began to fix him a drink. “All those treasures and all the exotic places you travel to.”

“There are times it’s more exciting just to be home.”

She shot him a look. “You make that hard to believe, since you’re so seldom here. Where was it last month? Venice?”

“A beautiful city,” he said smoothly.

“I’d love to see it. If I could drag Alex away from his ships ...” Liz’s eyes focused across the room. “Oh dear, it looks like Iona is annoying Alex again.” On a long breath, she lifted her eyes to Nick’s. Seeing the quick understanding, she gave a rueful smile. “I’m going to have to play diplomat.”

“You do it charmingly, Liz. Alex is a lucky man.”

“Remind him of that from time to time,” she suggested. “I’d hate for him to take me for granted. Oh, here comes Morgan. She’ll keep you entertained while I do my duty.”

Following Liz’s gaze, Nick watched as Morgan entered the room. “I’m sure she will,” was his murmured reply. He liked the dress she wore, the floating white that was at once alluring and innocent. She’d left her hair loose so that it fell over her shoulders almost as if it had come off a pillow. Quite beautiful, he thought as he felt the stir. He’d always had a weakness for beauty.

“Morgan.” Before Morgan could do any more than smile her hello at Dorian, Liz took her arm. “You’ll keep Nick happy for a moment, I have a job to do. Morgan James, Nicholas Gregoras.” With the quick introduction, Liz was halfway across the room.

Morgan stared in stunned silence. Nick lifted her limp hand to his lips. “You,” she managed in a choked whisper.

“Aphrodite, you’re exquisite. Even fully dressed.”

With his lips lingering over her knuckles, he met her eyes. His were dark and pleased. Regaining her senses, Morgan tried to wrench her hand free. Without changing expression, Nick tightened his grip and held her still.

“Careful, Morgan,” he said mildly. “Liz and her guest will wonder at your behavior. And explanations would”—he grinned, exactly as she remembered—“cause them to wonder about your mental health.”

“Let go of my hand,” she said quietly and smiled with her lips only. “Or I swear, I’ll deck you.”

“You’re magnificent.” Making a small bow, he released her. “Did you know your eyes literally throw darts when you’re annoyed?”

“Then I’ve the pleasure of knowing you’re riddled with tiny holes,” she returned. “Let me know when one hits the heart, *Mr. Gregoras.*”

“Nick, please,” he said in a polished tone. “We could hardly start formalities now after all we’ve ... been through together.”

Morgan gave him a brilliant smile. “Very well, Nick, you odious swine. What a pity this isn’t the proper time to go into how detestable you are.”

He inclined his head. “We’ll arrange for a more appropriate opportunity. Soon,” he added with the faintest hint of steel. “Now, let me get you a drink.”

Liz breezed up, pleased with the smiles she had seen exchanged. “You two seem to be getting along like old friends.”

“I was just telling Mr. Gregoras how enchanting his home looks from the sea.” Morgan sent him a quick but lethal glance.

“Yes, Morgan was fascinated by it,” Liz told him. “She’s always preferred things that didn’t quite fit a mold, if you know what I mean.”

“Exactly.” Nick let his eyes sweep over Morgan’s face. A man could get lost in those eyes, he thought, if he wasn’t careful. Very careful. “Miss James has agreed to a personal tour tomorrow afternoon.” He smiled, watching her expression go from astonishment to fury before she controlled it.

“Marvelous!” Pleased, Liz beamed at both of them. “Nick has so many treasures from all over the world. His house is just like Aladdin’s cave.”

Smiling, Morgan thought of three particularly gruesome wishes, all involving her intended host. “I can’t wait to see it.”

Through dinner, Morgan watched, confused, then intrigued by Nick’s manner. This was not the man she knew. This man was smooth, polished. Gone was the intensity, the ruthlessness, replaced by an easy warmth and charm.

Nicholas Gregoras, olive oil, import-export. Yes, she could see the touches of wealth and success—and the authority she’d understood from the first. But command sat differently on him now, with none of the undertones of violence.

He could sit at the elegant table, laughing with Liz and Alex over some island story with the gleam of cut crystal in his hand. The smoky-gray suit was perfectly tailored and fit him with the same ease as the dark sweatshirt and jeans she’d first seen him in. His

arrogance had a more sophisticated tone now. All the rough edges were smoothed.

He seemed relaxed, at home—with none of that vital, dangerous energy. How could this be the same man who had flourished a knife, or climbed the sheer wall to her balcony?

Nick handed her a glass of wine and she frowned. But he was the same man, she reminded herself. And just what game was he playing? Lifting her eyes, Morgan met his. Her fingers tightened on the stem of the glass. The look was brief and quickly veiled, but she saw the inner man. The force was vital. If he was playing games, she thought, sipping her wine to calm suddenly tight nerves, it wasn't a pleasant one. And she wanted no part of it—or of him.

Turning to Dorian, Morgan left Nick to Iona. Intelligent, witty, and with no frustrating mysteries, Dorian was a more comfortable dinner companion. Morgan fell into the easy exchange and tried to relax.

“Tell me, Morgan, don't you find the words of so many languages a bit crowded in the mind?”

She toyed with her moussaka, finding her stomach too jittery to accept the rich sauce. Damn the man for interfering even with her appetite. “I do my thinking in one at a time,” she countered.

“You take it too lightly,” Dorian insisted. “It's an accomplishment to be proud of. Even a power.”

“A power?” Her brows drew together for a moment, then cleared as she smiled. “I suppose it is, though I'd never really thought about it. It just seemed too limiting to only be able to communicate and think in one language, then once I got started, I couldn't seem to stop.”

“Having the language, you'd be at home in many countries.”

“Yes, I guess that's why I feel so—well, easy here.”

“Alex tells me he’s trying to entice you into his company.” With a smile, Dorian toasted her. “I’ve drafted myself as promoter. Working with you would add to the company benefits.”

Iona’s rich laughter floated across the table. “Oh, Nicky, you say the most ridiculous things.”

Nicky, Morgan thought with a sniff. I’ll be ill any minute. “I think I might enjoy your campaign,” Morgan told Dorian with her best smile.

“Take me out on your boat tomorrow, Nicky. I simply must have some fun.”

“I’m sorry, Iona, not tomorrow. Perhaps later in the week.” Nick softened the refusal with the trace of a finger down her hand.

Iona’s mouth formed a pout. “I might die of boredom by later in the week.”

Morgan heard Dorian give a quiet sigh. Glancing over, she noted the quick look of exasperation he sent Iona. “Iona tells me she ran into Maria Popagos in Athens last week.” The look of exasperation was gone, and his voice was gentle. “She has what—four children now, Iona?”

They treat her like a child, Morgan thought with distaste. And she behaves like one—a spoiled, willful, not quite healthy child.

Through the rest of the meal, and during coffee in the salon, Morgan watched Iona’s moods go from sullen to frantic. Apparently used to it, or too good mannered to notice, Dorian ignored the fluctuations. And though she hated to give him the credit for it, so did Nick. But Morgan noted, with a flutter of sympathy, that Alex grew more distracted as the evening wore on. He spoke to his cousin in undertones as she added more brandy to her glass. Her response was a dramatic toss of her head before she swallowed the liquor and turned her back on him.

When Nick rose to leave, Iona insisted on walking with him to his car. She cast a look of triumph over her shoulder as they left the salon arm-in-arm. Now who, Morgan mused, was that aimed at? Shrugging, she turned back to Dorian and let the evening wind down naturally. There would be time enough to think things through when she was alone in her room again.

Morgan floated with the dream. The wine had brought sleep quickly. Though she had left the balcony doors securely locked, the night breeze drifted through the windows. She sighed, and shifted with its gentle caress on her skin. It was a soft stroking, like a butterfly's wing. It teased across her lips then came back to warm them. She stirred with pleasure. Her body was pliant, receptive. As the phantom kiss increased in pressure, she parted her lips. She drew the dream lover closer.

Excitement was sleepy. The tastes that seeped into her were as sweet and as potent as the wine that still misted her brain. With a sigh of lazy, languid pleasure, she floated with it. In the dream, her arms wrapped around the faceless lover—the pirate, the phantom. He whispered her name and deepened the kiss as his hands drew down the sheet that separated them. Rough fingers, familiar fingers, traced over her skin. A body, too hard, too muscular for a dream, pressed against hers. The lazy images became more tangible, and the phantom took on form. Dark hair, dark eyes, and a mouth that was grimly beautiful and oh, so clever.

Warmth became heat. With a moan, she let passion take her. The stroking along her body became more insistent at her response. Her mouth grew hungry, demanding. Then she heard the breathy whisper of a Greek endearment against her ear.

Suddenly, the filmy curtain of sleep lifted. The weight on her body was real, aching real—and aching familiar. Morgan began a confused struggle.

“The goddess awakes. More's the pity.”

She saw him in the shaft of moonlight. Her body was alive with needs, her mind baffled with the knowledge that he had induced them. “What are you doing!” she demanded, and found her breathing was quick and ragged. His mouth had been on hers, she knew. She could still taste him. And his hands ... “This is the limit! If you think for one minute I’m going to sit still for you crawling into my bed while I’m sleeping—”

“You were very agreeable a moment ago.”

“Oh! What a despicable thing to do.”

“You’re very responsive,” Nick murmured, and traced her ear with his fingertip. Beneath his hand he could feel the thunder of her heartbeat. He knew, though he fought to slow it, that his own beat as quickly. “It seemed to please you to be touched. It pleased me to touch you.”

His voice had lowered again, as she knew it could—dark, seductive. The muscles in her thighs loosened. “Get off of me,” she ordered in quick defense.

“Sweet Morgan.” He nipped her bottom lip—felt her tremble, felt a swift rush of power. It would be so easy to persuade her ... and so risky. With an effort, he gave her a friendly smile. “You only postpone the inevitable.”

She kept her eyes level as she tried to steady her breathing. Something told her that if all else he had said had been lies, his last statement was all too true. “I didn’t promise not to scream this time.”

He lifted a brow as though the possibility intrigued him. “It might be interesting to explain this ... situation to Alex and Liz. I could claim I was overcome with your beauty. It has a ring of truth. But you won’t scream in any case.”

“Just what makes you so sure?”

“You’d have given me away—or tried to by now—if you were going to.” Nick rolled aside.

Sitting up, Morgan pushed at her hair. Did he always have to be right? she wondered grimly. “What do you want now? And how the hell did you get in this time? I locked ...” Her voice trailed off as she saw the balcony doors were wide open.

“Did you think a lock would keep me out?” With a laugh, Nick ran a finger down her nose. “You have a lot to learn.”

“Now, you listen to me—”

“No, save the recriminations for later. They’re understood in any case.” Absently, he rubbed a lock of her hair between his thumb and forefinger. “I came back to make certain you didn’t develop a convenient headache that would keep you from coming to the house tomorrow. There are one or two things I want to discuss with you.”

“I’ve got a crate full of things to discuss with you,” Morgan hissed furiously. “Just what were you doing that night on the beach? And who—”

“Later, Aphrodite. I’m distracted at the moment. That scent you wear, for instance. It’s very ...” He lifted his eyes to hers, “alluring.”

“Stop it.” She didn’t trust him when his voice dropped to that tone. She didn’t trust him at all, she reminded herself and gave him a level look. “What’s the purpose behind that ridiculous game you were playing tonight?”

“Game?” His eyes widened effectively. “Morgan, my love, I don’t know what you’re talking about. I was quite natural.”

“Natural be damned.”

“No need to swear at me,” he said mildly.

“There’s every need,” she countered. How could he manage to be charming under such ridiculous circumstances? “You were the perfect guest this evening,” Morgan went on, knocking his hand aside as he began to toy with the thin strap of her chemise.

“Charming—”

“Thank you.”

“And false,” she added, narrowing her eyes.

“Not false,” Nick disagreed. “Simply suitable, considering the occasion.”

“I suppose it would have looked a bit odd if you’d pulled a knife out of your pocket.”

His fingers tightened briefly, then relaxed. She wasn’t going to let him forget that—and he wasn’t having an easy time blanking out that moment she had gone limp with terror beneath him. “Few people have seen me other than I was tonight,” he murmured, and began to give the texture of her hair his attention. “Perhaps it’s your misfortune to count yourself among them.”

“I don’t want to see you *any* way, from now on.”

Humor touched his eyes again as they shifted to hers. “Liar. I’ll pick you up tomorrow at one.”

Morgan tossed out a phrase commonly heard in the less elite portions of Italy. Nick responded with a pleased laugh.

“*Agapetike*, I should warn you, in my business I’ve had occasion to visit some Italian gutters.”

“Good, then you won’t need a translation.”

“Just be ready.” He let his gaze sweep down her, then up again. “You might find it easier to deal with me in the daylight—and when you’re more adequately attired.”

“I have no intention of dealing with you at all,” Morgan began in a furious undertone. “Or of continuing this ridiculous charade by going with you tomorrow.”

“Oh, I think you will.” Nick’s smile was confident and infuriating. “You’d find yourself having a difficult time explaining to Liz why you won’t come when you’ve already expressed an interest in my home. Tell me, what was it that appealed to you about it?”

“The insanity of the architecture.”

He laughed again and took her hand. “More compliments. I adore you, Aphrodite. Come, kiss me good-night.”

Morgan drew back and scowled. “I certainly will not.”

“You certainly will.” In a swift movement he had her pinned under him again. When she cursed him, he laughed and the insolence was back. “Witch,” he murmured. “What mortal can resist one?”

His mouth came down quickly, lingering until she had stopped squirming beneath him. Gradually, the force went out of the kiss, but not the power. It seeped into her, so that she couldn’t be sure if it was hers or his. Then it was only passion—clean and hot and senseless. On a moan, Morgan accepted it, and him.

Feeling the change in her, Nick relaxed a moment and simply let himself enjoy.

She had a taste that stayed with him long after he left her. Each time he touched her he knew, eventually, he would have to have it all. But not now. Now there was too much at stake. She was a risk, and he had already taken too many chances with her. But that taste ...

He gave himself over to the kiss knowing the danger of letting himself become vulnerable, even for a moment, by losing himself in her. If she hadn’t been on the beach that night. If he hadn’t had to reveal himself to her. Would things have been different than they were now? he wondered as desire began to claw at him. Would he

have been able to coax her into his arms, into his bed, with a bit of flair and a few clever words? If they had met for the first time tonight, would he have wanted her this badly, this quickly?

Her hands were in his hair. He found his mouth had roamed to her throat. Her scent seemed to concentrate there, and the taste was wild and dangerous. He lived with danger and enjoyed it—lived by his wits and won. But this woman, this feeling she stirred in him, was a risk he could calculate. Yet it was done. There was no changing the course he had to take. And no changing the fact that she was involved.

He wanted to touch her, to tear off that swatch of silk she wore and feel her skin warm under his hand. He dared not. He was a man who knew his own limitations, his own weaknesses. Nick didn't appreciate the fact that Morgan James had become a weakness at a time when he could least afford one.

Murmuring his name, Morgan slid her hands beneath the loose sweatshirt, to run them over the range of muscle. Nick felt need shoot like a spear, white-tipped, to the pit of his stomach. Using every ounce of will, he banked down on it until it was a dull ache he could control. He lifted his head and waited for those pale, clouded blue eyes to open. Something dug into his palm, and he saw that he had gripped her medal in his hand without realizing it. Nick had to quell the urge to swear, then give himself a moment until he knew he could speak lightly. "Sleep well, Aphrodite," he told her with a grin. "Until tomorrow."

"You—" She broke off, struggling for the breath and the wit to hurl abuse at him.

"Tomorrow," Nick repeated as he brought her hand to his lips.

Morgan watched him stride to the balcony, then lower himself out of sight. Lying perfectly still, she stared at the empty space and wondered what she had gotten herself into.

Chapter Four

The house was cool and quiet in the mid-morning hush. Gratefully, Morgan accepted Liz's order to enjoy the beach. She wanted to avoid Iona's company, and though she hated to admit it, she didn't think she could handle Liz's carefree chatter about the dinner party. Liz would have expected her to make some witty observations about Nick that Morgan just didn't feel up to. Relieved that Dorian had business with Alex, and wouldn't feel obliged to keep her company, she set out alone.

Morgan wanted the solitude—she did her best thinking when she was alone. In the past few days she had accumulated quite a bit to think about. Now she decided to work it through one step at a time.

What had Nicholas Gregoras been doing that night on the beach? He'd had the scent of the sea on him, so it followed that he had been out on the water. She remembered the sound of a motor. She'd assumed it belonged to a fisherman but Nick was no fisherman. He'd been desperate not to be seen by someone ... desperate enough to have been carrying a knife. She could still see the look on his face as she had lain beneath him in the shadows of the cypress. He'd been prepared to use the knife.

Somehow the knowledge that this was true disturbed her more now than it had when he'd been a stranger. Kicking bad-temperedly at a stone, she started down the beach steps.

And who had been with him? Morgan fretted. Someone had followed his orders without any question. Who had used the beach steps while Nick had held her prisoner in the shadows? Alex? The man who rented Nick's cottage? Frustrated, Morgan slipped out of her shoes and began to cross the warm sand. Why would Nick be ready to kill either one of them rather than be discovered by them? By anyone, she corrected. It could have been a servant of one of the villas, a villager trespassing.

One question at a time, Morgan cautioned herself as she kicked idly at the sand. First, was it logical to assume that the footsteps she had heard were from someone who had also come from the sea? Morgan thought it was. And second, she decided that the person must have been headed to one of the villas or a nearby cottage. Why else would they have used that particular strip of beach? Logical, she concluded, walking aimlessly. So why was Nick so violently determined to go unseen?

Smuggling. It was so obvious. So logical. But she had continued to push the words aside. She didn't want to think of him involved in such a dirty business. Somewhere, beneath the anger and resentment she felt for him, Morgan had experienced a totally different sensation. There was something about him—something she couldn't really pinpoint in words. Strength, perhaps. He was the kind of man you could depend on when no one else could—or would—help. She wanted to trust him. There was no logic to it, it simply was.

But was he a smuggler? Had he thought she'd seen something incriminating? Did the footsteps she'd heard belong to a patrol? Another smuggler? A rival? If he'd believed her to be a threat, why hadn't he simply used the knife on her? If he were a cold-blooded killer ... no. Morgan shook her head at the description. While she could almost accept that Nick would kill, she couldn't agree with the adjective. And that led to hundreds of other problems.

Questions and answers sped through her mind. Stubborn questions, disturbing answers. Morgan shut her eyes on them. I'm going to get some straight answers from him this afternoon, she promised herself. It was his fault she was involved. Morgan dropped to the sand and brought her knees to her chest. She had been minding her own business when he had literally dragged her into it. All she had wanted was a nice, quiet vacation.

“Men!”

“I refuse to take that personally.”

Morgan spun her head around and found herself staring into a wide, friendly smile.

“Hello. You seem to be angry with my entire gender.” He rose from a rock and walked to her. He was tall and very slender, with dark gold curls appealingly disarrayed around a tanned face that held both youth and strength. “But I think it’s worth the risk. I’m Andrew Stevenson.” Still smiling, he dropped to the sand beside her.

“Oh.” Recovering, Morgan returned the smile. “The poet or the painter? Liz wasn’t sure.”

“Poet,” he said with a grimace. “Or so I tell myself.”

Glancing down, she saw the pad he held. It was dog-eared and covered with a fine, looping scribble. “I’ve interrupted your work, I’m sorry.”

“On the contrary, you’ve given me a shot of inspiration. You have a remarkable face.”

“I think,” Morgan considered, “that’s a compliment.”

“Dear lady, yours is a face a poet dreams of.” He let his eyes roam it for a moment. “Do you have a name, or are you going to vanish in a mist and leave me bewitched?”

“Morgan.” The fussy compliment, delivered with bland sincerity made her laugh. “Morgan James, and are you a good poet, Andrew Stevenson?”

“I can’t say no.” Andrew continued to study her candidly. “Modesty isn’t one of my virtues. You said Liz. I assume that’s Mrs. Theoharis. You’re staying with them?”

“Yes, for a few weeks.” A new thought crossed her mind. “You’re renting Nicholas Gregoras’s cottage?”

“That’s right. Actually, it’s a free ride.” Though he set down the pad, he began to trace patterns in the sand as if he couldn’t keep his hands quite still. “We’re cousins.” Andrew noted the surprise on her face. His smile deepened. “Not the Greek side. Our mothers are related.”

“Oh, so his mother’s American.” This at least explained his ease with the language.

“A Norling of San Francisco,” he stated with a grin for the title. “She remarried after Nick’s father died. She’s living in France.”

“So, you’re visiting Lesbos and your cousin at the same time.”

“Actually, Nick offered me the retreat when he learned I was working on an epic poem—a bit Homeric, you see.” His eyes were blue, darker than hers, and very direct on her face. Morgan could see nothing in the open, ingenuous look to link him with Nick. “I wanted to stay on Lesbos awhile, so it worked out nicely. The home of Sappho. The poetry and legend have always fascinated me.”

“Sappho,” Morgan repeated, turning her thoughts from Nick. “Oh, yes, the poetess.”

“The Tenth Muse. She lived here, in Mitilini.” His gaze, suddenly dreamy, swept down the stretch of beach. “I like to think Nick’s house is on the cliff where she hurled herself into the sea, desperate for Phaon’s love.”

“An interesting thought.” Morgan looked up to where a portion of a gray stone wall was visible. “And I suppose her spirit floats over the house searching for her love.” Somehow, she liked the idea and smiled. “Lord knows, it’s the perfect house for a poetic haunting.”

“Have you been inside?” Andrew asked her, his tone as dreamy as his eyes now. “It’s fantastic.”

“No, I’m getting a personal tour this afternoon.” Morgan kept her voice light as she swore silently in several languages.

“A personal tour?” Abruptly direct again, Andrew tilted his head, with brows lifted in speculation. “You must have made quite an impression on Nick. But then,” he added with a nod, “you would. He sets great store by beauty.”

Morgan gave him a noncommittal smile. He could hardly know that it wasn't her looks or charm that had secured the invitation. “Do you often write on the beach? I can't keep away from it myself.” Morgan hesitated briefly, then plunged. “I came down here a couple of nights ago and swam by moonlight.”

There was no shock or anxiety in his eyes at this information. Andrew grinned. “I'm sorry I missed that. You'll find me all over this part of the island. Here, up on the cliffs, in the olive groves. I go where the mood strikes me.”

“I'm going to do some exploring myself.” She thought wistfully of a carefree hour in the inlets.

“I'm available if you'd like a guide.” His gaze skimmed over her face again, warm and friendly. “By now, I know this part of the island as well as a native. If you find you want company, you can usually find me wandering around or in the cottage. It isn't far.”

“I'd like that.” A gleam of amusement lit her eyes. “You don't happen to keep a goat, do you?”

“Ah—no.”

Laughing at his expression, Morgan, patted his hand. “Don't try to understand,” she advised. “And now I'd better go change for my tour.”

Andrew rose with her and captured her hand. “I'll see you again.” It was a statement, not a question. Morgan responded to the gentle pressure.

“I'm sure you will; the island's very small.”

Andrew smiled as he released her hand. "I'd rather call it kismet." He watched Morgan walk away before he settled back on his rock, facing the sea.

* * *

Nicholas Gregoras was very prompt. By five minutes past one, Morgan found herself being shoved out the door by an enthusiastic Liz. "Have fun, darling, and don't hurry back. Nick, Morgan will adore your house; all those winding passages and the terrifying view of the sea. She's very courageous, aren't you, Morgan?"

"I'm practically stalwart," she muttered while Nick grinned.

"Well, run along and have fun." Liz shooed them out the door as if they were two reluctant children being sent to school.

"You should be warned," Morgan stated as she slid into Nick's car, "Liz considers you a suitable candidate for my hand. I think she's getting desperate picturing me as her unborn child's maiden aunt."

"Aphrodite." Nick settled beside her and took her hand. "There isn't a male alive who could picture you as anyone's maiden aunt."

Refusing to be charmed, Morgan removed her hand from his, then studied the view out the side window. "I met your poet in residence this morning on the beach."

"Andrew? He's a nice boy. How did you find him?"

"Not like a boy." Turning back to Nick, Morgan frowned. "He's a very charming man."

Nick lifted a brow fractionally. "Yes, I suppose he is. Somehow, I always think of him as a boy, though there's barely five years between us." He moved his shoulders. "He does have talent. Did you charm him?"

" 'Inspire' was his word," she returned, annoyed.

Nick flashed her a quick grin. “Naturally. One romantic should inspire another.”

“I’m not a romantic.” The conversation forced her to give him a great deal more of her attention than she had planned. “I’m very practical.”

“Morgan, you’re an insatiable romantic.” Her annoyance apparently amused him, because a smile continued to hover on his mouth. “A woman who combs her hair on a moonlit beach, wears filmy white, and treasures a valueless memento thrives on romance.”

Uncomfortable with the description, Morgan spoke coolly. “I also clip coupons and watch my cholesterol.”

“Admirable.”

She swallowed what might have been a chuckle. “You, Nicholas Gregoras, are a first-rate bastard.”

“Yes. I hate to be second-rate at anything.”

Morgan flounced back in her seat, but lost all resentment as the house came into full view. “Oh, Lord,” she murmured. “It’s wonderful!”

It looked stark and primitive and invulnerable. The second story lashed out over the sea like an out-stretched arm—not offering payment, but demanding it. None of the power she had felt out at sea was diminished at close range. The flowering shrubs and vines which trailed and tangled were placed to disguise the care of their planting. The result was an illusion of wild abandon. Sleeping Beauty’s castle, she thought, a century after she pricked her finger.

“What a marvelous place.” Morgan turned to him as he stopped the car at the entrance. “I’ve never seen anything like it.”

“That’s the first time you’ve smiled at me and meant it.” He wasn’t smiling now, but looking at her with a trace of annoyance. He hadn’t

realized just how much he'd wanted to see that spontaneous warmth in her eyes—directed at him. And now that he had, he wasn't certain what to do about it. With a quick mental oath, Nick slid from the car.

Ignoring him, Morgan climbed out and tried to take in the entire structure at once. "You know what it looks like," she said, half to herself. "It looks like Zeus hurled a lightning bolt into the mountain and the house exploded into existence."

"An interesting theory." Nick took her hand and started up the stone steps. "If you'd known my grandfather, you'd realize how close that is to the truth."

Morgan had primed herself to begin hurling questions and demanding explanations as soon as they had arrived. When she stepped into the entrance hall, she forgot everything.

Wide and speckled in age white, the hall was sporadically slashed with stark colors from wall hangings and primitive paintings. On one wall, long spears were crossed—weapons for killing, certainly, but with an ancient dignity she had to admire. The staircase leading to the upper floors arched in a half circle with a banister of dark, unvarnished wood. The result was one of earthy magnificence. It was far from elegant, but there was a sense of balance and savage charm.

"Nicholas." Turning a full circle, Morgan sighed. "It's really wonderful. I expect a cyclops to come stalking down the stairs. Are there centaurs in the courtyard?"

"I'll take you through, and we'll see what we can do." She was making it difficult for him to stick to his plan. She wasn't supposed to charm him. That wasn't in the script. Still, he kept her hand in his as he led her through the house.

Liz's comparison to Aladdin's cave was completely apt. Room after room abounded with treasures—Venetian glass, Fabergé boxes, African masks, Native American pottery, Ming vases. All were set

together in a hodgepodge of cultures. What might have seemed like a museum was instead a glorious clutter of wonders. As the house twisted and turned, revealing surprise after surprise, Morgan became more fascinated. Elegant Waterford crystal was juxtaposed with a deadly-looking seventeenth-century crossbow. She saw exquisite porcelain and a shrunken head from Ecuador.

Yes, the architect was mad, she decided, noting lintels with wolves' heads or grinning elves carved into them. Wonderfully mad. The house was a fairy tale—not the tame children's version, but with all the whispering shadows and hints of gremlins.

A huge curved window on the top floor gave her the sensation of standing suspended on the edge of the cliff. It jutted out, arrogantly, then fell in a sheer drop into the sea. Morgan stared down, equally exhilarated and terrified.

Nick watched her. There was a need to spin her around and seize, to possess while that look of dazzled courage was still on her face. He was a man accustomed to taking what he wanted without a second thought. She was something he wanted.

Morgan turned to him. Her eyes were still alive with the fascination of the sea and hints of excited fear. "Andrew said he hoped this was the cliff where Sappho hurled herself into the sea. I'm ready to believe it."

"Andrew's imaginative."

"So are you," she countered. "You live here."

"Your eyes are like some mythological lake," he murmured.

"Translucent and ethereal. I should call you Circe rather than Aphrodite." Abruptly, he gripped her hair in his hand, tugging it until her face was lifted to his. "I swear you're more witch than goddess."

Morgan stared at him. There was no teasing in his eyes this time, no arrogance. What she saw was longing. And the longing, more than

passion, seduced her. “I’m only a woman, Nicholas,” she heard herself say.

His fingers tightened. His expression darkened. Then even as she watched, his mood seemed to shift. This time, he took her arm rather than her hand. “Come, we’ll go down and have a drink.”

As they entered the salon, Morgan reasserted her priorities. She had to get answers—she *would* get answers. She couldn’t let a few soft words and a pair of dark eyes make her forget why she’d come. Before she could speak, however, a man slipped into the doorway.

He was small, with creased, leather skin. His hair was gray with age, but thick. So were his arms—thick and muscled. He made her think of a small-scaled, very efficient tank. His moustache was a masterpiece. It spread under his nose to drop free along the sides of his mouth, reaching his chin in two flowing arches. He smiled, showing several gaps in lieu of teeth.

“Good afternoon.” He spoke in respectful Greek, but his eyes were dancing.

Intrigued, Morgan gave him an unsmiling stare. “*Yiasou.*”

“Stephanos, Miss James. Stephanos is my, ah, caretaker.”

The checkerboard grin widened at the term. “Your servant, my lady.” He bowed, but there was nothing deferential in the gesture. “The matter we discussed has been seen to, Mr. Gregoras.” Turning to Nick, the old man spoke with exaggerated respect. “You have messages from Athens.”

“I’ll tend to them later.”

“As you wish.” The small man melted away. Morgan frowned. There had been something in the exchange that wasn’t quite what it should be. Shaking her head, she watched Nick mix drinks. It wasn’t Nick’s relationship with his servants that she was interested in.

Deciding that plunging head first was the most direct route, Morgan leaped. “What were you doing on the beach the other night?”

“I rather thought we’d concluded I was assaulting you.” His voice was very mild.

“That was only part of the evening’s entertainment.” She swallowed and took another dive. “Had you been smuggling?”

To his credit, Nick hesitated only briefly. As his back was to her, Morgan didn’t see his expression range from surprise to consideration. A very sharp lady, he mused. Too damn sharp.

“And how did you come by such an astonishing conclusion?” He turned to hand her a delicate glass.

“Don’t start that charade with me,” Morgan fumed, snatching the glass. “I’ve seen you stripped.” She sat down and aimed a level stare.

Nick’s mouth twitched. “What a fascinating way you have of putting things.”

“I asked if you were a smuggler.”

Nick sat across from her, taking a long study of her face as he ticked off possibilities. “First, tell me why you think I might be.”

“You’d been out on the water that night. I could smell the sea on you.”

Nick gazed down into the liquid in his glass, then sipped. “It’s fanciful, to say the least, that my being out on the water equals smuggling.”

Morgan ground her teeth at the cool sarcasm and continued. “If you’d been out on a little fishing trip, you’d hardly have dragged me into the trees waving a knife.”

“One might argue,” he murmured, “that fishing was precisely my occupation.”

“The coast of Turkey is very convenient from this part of the island. Alex told me smuggling was a problem.”

“Alex?” Nick repeated. There was a quick, almost imperceptible change in his expression. “What was Alex’s attitude toward smuggling?”

Morgan hesitated. The question had broken into her well-thought-out interrogation. “He was ... resigned, like one accepts the weather.”

“I see.” Nick swirled his drink as he leaned back. “And did you and Alex discuss the intricacies of the procedure?”

“Of course not!” she snapped, infuriated that he had cleverly turned the interrogation around on her. “Alex would hardly be intimate with such matters. But,” she continued, “I think you are.”

“Yes, I can see that.”

“Well?”

He sent her a mildly amused smile that didn’t quite reach his eyes. “Well what?”

“Are you going to deny it?” She wanted him to, Morgan realized with something like a jolt. She very, very badly wanted him to deny it.

Nick considered her for a moment. “If I deny it, you won’t believe me. It’s easy to see you’ve already made up your mind.” He tilted his head, and now the amusement crept into his eyes. “What will you do if I admit it?”

“I’ll turn you over to the police.” Morgan took a bold sip of her drink. Nick exploded with laughter.

“Morgan what a sweet, brave child you are.” He leaned over to take her hand before she could retort. “You don’t know my reputation, but I assure you, the police would think you mad.”

“I could prove—”

“What?” he demanded. His eyes were steady on hers, probing. The polished veneer was slowly fading. “You can’t prove what you don’t know.”

“I know that you’re not what you pretend to be.” Morgan tried to pull her hand from his, but he held it firm. “Or maybe it’s more accurate to say you’re something you pretend not to be.”

Nick watched her in silence, torn between annoyance and admiration. “Whatever I am, whatever I’m not, has nothing to do with you.”

“No one wishes more than I that that was the truth.”

Battling a new emotion, he sat back and studied her over the rim of his glass. “So your conclusions that I might be involved in smuggling would prompt you to go to the police. That wouldn’t be wise.”

“It’s a matter of what’s right.” Morgan swallowed, then blurted out what was torturing her mind. “The knife—would you have used it?”

“On you?” he asked, his eyes as expressionless as his voice.

“On anyone.”

“A general question can’t be given a specific answer.”

“Nicholas, for God’s sake—”

Nick set down his drink, then steepled his fingers. His expression changed, and his eyes were suddenly dangerous. “If I were everything you seem to think, you’re incredibly brave or incredibly foolish to be sitting here discussing it with me.”

“I think I’m safe enough,” she countered and straightened her shoulders. “Everyone knows where I am.”

“I could always dispose of you another time if I considered you an obstacle.” Morgan’s eyes flickered with momentary fear, quickly controlled. It was one more thing he could admire her for.

“I can take care of myself.”

“Can you?” he murmured, then shrugged as his mood shifted again. “Well, in any case, I have no intention of wasting beauty especially when I intend to enjoy its benefits. Your talents could be useful to me.”

Her chin shot up. “I have no intention of being your tool. Smuggling opium is a filthy way to make money. It’s a far cry from crossing the English Channel with French silks and brandy.”

“With mists curling and eye-patched buccaneers?” Nick countered with a smile. “Is that how your practical mind sees it, Morgan?”

She opened her mouth to retort, but found herself smiling. “I refuse to like you, Nicholas.”

“You don’t have to like me, Morgan. Like is too tame for my tastes in any case.” Outwardly relaxed, he picked up his glass again. “Don’t you like your drink?”

Without taking her eyes from his, Morgan set it down. “Nicholas, I only want a straight answer—I deserve one. You’re perfectly right that I can’t go to the police, no matter what you tell me. You really have nothing to fear from me.”

Something flashed in his eyes at her final statement, then was quickly banked. He considered his options before he spoke. “I’ll tell you this much, I am—concerned with smuggling. I’d be interested to know of any conversations you might hear on the subject.”

Frowning, Morgan rose to wander the room. He was making it difficult for her to remember the straight and narrow path of right and wrong. The path took some confusing twists and turns when emotions were involved. Emotions! She brought herself up short. No, no emotions here. She had no feelings toward him.

“Who was with you that night?” Keep to the plan, she told herself. Questions and answers. Save the introspection for later. “You were giving someone orders.”

“I thought you were too frightened to notice.” Nick sipped at his drink.

“You were speaking to someone,” Morgan went on doggedly. “Someone who did precisely what you told him without question. Who?”

Nick weighed the pros and cons before he answered. With her mind she’d figure it out for herself soon enough. “Stephanos.”

“That little old man?” Morgan stopped in front of Nick and stared down. Stephanos was not Morgan’s image of a ruthless smuggler.

“That little old man knows the sea like a gardener knows a rose bush.” He smiled at her incredulous expression. “He also has the advantage of being loyal. He’s been with me since I was a boy.”

“How convenient all this is for you.” Depressed, Morgan wandered to a window. She was getting her answers, but she discovered they weren’t the ones she wanted. “A home on a convenient island, a convenient servant, a convenient business to ease distribution. Who passed by the grove that night whom you wanted to avoid?”

Frightened or not, he thought angrily, she’d been far too observant. “That needn’t concern you.”

Morgan whirled. “You got me into this, Nicholas. I have a right to know.”

“Your rights end where I say they do.” He rose as his temper threatened. “Don’t push me too far, Morgan. You wouldn’t like the results. I’ve told you all I intend to for now. Be content with it.”

She backed away a step, furious with herself for being frightened. He swore at the movement, then gripped her shoulders.

“I have no intention of harming you, damn it. If I had, there’s already been ample opportunity. What do you picture?” he demanded, shaking her. “Me cutting your throat or tossing you off a cliff?”

Her eyes were dry and direct, more angry now than frightened. “I don’t know what I picture.”

Abruptly he realized he was hurting her. Cursing himself, he eased the grip to a caress. He couldn’t keep letting her get under his skin this way. He couldn’t let it matter what she thought of him. “I don’t expect you to trust me,” he said calmly. “But use common sense. Your involvement was a matter of circumstance, not design. I don’t want to see you hurt, Morgan. That much you can take as the truth.”

And that much she believed. Intrigued, she studied his face. “You’re a strange man, Nicholas. Somehow, I can’t quite see you doing something as base as smuggling opium.”

“Intuition, Morgan?” Smiling, Nick tangled his fingers in her hair. It was soft, as he remembered, and tempting. “Are you a woman who believes in her intuition, or in her reason?”

“Nicholas—”

“No. No more questions or I’ll have to divert you. I’m very”—a frown hovered, then flashed into a grin—“very susceptible to beauty. You have a remarkable supply. Coupled with a very good mind, the combination is hard to resist.” Nick lifted the medal at her throat, examined it, then let it fall before he moved back from her. “Tell me, what do you think of Dorian and Iona?”

“I resent this. I resent all of this.” Morgan spun away from him. He shouldn’t be allowed to affect her so deeply, so easily, then switch off like a light. “I came to Lesbos to get away from pressures and complications.”

“What sort of pressures and complications?”

She turned back to him, eyes hot. “They’re my business. I had a life before I went down to that damned beach and ran into you.”

“Yes,” he murmured and picked up his drink. “I’m sure you did.”

“Now, I find myself tossed into the middle of some grade-B thriller. I don’t like it.”

“It’s a pity you didn’t stay in bed that night, Morgan.” Nick drank deeply, then twirled his glass by the stem. “Maybe I’m Greek enough to say the gods didn’t will it so. For the moment your fate’s linked with mine and there’s nothing either of us can do about it.”

She surprised him by laying a hand on his chest. He didn’t like the way his heart reacted to the touch. Needs ... he couldn’t need. Wants were easily satisfied or ignored, but needs ate at a man.

“If you feel that way, why won’t you give me a straight answer?”

“I don’t choose to.” His eyes locked on hers, cementing her to the spot. In them she saw desire—his and a mirror of her own. “Take me for what I am, Morgan.”

She dropped her hand. Frightened not of him now, but of herself. “I don’t want to take you at all.”

“No?” He pulled her close, perversely enjoying her resistance. “Let’s see just how quickly I can make a liar of you.”

She could taste anger on his mouth, and just as clearly she could taste need. Morgan stopped resisting. The path of right and wrong

took a few more confusing twists when she was in his arms. Whoever, whatever he was, she wanted to be held by him.

Her arms wound around his neck to draw him closer. She heard him murmur something against her mouth; the kiss held a savageness, a demand she was answering with equal abandon.

Had this passion always been there, sleeping inside her? It wasn't asleep any longer. The force of it had her clinging to him, had her mouth urgent and hungry against his. Something had opened inside her, letting him pour through. His hands were in her hair, then running down her back in a swift stroke of possession. She arched against him as if daring him to claim her—taunting him to try.

Somehow she knew, as her body fit truly to his, that they would come back to each other, again and again, against their will, against all reason. She might fight it from moment to moment, but there would be a time. The knowledge filled her with hunger and fear.

“Morgan.” Her name wrenched from him on a sigh of need. “I want you—by the gods, I want you. Come, stay here with me tonight. Here, where we can be alone.”

His mouth was roaming her face. She wanted to agree. Her body was aching to agree to anything—to everything. Yet, she found herself drawing back. “No.”

Nick lifted his face. His expression was amused and confident. “Afraid?”

“Yes.”

His brows rose at the unexpected honesty, then drew together in frustration. The look in her eyes made it impossible for him to press his advantage. “*Diabolos*, you're an exasperating woman.” He strode away and poured more liquor into his glass. “I could toss you over my shoulder, haul you up to the bedroom, and be done with it.”

Though her legs were watery, Morgan forced herself to remain standing. “Why don’t you?”

He whirled back, furious. She watched as he slowly pulled out the control. “You’re more accustomed to a wine and candlelight seduction, I imagine. Soft promises. Soft lies.” Nick drank deep, then set down his glass with a bang. “Is that what you want from me?”

“No.” Morgan met his fury steadily while her hand reached instinctively for the medal at her throat. “I don’t want you to make love to me.”

“Don’t take me for a fool!” He took a step toward her, then stopped himself. Another step and neither of them would have a choice. “Your body betrays you every time I touch you.”

“That has nothing to do with it,” she said calmly. “I don’t want you to make love to me.”

He waited a beat until the desire and frustration could be tamed a bit. “Because you believe I’m an opium smuggler?”

“No,” she said, surprising both of them. She felt her strength waver a moment, then told him the truth. “Because I don’t want to be one of your amusements.”

“I see.” Carefully, Nick dipped his hands into his pockets. “I’d better take you back before you discover I find nothing amusing in lovemaking.”

A half-hour later, Nick slammed back into the house. His temper was foul. He stalked into the salon, poured himself another drink, and slumped into a chair. Damn the woman, he didn’t have the time or patience to deal with her. The need for her was still churning inside him like a pain, sharp and insistent. He took a long swallow of liquor to dull it. Just physical, he told himself. He’d have to find another woman—any other woman—and release some of the tension.

“Ah, you’re back.” Stephanos entered. He noted the black temper and accepted it without comment. He’d seen it often enough in the past. “The lady is more beautiful than I remembered.” Nick’s lack of response left him unperturbed. He moved to the bar and poured himself a drink. “How much did you tell her?”

“Only what was necessary. She’s sharp and remarkably bold.” Nick eyed the liquid in his glass with a scowl. “She accused me flat out of smuggling.” At Stephanos’s cackle of laughter, Nick drained more liquor. “Your sense of humor eludes me at the moment, old man.”

Stephanos only grinned. “Her eyes are sharp—they linger on you.” Though Nick made no response, Stephanos’s grin remained. “Did you speak to her of Alex?”

“Not at length.”

“Is she loyal?”

“To Alex?” Nick frowned into his drink. “Yes, she would be. Where she cares, she’d be loyal.” He set down the glass, refusing to give in to the urge to hurl it across the room. “Getting information out of her won’t be easy.”

“You’ll get it nonetheless.”

“I wish to hell she’d stayed in bed that night,” Nick said savagely.

The gap-toothed grin appeared before Stephanos tossed back the drink in one long swallow. He let out a wheezy sigh of appreciation. “She lingers in your mind. That makes you uncomfortable.” He laughed loud and long at Nick’s scowl, then sighed again with the effort of it. “Athens is waiting for your call.”

“Athens can fry in hell.”

Chapter Five

Morgan's frame of mind was as poor as Nick's when she entered the Theoharis villa. Somewhere on the drive back from Nick's she had discovered that what she was feeling wasn't anger. It wasn't fear or even resentment. In a few days Nick had managed to do something Jack hadn't done in all the months she had known him. He'd hurt her.

It had nothing to do with the bruises that were already fading on her arms. This hurt went deeper, and had begun before she had even met him. It had begun when he had chosen the life he was leading.

Nothing to do with me. Nothing to do with me, Morgan told herself again and again. But she slammed the front door as she swept into the cool white hall. Her plans to go immediately to her room before she could snarl at anyone were tossed to the winds by a call and a wave from Dorian.

"Morgan, come join us."

Fixing on a smile, Morgan strolled out to the terrace. Iona was with him sprawled on a lounge in a hot-pink playsuit that revealed long, shapely legs but covered her arms with white lace cuffs at the wrists. She sent Morgan a languid greeting, then went back to her sulky study of the gulf. Morgan felt the tension hovering in the air and wondered if it had been there before or if she had brought it with her.

"Alex is on a transatlantic call," Dorian told her as he held out a chair. "And Liz is dealing with some domestic crisis in the kitchen."

"Without an interpreter?" Morgan asked. She smiled, telling herself Nick wasn't going to ruin her mood and make her as sulky as Alex's cousin.

"It's ridiculous." Iona gestured for Dorian to light her cigarette. "Liz should simply fire the man. Americans are habitually casual with servants."

"Are they?" Morgan felt her back go up at the slur on her friend and her nationality. "I wouldn't know."

Iona's dark eyes flicked over her briefly. "I don't imagine you've had many dealings with servants."

Before Morgan could retort, Dorian stepped in calmly. "Tell me, Morgan, what did you think of Nick's treasure trove?"

The expression in his eyes asked her to overlook Iona's bad manners, and told her something she'd begun to suspect the night before. He's in love with her, she mused, and felt a stab of pity. With an effort, Morgan relaxed her spine. "It's a wonderful place, like a museum without being regimented or stiff. It must have taken him years to collect all those things."

"Nick's quite a businessman," Dorian commented. Another look passed between him and Morgan. This time she saw it was gratitude. "And, of course, he uses his knowledge and position to secure the best pieces for himself."

"There was a Swiss music box," she remembered. "He said it was over a hundred years old. It played *Für Elise*." Morgan sighed, at ease again. "I'd kill for it."

"Nick's a generous man—when approached in the proper manner." Iona's smile was sharp as a knife. Morgan turned her head and met it.

"I wouldn't know anything about that either," she said coolly. Deliberately, she turned back to Dorian. "I met Nick's cousin earlier this morning."

"Ah, yes, the young poet from America."

"He said he wanders all over this part of the island. I'm thinking of doing the same myself. It's such a simple, peaceful place. I suppose that's why I was so stunned when Alex said there was a problem with smuggling."

Dorian merely smiled as if amused. Iona stiffened. As Morgan watched, the color drained from her face, leaving it strained and cold

and anything but beautiful. Surprised by the reaction, Morgan studied her carefully. Why, she's afraid, she realized. Now why would that be?

"A dangerous business," Dorian commented conversationally. Since his eyes were on Morgan, Iona's reaction went unnoticed by him. "But common enough—traditional in fact."

"An odd tradition," Morgan murmured.

"The network of patrols is very large, I'm told, and closely knotted. As I recall, five men were killed last year, gunned down off the Turkish coast." He lit a cigarette of his own. "The authorities confiscated quite a cache of opium."

"How terrible." Morgan noticed that Iona's pallor increased.

"Just peasants and fishermen," he explained with a shrug. "Not enough intelligence between them to have organized a large smuggling ring. It's rumored the leader is brilliant and ruthless. From the stories passed around in the village, he goes along on runs now and then, but wears a mask. Apparently, not even his cohorts know who he is. It might even be a woman." He flashed a grin at the idea. "I suppose that adds an element of romance to the whole business."

Iona rose and dashed from the terrace.

"You must forgive her." Dorian sighed as his eyes followed her. "She's a moody creature."

"She seemed upset."

"Iona's easily upset," he murmured. "Her nerves ..."

"You care for her quite a lot."

His gaze came back to lock on Morgan's before he rose and strode to the railing.

“I’m sorry, Dorian,” Morgan began immediately. “I didn’t mean to pry.”

“No, forgive me.” He turned back and the sun streamed over his face, gleaming off the bronzed skin, combing through his burnished gold hair. Adonis, Morgan thought again, and for the second time since she had come to Lesbos wished she could paint. “My feelings for Iona are ... difficult and, I had thought, more cleverly concealed.”

“I’m sorry,” Morgan said again, helplessly.

“She’s spoiled, willful.” With a laugh, Dorian shook his head. “What is it that makes one person lose his heart to another?”

Morgan looked away at the question. “I don’t know. I wish I did.”

“Now I’ve made you sad.” Dorian sat back down beside Morgan and took her hands. “Don’t pity me. Sooner or later, what’s between Iona and me will be resolved. I’m a patient man.” He smiled then, his eyes gleaming with confidence. “For now, we’ll talk of something else. I have to confess, I’m fascinated by the smuggling legends.”

“Yes. It is interesting. You said the rumor is that no one, not even the men who work for him, know who the leader is.”

“That’s the story. Whenever I’m on Lesbos, I keep hoping to stumble across some clue that would unmask him.”

Morgan murmured something as her thoughts turned uncomfortably to Nick. “Yet you don’t seem terribly concerned about the smuggling itself.”

“Ah, the smuggling.” Dorian moved his shoulders. “That’s something for the authorities to worry about. But the thrill of the hunt, Morgan.” His eyes gleamed as they moved past her. “The thrill of the hunt.”

“You wouldn’t believe it!” Liz bustled out and plopped into a chair. “A half-hour with a temperamental Greek cook. I’d rather face a firing squad. Give me a cigarette, Dorian.” Her smile and everyday

complaint made the subject of smuggling absurd. “So tell me, Morgan, how did you like Nick’s house?”

Pink streaks joined sky and sea as dawn bloomed. The air was warm and moist. After a restless night, it was the best of beginnings.

Morgan strolled along the water’s edge and listened to the first serenading of birds. This was the way she had planned to spend her vacation—strolling along the beach, watching sunrises, relaxing. Isn’t that what her father and Liz had drummed into her head?

Relax, Morgan. Get off the treadmill for a while. You never give yourself any slack.

She could almost laugh at the absurdity. But then, neither Liz nor her father had counted on Nicholas Gregoras.

He was an enigma, and she couldn’t find the key. His involvement in smuggling was like a piece of a jigsaw puzzle that wouldn’t quite fit. Morgan had never been able to tolerate half-finished puzzles. She scuffed her sandals in the sand. He was simply not a man she could categorize, and she wanted badly to shake the need to try.

On the other hand, there was Iona. Morgan saw the puzzle there as well. Alex’s sulky cousin was more than a woman with an annoying personality. There was some inner agitation—something deep and firmly rooted. And Alex knows something of it, she mused. Dorian, too, unless she missed her guess. But what? And how much? Iona’s reaction to talk of smuggling had been a sharp contrast to both Alex’s and Dorian’s. They’d been resigned—even amused. Iona had been terrified. Terrified of discovery? Morgan wondered. But that was absurd.

Shaking her head, Morgan pushed the thought aside. This morning she was going to do what she had come to Greece to do. Nothing. At least, nothing strenuous. She was going to look for shells, she

decided, and after rolling up the hem of her jeans, splashed into a shallow inlet.

They were everywhere. The bank of sand and the shallow water were glistening with them. Some had been crushed underfoot or beaten smooth by the slow current. Crouching, she stuffed the pockets of her jacket with the best of them.

She noticed the stub of a black cigarette half-buried in the sand. So, Alex comes this way, she thought with a smile. Morgan could see Liz and her husband strolling hand in hand through the shallows.

As the sun grew higher, Morgan became more engrossed. If only I'd brought a tote, she thought, then shrugged and began to pile shells in a heap to retrieve later. She'd have them in a bowl on her windowsill at home. Then, whenever she was trapped indoors on a cold, rainy afternoon, she could look at them and remember Greek sunshine.

There were dozens of gulls. They flapped around her, circled, and called out. Morgan found the high, piercing sound the perfect company for a solitary morning. As the time passed, she began to find that inner peace she had experienced so briefly on the moonlit beach.

The hunt had taken her a good distance from the beach. Glancing up, she saw, with pleasure, a mouth of a cave. It wasn't large and was nearly hidden from view, but she thought it was entitled to an exploration. With a frown for her white jeans, Morgan decided to take a peek inside the entrance and come back when she was more suitably dressed. She moved to it with the water sloshing up to her calves. Bending down, she tugged another shell from its bed of sand. As her gaze swept over toward the cave, her hand froze.

The face glistened white in the clear water. Dark eyes stared back at her. Her scream froze in her throat, locked there by terror. She had never seen death before—not unpampered, staring death. Morgan stepped back jerkily, nearly slipping on a rock. As she struggled to

regain her balance, her stomach heaved up behind the scream so that she could only gag. Even through the horror, she could feel the pressure of dizziness. She couldn't faint, not here, not with that only a foot away. She turned and fled.

She scrambled and spilled over rocks and sand. The only clear thought in her head was to get away. On a dead run, breath ragged, she broke from the concealment of the inlet out to the sickle of beach.

Hands gripped her. Blindly, Morgan fought against them with the primitive fear that the thing in the inlet had risen up and come after her.

“Stop it! Damn it, I'll end up hurting you again. Morgan, stop this. What's wrong with you?”

She was being shaken roughly. The voice pierced the first layer of shock. She stared and saw Nick's face. “Nicholas?” The dizziness was back and she went limp against him as waves of fear and nausea wracked her. Trembling, she couldn't stop the trembling, but knew she'd be safe now. He was there. “Nicholas,” she managed again as though his name alone was enough to shield her.

Nick caught her tighter and shook her again. Her face was deathly pale, her skin clammy. He'd seen enough of horror to recognize it in her eyes. In a moment, he knew, she'd faint or be hysterical. He couldn't allow either.

“What happened?” he demanded in a voice that commanded an answer.

Morgan opened her mouth, but found she could only shake her head. She buried her face against her chest in an attempt to block out what she had seen. Her breath was still ragged, coming in dry sobs that wouldn't allow for words. She'd be safe now, she told herself as she fought the panic. He'd keep her safe.

“Pull yourself together, Morgan,” Nick ordered curtly, “and tell me what happened.”

“Can’t ...” She tried to burrow herself into him.

In one quick move he jerked her away, shaking her. “I said tell me.” His voice was cold, emotionless. He knew only one way to deal with hysteria, and her breath was still rising in gasps.

Dazed by the tone of his voice, she tried again, then jolted, clinging to him when she heard the sound of footsteps.

“Hello. Am I intruding?” Andrew’s cheerful voice came from behind her, but she didn’t look back. The trembling wouldn’t stop.

Why was he angry with her? Why wasn’t he helping her? The questions whirled in her head as she tried to catch her breath. Oh, God, she needed him to help her.

“Is something wrong?” Andrew’s tone mirrored both concern and curiosity as he noted Nick’s black expression and Morgan’s shaking form.

“I’m not sure.” Nick forced himself not to curse his cousin and spoke briefly. “Morgan was running across the beach. I haven’t been able to get anything out of her yet.” He drew her away, his fingers digging roughly in her skin as she tried to hold firm. She saw nothing in his face but cool curiosity. “Now, Morgan”—there was an edge of steel now—“tell me.”

“Over there.” Her teeth began to chatter as the next stage of reaction set in. Swallowing, she clamped them together while her eyes pleaded with him. His remained hard and relentless on hers. “Near the cove.” The effort of the two short sentences swam in her head. She leaned toward him again. “Nicholas, please.”

“I’ll have a look.” He grabbed her arms, dragging them away from him, wishing he didn’t see what she was asking of him—knowing he couldn’t give it to her.

“Don’t leave, please!” Desperate, she grabbed for him again only to be shoved roughly into Andrew’s arms.

“Damn it, get her calmed down,” Nick bit off, tasting his own fury. She had no right—no right to ask for things he couldn’t give. He had no right—no right to want to give them to her. He swore again, low and pungent under his breath as he turned away.

“Nicholas!” Morgan struggled out of Andrew’s arms, but Nick was already walking away. She pressed a hand to her mouth to stop herself from calling him again. He never looked back.

Arms encircled her. Not Nick’s. She could feel the gentle comfort of Andrew as he drew her against his chest. Her fingers gripped his sweater. Not Nick. “Here now.” Andrew brought a hand to her hair. “I had hoped to entice you into this position under different circumstances.”

“Oh, Andrew.” The soft words and tender stroking had the ice of shock breaking into tears. “Andrew, it was so horrible.”

“Tell me what happened, Morgan. Say it fast. It’ll be easier then.” His tone was quiet and coaxing as he stroked her hair. Morgan gave a shuddering sigh.

“There’s a body at the mouth of the cave.”

“A body!” He drew her back to stare into her face. “Good God! Are you sure?”

“Yes, yes, I saw—I was ...” She covered her face with her hands a moment until she thought she could speak.

“Easy, take it easy,” he murmured. “And let it come out.”

“I was collecting shells in the inlet. I saw the cave. I was going to peek inside, then I ...” She shuddered once, then continued. “Then I saw the face—under the water.”

“Oh, Morgan.” He drew her into his arms again and held her tight. He didn’t say any more, but in silence gave her everything she had needed. When the tears stopped, he kept her close.

Nick moved rapidly across the sand. His frown deepened as he saw Morgan molded in his cousin’s arms. As he watched, Andrew bent down to kiss her hair. A small fire leaped inside him that he smothered quickly.

“Andrew, take Morgan up to the Theoharis villa and phone the authorities. One of the villagers has had a fatal accident.”

Nodding, Andrew continued to stroke Morgan’s hair. “Yes, she told me. Terrible that she had to find it.” He swallowed what seemed to be his own revulsion. “Are you coming?”

Nick looked down as Morgan turned her face to his. He hated the look in her eyes as she stared at him—the blankness, the hurt. She wouldn’t forgive him easily for this. “No, I’ll stay and make sure no one else happens across it. Morgan ...” He touched her shoulders, detesting himself. There was no response, her eyes were dry now, and empty. “You’ll be all right. Andrew will take you home.”

Without a word, Morgan turned her face away again.

His control slipped a bit as Nick shot Andrew a hard glance. “Take care of her.”

“Of course,” Andrew murmured, puzzled by the tone. “Come on, Morgan, lean on me.”

Nick watched them mount the beach steps. When they were out of sight, he went back to search the body.

Seated in the salon, her horror dulled with Alex’s best brandy, Morgan studied Captain Tripolos of Mitilini’s police department. He was short, with his build spreading into comfortable lines that stopped just short of fat. His gray hair was carefully slicked to

conceal its sparseness. His eyes were dark and sharp. Through the haze of brandy and shock, Morgan recognized a man with the tenacity of a bulldog.

“Miss James.” The captain spoke in quick, staccato English. “I hope you understand, I must ask you some questions. It is routine.”

“Couldn’t it wait?” Andrew was stationed next to Morgan on the sofa. As he spoke he slipped an arm around her shoulders. “Miss James has had a nasty shock.”

“No, Andrew, it’s all right.” Morgan laid her hand over his. “I’d rather be done with it. I understand, Captain.” She gave him a straight look which he admired. “I’ll tell you whatever I can.”

“*Efxaristo.*” He licked the end of his pencil, settled himself in his chair, and smiled with his mouth only. “Perhaps you could start by telling me exactly what happened this morning, from the time you arose.”

Morgan began to recount the morning as concisely as she could. She spoke mechanically, with her hands limp and still in her lap. Though her voice trembled once or twice, Tripolos noted that her eyes stayed on his. She was a strong one, he decided, relieved that she wasn’t putting him to the inconvenience of tears or jumbled hysterics.

“Then I saw him under the water.” Morgan accepted Andrew’s hand with gratitude. “I ran.”

Tripolos nodded. “You were up very early. Is this your habit?”

“No. But I woke up and had an impulse to walk on the beach.”

“Did you see anyone?”

“No.” A shudder escaped, but her gaze didn’t falter. She went up another notch in Tripolos’s admiration. “Not until Nicholas and Andrew.”

“Nicholas? Ah, Mr. Gregoras.” He shifted his eyes to where Nick sprawled on a sofa across the room with Alex and Liz. “Had you ever seen the ... deceased before?”

“No.” Her hand tightened convulsively on Andrew’s as the white face floated in front of her eyes. With a desperate effort of will, she forced the image away. “I’ve only been here a few days and I haven’t been far from the villa yet.”

“You’re visiting from America?”

“Yes.”

He made a quiet cluck of sympathy. “What a pity a murder had to blight your vacation.”

“Murder?” Morgan repeated. The word echoed in her head as she stared into Tripolos’s calm eyes. “But I thought ... wasn’t it an accident?”

“No.” Tripolos glanced idly down at his notepad. “No, the victim was stabbed—in the back,” he added with distaste. It was as if he considered murder one matter and backstabbing another. “I hope I won’t have to disturb you again.” He rose and bowed over her hand. “Did you find many shells this morning, Miss James?”

“Yes I—I gathered quite a few.” She felt compelled to reach in her jacket pocket and produce some. “I thought they were ... lovely.”

“Yes.” He smiled, then turned to the others. “I regret we will have to question everyone on their whereabouts from last evening to this morning. Of course,” he continued with a shrug, “we will no doubt find the murder was a result of a village quarrel, but with the body found so close to both villas ...” He trailed off as he pocketed his pad and pencil. “One of you might recall some small incident that will help settle the matter.”

Settle the matter? Morgan thought on a wave of hysteria. Settle the matter. But a man’s dead. I’m dreaming. I must be dreaming.

“Easy, Morgan,” Andrew whispered in her ear. “Have another sip.” Gently, he urged the brandy back to her lips.

“You have our complete cooperation, Captain,” Alex stated, and rose. “It isn’t pleasant for any of us to have such a thing happen so near our homes. It’s particularly upsetting that a guest of mine should have found the man.”

“I understand, of course.” Tripolos nodded wearily, rubbing a hand over his square chin. “It would be less confusing if I spoke with you one at a time. Perhaps we could use your office?”

“I’ll show you where it is.” Alex gestured to the door. “You can speak to me first if you like.”

“Thank you.” Tripolos gave the room a general bow before retreating behind Alex. Morgan watched his slow, measured steps. He’d haunt a man to the grave she thought, and shakily swallowed the rest of the brandy.

“I need a drink,” Liz announced, moving toward the liquor cabinet. “A double. Anyone else?”

Nick’s eyes skimmed briefly over Morgan. “Whatever you’re having.” He gestured with his hand, signaling Liz to refill Morgan’s glass.

“I don’t see why he has to question us.” Iona moved to the bar, too impatient to wait for Liz to pour. “It’s absurd. Alex should have refused. He has enough influence to avoid all of this.” She poured something potent into a tall glass and drank half of it down.

“There’s no reason for Alex to avoid anything.” Liz handed Nick his drink before splashing another generous portion of brandy into Morgan’s glass. “We have nothing to hide. What can I fix you, Dorian?”

“Hide? I said nothing about hiding,” Iona retorted as she swirled around the room. “I don’t want to answer that policeman’s silly

questions just because *she* was foolish enough to stumble over some villager's body," she said, gesturing toward Morgan.

"A glass of ouzo will be fine, Liz," Dorian stated before Liz could fire a retort. His gaze lit on Iona. "I hardly think we can blame Morgan, Iona. We'd have been questioned in any case. As it is, she's had to deal with finding the man as well as the questions. Thank you, Liz," he added as she placed a glass in his hand and shot him a grim smile.

"I cannot stay in this house today." Iona prowled the room, her movements as jerky as a nervous finger on a trigger. "Nicky, let's go out in your boat." She stopped and dropped to the arm of his chair.

"The timing's bad, Iona. When I'm finished here, I have paperwork to clear up at home." He sipped his drink and patted her hand. His eyes met Morgan's briefly, but long enough to recognize condemnation. Damn you, he thought furiously, you have no right to make me feel guilty for doing what I have to do.

"Oh, Nicky." Iona's hand ran up his arm. "I'll go mad if I stay here today. Please, a few hours on the sea?"

Nick sighed in capitulation while inside he fretted against a leash that was too long, and too strong, for him to break.

He had reason to agree, and couldn't let Morgan's blank stare change the course he'd already taken. "All right, later this afternoon."

Iona smiled into her drink.

The endless questioning continued. Liz slipped out as Alex came back in. And the waiting went on. Conversation came in fits and starts, conducted in undertones. As Andrew left the room for his conference, Nick wandered to Morgan's new station by the window.

"I want to talk to you." His tone was quiet, with the steel under it. When he put his hand over hers, she jerked it away.

“I don’t want to talk to you.”

Deliberately, he slipped his hands into his pockets. She was still pale. The brandy had steadied her but hadn’t brought the color back to her cheeks. “It’s necessary, Morgan. At the moment, I haven’t the opportunity to argue about it.”

“That’s your problem.”

“We’ll go for a drive when the captain’s finished. You need to get away from here for a while.”

“I’m not going anywhere with you. Don’t tell me what I need now.” She kept her teeth clamped and spoke without emotion. “I needed you then.”

“Damn it, Morgan.” His muttered oath had all the power of a shout. She kept her eyes firmly on Liz’s garden. Some of the roses, she thought dispassionately, were overblown now. The hands in his pockets were fists, straining impotently. “Don’t you think I know that? Don’t you think I—” He cut himself off before he lost control. “I couldn’t give you what you needed—not then. Don’t make this any more impossible for me than it is.”

She turned to him now, meeting his fury with frost. “I have no intention of doing that.” Her voice was as low as his but with none of his vibrating emotion. “The simple fact is I don’t want anything from you now. I don’t want anything to do with you.”

“Morgan ...” There was something in his eyes now that threatened to crack her resolve. Apology, regret, a plea for understanding where she’d never expected to see one. “Please, I need—”

“I don’t care what you need,” she said quickly, before he could weaken her again. “Just stay away from me. Stay completely away from me.”

“Tonight,” he began, but the cold fury in her eyes stopped him.

“Stay away,” Morgan repeated.

She turned her back on him and walked across the room to join Dorian. Nick was left with black thoughts and the inability to carry them out.

Chapter Six

Morgan was surprised she'd slept. She hadn't been tired when Liz and Alex had insisted she lie down, but had obeyed simply because her last words with Nick had sapped all of her resistance. Now as she woke she saw it was past noon. She'd slept for two hours.

Groggy, heavy-eyed, Morgan walked into the bath to splash cool water on her face. The shock had passed, but the nap had brought her a lingering weariness instead of refreshment. Beneath it all was a deep shame—shame that she had run, terrified, from a dead man. Shame that she had clung helplessly to Nick and been turned away. She could feel even now that sensation of utter dependence—and utter rejection.

Never again, Morgan promised herself. She should have trusted her head instead of her heart. She should have known better than to ask or expect anything from a man like him. A man like him had nothing to give. You'd always find hell if you looked to a devil. And yet ...

And yet it had been Nick she had needed, and trusted—him she had felt safe with the moment his arms had come around her. My mistake, Morgan thought grimly, and studied herself in the mirror over the basin. There were still some lingering signs of shock—the pale cheeks and too wide eyes, but she felt the strength returning.

“I don't need him,” she said aloud, wanting to hear the words. “He doesn't mean anything to me.”

But he's hurt you. Someone who doesn't matter can't hurt you.

I won't let him hurt me again, Morgan promised herself. Because I won't ever go to him again, I won't ever ask him again, no matter what.

She turned away from her reflection and went downstairs.

Even as she entered the main hall, Morgan heard the sound of a door closing and footsteps. Glancing behind her, she saw Dorian.

“So, you’ve rested.” He came to her and took her hand. In the gesture was all the comfort and concern she could have asked for.

“Yes. I feel like a fool.” At his lifted brow, Morgan moved her shoulders restlessly. “Andrew all but carried me back up here.”

With a low laugh, he slipped an arm around her shoulders and led her into the salon. “You American women—do you always have to be strong and self-reliant?”

“I always have been.” She remembered weeping in Nick’s arms—clinging, pleading—and straightened her spine. “I have to depend on myself.”

“I admire you for it. But then, you don’t make a habit of stumbling over dead bodies.” He cast a look at her pale cheeks and gentled his tone. “There, it was foolish of me to remind you. Shall I fix you another drink?”

“No— No, I’ve enough brandy in me as it is.” Morgan managed a thin smile and moved away from him.

Why was it she was offered a supporting arm by everyone but the one who mattered? No, Nick couldn’t matter, she reminded herself. She couldn’t let him matter, and she didn’t need a supporting arm from anyone.

“You seem restless, Morgan. Would you rather be alone?”

“No.” She shook her head as she looked up. His eyes were calm. She’d never seen them otherwise. There’d be strength in him, she thought, and wished bleakly it had been Dorian she had run to that morning. Going to the piano, she ran a finger over the keys. “I’m glad the captain’s gone. He made me nervous.”

“Tripolos?” Dorian drew out his cigarette case. “I doubt he’s anything to worry about. I doubt even the killer need worry,” he added with a short laugh. “The Mitilini police force isn’t known for its energy or brilliance.”

“You sound as if you don’t care if the person who killed that man is caught.”

“Village quarrels mean nothing to me,” he countered. “I’m concerned more with the people I know. I don’t like to think you’re worried about Tripolos.”

“He doesn’t worry me,” she corrected, frowning as he lit a cigarette. Something was nagging at the back of her mind, struggling to get through. “He just has a way of looking at you while he sits there, comfortable and not quite tidy.” She watched the column of smoke curl up from the tip of the long, black cigarette. With an effort, Morgan shook off the feeling of something important, half remembered. “Where is everyone?”

“Liz is with Alex in his office. Iona’s gone on her boat ride.”

“Oh, yes, with Nicholas.” Morgan looked down at her hands, surprised that they had balled into fists. Deliberately, she opened them. “It must be difficult for you.”

“She needed to escape. The atmosphere of death is hard on her nerves.”

“You’re very understanding.” Disturbed and suddenly headachy, Morgan wandered to the window. “I don’t think I would be—if I were in love.”

“I’m patient, and I know that Nick means less than nothing to her. A means to an end.” He paused for a moment, before he spoke again, thoughtfully. “Some people have no capacity for emotion—love or hate.”

“How empty that would be,” Morgan murmured.

“Do you think so?” He gave her an odd smile. “Somehow, I think it would be comfortable.”

“Yes, comfortable perhaps but ...” Morgan trailed off as she turned back. Dorian was just lifting the cigarette to his lips. As Morgan’s eyes focused on it, she remembered, with perfect clarity, seeing the stub of one of those expensive brands in the sand, only a few yards from the body. A chill shot through her as she continued to stare.

“Morgan, is something wrong?” Dorian’s voice broke through so that she blinked and focused on him again.

“No, I—I suppose I’m not myself yet. Maybe I’ll have that drink after all.”

She didn’t want it, but needed a moment to pull her thoughts together. The stub of a cigarette didn’t have to mean anything, she told herself as Dorian went to the bar. Anyone from the villa could have wandered through that inlet a dozen times.

But the stub had been fresh, Morgan remembered—half in, half out of the sand, unweathered. The birds hadn’t picked at it. Surely if someone had been that close to the body, they would have seen. They would have seen, and they would have gone to the police. Unless ...

No, that was a ridiculous thought, she told herself as she felt a quick tremor. It was absurd to think that Dorian might have had anything to do with a villager’s murder. Dorian or Alex, she thought as that sweet, foreign smoke drifted over her.

They were both civilized men—civilized men didn’t stab other men in the back. Both of them had such beautiful, manicured hands and careful manners. Didn’t it take something evil, something cold and hard to kill? She thought of Nick and shook her head. No, she wouldn’t think of him now.

She’d concentrate on this one small point and work it through to the end.

It didn't make any sense to consider Dorian or Alex as killers. They were businessmen, cultured. What possible dealings could they have had with some local fisherman? It was an absurd thought, Morgan told herself, but couldn't quite shake the unease that was creeping into her. There'd be a logical explanation, she insisted. There was always a logical explanation. She was still upset, that was all. Blowing some minor detail out of proportion.

Whose footsteps were on the beach steps that first night? a small voice insisted. Who was Nick hiding from? Or waiting for? That man hadn't been killed in a village quarrel, her thoughts ran on. She hadn't believed it for a moment, any more than she'd really believed the man had died accidentally. Murder ... smuggling. Morgan closed her eyes and shuddered.

Who was coming in from the sea when Nick had held her in the shadow of the cypress? Nick had ordered Stephanos to follow him. Alex? Dorian? The dead man perhaps? She jolted when Dorian offered her the snifter.

“Morgan, you're still so pale. You should sit.”

“No ... I guess I'm still a little jumpy, that's all.” Morgan cupped the snifter in both hands but didn't drink. She would ask him, that was all. She would simply ask him if he'd been to the inlet. But when her eyes met his, so calm, so concerned, she felt an icy tremor of fear. “The inlet—” Morgan hesitated, then continued before her courage failed her. “The inlet was so beautiful. It seemed so undisturbed.” But so many shells had been crushed underfoot, she remembered abruptly. Why hadn't she thought of that before? “Do you—do a lot of people go there?”

“I can't speak for the villagers,” Dorian began, watching as she perched on the arm of a divan. “But I'd think most of them would be too busy with their fishing or in the olive groves to spend much time gathering shells.”

“Yes.” She moistened dry lips. “But still, it's a lovely spot, isn't it?”

Morgan kept her eyes on his. Was it her imagination, or had his eyes narrowed? A trick of the smoke that wafted between them? Her own nerves?

“I’ve never been there,” Dorian said lightly. “I suppose it’s a bit like a native New Yorker never going to the top of the Empire State Building.” Morgan’s gaze followed his fingers as he crushed out the cigarette in a cut-glass ashtray. “Is there something else, Morgan?”

“Something—no.” Hastily, she looked back up to meet his eyes. “No, nothing. I suppose like Iona, the atmosphere’s getting to me, that’s all.”

“Small wonder.” Sympathetic, he crossed to her. “You’ve been through too much today, Morgan. Too much talk of death. Come out in the garden,” he suggested. “We’ll talk of something else.”

Refusal was on the tip of her tongue. She didn’t know why, only that she didn’t want to be with him. Not then. Not alone. Even as she cast around for a reasonable excuse, Liz joined them.

“Morgan, I’d hoped you were resting.”

Grateful for the interruption, Morgan set down her untouched brandy and rose. “I rested long enough.” A quick scan of Liz’s face showed subtle signs of strain. “You look like you should lie down awhile.”

“No, but I could use some air.”

“I was just taking Morgan out to the garden.” Dorian touched a hand to Liz’s shoulder. “You two go out and relax. Alex and I have some business we should clear up.”

“Yes.” Liz lifted her hand to his. “Thank you, Dorian. I don’t know what Alex or I would have done without you today.”

“Nonsense.” He brushed her cheek with his lips. “Go, take your mind off this business.”

“I will. See if you can get Alex to do the same.” The plea was light, but unmistakable before Liz hooked her arm through Morgan’s.

“Dorian.” Morgan felt a flush of shame. He’d been nothing but kind to her, and she’d let her imagination run wild. “Thank you.”

He lifted a brow at the gratitude, then smiled and kissed her cheek in turn. He smelt of citrus groves and sunshine. “Sit with the flowers for a while, and enjoy.”

As he walked into the hall, Liz turned and headed toward the garden doors. “Should I order us some tea?”

“Not for me. And stop treating me like a guest.”

“Good Lord, was I doing that?”

“Yes, ever since—”

Liz shot Morgan a quick look as she broke off, then grimaced. “This whole business really stinks,” Liz stated inelegantly, and plopped down on a marble bench.

Surrounded by the colors and scents of the garden, isolated from the house and the outside world by vines, Morgan and Liz frowned at each other.

“Damn, Morgan, I’m so sorry that you had to be the one. No, don’t shrug and try to look casual,” she ordered as Morgan did just that. “We’ve known each other too long and too well. I know what it must have been like for you this morning. And I know how you must be feeling right now.”

“I’m all right, Liz.” She chose a small padded glider and curled her legs under her. “Though I’ll admit I won’t be admiring seashells for a while. Please,” she continued as Liz’s frown deepened. “Don’t do this. I can see that you and Alex are blaming yourselves. It was just—just a horrible coincidence that I happened to take a tour of that inlet this morning. A man was killed; someone had to find him.”

“It didn’t have to be you.”

“You and Alex aren’t responsible.”

Liz sighed. “My practical American side knows that, but ...” She shrugged, then managed to smile. “But I think I’m becoming a bit Greek. You’re staying in my house.” Liz lit a cigarette resignedly as she rose to pace the tiny courtyard.

A black cigarette, Morgan noticed with a tremor of anxiety—slim and black. She’d forgotten Liz had picked up the habit of occasionally smoking one of Alex’s brand.

She stared up into Liz’s oval, classic face, then shut her eyes. She must be going mad if she could conceive, even for an instant, that Liz was mixed up in smuggling and back-stabbing. This was a woman she’d known for years—lived with. Certainly if there was one person she knew as well as she knew herself, it was Liz.

But how far—how far would Liz go to protect the man she loved?

“And I have to admit,” Liz went on as she continued to pace, “though it sticks me in the same category as Iona, that policeman made me nervous. He was just too”—she searched for an adjective—“respectful,” she decided. “Give me a good old American grilling.”

“I know what you mean,” Morgan murmured. She had to stop thinking, she told herself. If she could just stop thinking, everything would be all right again.

“I don’t know what he expected to find out, questioning us that way.” Liz took a quick, jerky puff, making her wedding ring flash with cold, dazzling light.

“It was just routine, I suppose.” Morgan couldn’t take her eyes from the ring—the light, the stones. Love, honor, and obey—forsaking all others.

“And creepy,” Liz added. “Besides, none of us even knew this Anthony Stevos.”

“The captain said he was a fisherman.”

“So is every second man in the village.”

Morgan allowed the silence to hang. Carefully, she reconstructed the earlier scene in the salon. What were the reactions? If she hadn't been so dimmed with brandy and shock, would she have noticed something? There was one more person she'd seen lighting one of the expensive cigarettes.

“Liz,” she began slowly, “don't you think Iona went a little overboard? Didn't she get a bit melodramatic about a few routine questions?”

“Iona thrives on melodrama,” Liz returned with grim relish. “Did you see the way she fawned all over Nick? I don't see how he could bear it.”

“He didn't seem to mind,” Morgan muttered. No, not yet, she warned herself. You're not ready to deal with that yet. “She's a strange woman,” Morgan continued. “But this morning ...” And yesterday, she remembered. “Yesterday when I spoke of smuggling ... I think she was really afraid.”

“I don't think Iona has any genuine feelings,” Liz said stubbornly. “I wish Alex would just cross her off as a bad bet and be done with it. He's so infuriatingly conscientious.”

“Strange, Dorian said almost the same thing.” Morgan plucked absently at an overblown rose. It was Iona she should concentrate on. If anyone could do something deadly and vile, it was Iona. “I don't see her that way.”

“What do you mean?”

“Iona.” Morgan stopped plucking at the rose and gave Liz her attention. “I see her as a woman of too many feelings rather than

none at all. Not all healthy certainly, perhaps even destructive—but strong, very strong emotions.”

“I can’t abide her,” Liz said with such unexpected venom, Morgan stared. “She upsets Alex constantly. I can’t tell you how much time and trouble and money he’s put into that woman. And he gets nothing back but ingratitude, rudeness.”

“Alex has very strong family feelings,” Morgan began. “You can’t protect him from—”

“I’d protect him from anything,” Liz interrupted passionately. “Anything and anyone.” Whirling, she hurled her cigarette into the bushes where it lay smoldering. Morgan found herself staring at it with dread. “Damn,” Liz said in a calmer tone. “I’m letting all this get to me.”

“We all are.” Morgan shook off the sensation of unease and rose. “It hasn’t been an easy morning.”

“I’m sorry, Morgan, it’s just that Alex is so upset by all this. And as much as he loves me, he just isn’t the kind of man to share certain areas with me. His trouble—his business. He’s too damn Greek.” With a quick laugh, she shook her head. “Come on, sit down. I’ve vented my spleen.”

“Liz, if there were something wrong—I mean, something really troubling you, you’d tell me, wouldn’t you?”

“Oh, don’t start worrying about me now.” Liz nudged Morgan back down on the glider. “It’s just frustrating when you love someone to distraction and they won’t let you help. Sometimes it drives me crazy that Alex insists on trying to keep the less-pleasant aspects of his life away from me.”

“He loves you,” Morgan murmured and found she was gripping her hands together.

“And I love him.”

“Liz ...” Morgan took a deep breath and plunged. “Do you and Alex walk through the inlet often?”

“*Hmmm?*” Obviously distracted, Liz looked back over her shoulder as she walked toward her bench. “Oh, no, actually, we usually walk on the cliffs—if I can drag him away from his office. I can’t think when’s the last time I’ve been near there. I only wish,” she added in a gentler tone, “I’d been with you this morning.”

Abruptly and acutely ashamed at the direction her thoughts had taken, Morgan looked away. “I’m glad you weren’t. Alex had his hands full enough with one hysterical female.”

“You weren’t hysterical,” Liz corrected in a quiet voice. “You were almost too calm by the time Andrew brought you in.”

“I never even thanked him.” Morgan forced herself to push doubts and suspicions aside. They were as ugly as they were ridiculous. “What did you think of Andrew?”

“He’s a very sweet man.” Sensing Morgan’s changing mood, Liz adjusted her own thoughts. “He appeared to put himself in the role of your champion today.” She smiled, deliberately looking wise and matronly. “I’d say he was in the first stages of infatuation.”

“How smug one becomes after three years of marriage.”

“He’d be a nice diversion for you,” Liz mused, unscathed. “But he’s from the genteel-poor side of Nick’s family. I rather fancy seeing you set up in style. Then again,” she continued as Morgan sighed, “he’d be nice company for you ... for a while.”

Dead on cue, Andrew strolled into the courtyard. “Hello. I hope I’m not intruding.”

“Why, no!” Liz gave him a delighted smile. “Neighboring poets are always welcome.”

He grinned, a flash of boyishness. With that, he went up several notches on Liz's list. "Actually, I was worried about Morgan." Bending over, he cupped her chin and studied her. "It was such an awful morning, I wanted to see how you were doing. I hope you don't mind." His eyes were dark blue, like the water in the bay—and with the same serenity.

"I don't." She touched the back of his hand. "At all. I'm really fine. I was just telling Liz I hadn't even thanked you for everything you did."

"You're still pale."

His concern made her smile. "A New York winter has something to do with that."

"Determined to be courageous?" he asked with a tilted smile.

"Determined to do a better job of it than I did this morning."

"I kind of liked the way you held on to me." He gave her hand a light squeeze. "I want to steal her for an evening," he told Liz, shifting his gaze from Morgan's face. "Can you help me convince her a diversion is what she needs?"

"You have my full support."

"Come have dinner with me in the village." He bent down to Morgan again. "Some local color, a bottle of ouzo, and a witty companion. What more could you ask for?"

"What a marvelous idea!" Liz warmed to Andrew and the scheme. "It's just what you need, Morgan."

Amused, Morgan wondered if she should just let them pat each other on the back for a while. But it was what she needed—to get away from the house and the doubts. She smiled at Andrew. "What time should I be ready?"

His grin flashed again. “How about six? I’ll give you a tour of the village. Nick gave me carte blanche with his Fiat while I’m here, so you won’t have to ride on an ass.”

Because her teeth were tight again, Morgan relaxed her jaw. “I’ll be ready.”

The sun was high over the water when Nick set his boat toward the open sea. He gave it plenty of throttle, wanting the speed and the slap of the wind.

Damn the woman! he thought on a new surge of frustration. Seething, he tossed the butt of a slender black cigarette into the churning waves. If she’d stay in bed instead of wandering on beaches at ridiculous hours, all of this could have been avoided. The memory of the plea in her voice, the horror in her eyes flashed over him. He could still feel the way she had clung to him, needing him.

He cursed her savagely and urged more speed from the motor.

Shifting his thoughts, Nick concentrated on the dead man. Anthony Stevos, he mused, scowling into the sun. He knew the fisherman well enough—what he had occasionally fished for—and the Athens phone number he had found deep inside Stevos’s pants pocket.

Stevos had been a stupid, greedy man, Nick thought dispassionately. Now he was a dead one. How long would it take Tripolos to rule out the village brawl and hit on the truth? Not long enough, Nick decided. He was going to have to bring matters to a head a bit sooner than he had planned.

“Nicky, why are you looking so mean?” Iona called to him over the motor’s roar. Automatically, he smoothed his features.

“I was thinking about that pile of paperwork on my desk.” Nick cut the motor off and let the boat drift in its own wake. “I shouldn’t have let you talk me into taking the afternoon off.”

Iona moved to where he sat. Her skin glistened, oiled slick, against a very brief bikini. Her bosom spilled over in invitation. She had a ripe body, rounded and full and arousing. Nick felt no stir as she swung her hips moving toward him.

“*Agapetikos*, we’ll have to take your mind off business matters.” She wound herself into his lap and pressed against him.

He kissed her mechanically, knowing that, after the bottle of champagne she’d drunk, she’d never know the difference. But her taste lingered unpleasantly on his lips. He thought of Morgan, and with a silent, furious oath, crushed his mouth against Iona’s.

“*Mmm.*” She preened like a stroked cat. “Your mind isn’t on your paperwork now, Nicky. Tell me you want me. I need a man who wants me.”

“Is there a man alive who wouldn’t want a woman such as you?” He ran a hand down her back as her mouth searched greedily for his.

“A devil,” she muttered with a slurred laugh. “Only a devil. Take me, Nicky.” Her head fell back, revealing eyes half closed and dulled by wine. “Make love to me here, in the open, in the sun.”

And he might have to, he thought with a grinding disgust in his stomach. To get what he needed. But first, he would coax what he could from her while she was vulnerable.

“Tell me, *matia mou*,” he murmured, tasting the curve of her neck while she busily undid the buttons of his shirt. “What do you know of this smuggling between Lesbos and Turkey?”

Nick felt her stiffen, but her response—and, he knew, her wits—were dulled by the champagne. In her state of mind, he thought, it wouldn’t take much more to loosen her tongue. She’d been ready to snap for days. Deliberately, he traced his tongue across her skin and felt her sigh.

“Nothing,” she said quickly and fumbled more desperately at his buttons. “I know nothing of such things.”

“Come, Iona,” he murmured seductively. She was a completely physical woman, one who ran on sensations alone. Between wine and sex and her own nerves, she’d talk to him. “You know a great deal. As a businessman”—he nipped at her earlobe—“I’m interested in greater profit. You won’t deny me a few extra drachmas, will you?”

“A few million,” she murmured, and put her hand on his to show him what she wanted. “Yes, there’s much I know.”

“And much you’ll tell me?” he asked. “Come, Iona. You and the thought of millions excite me.”

“I know the man that stupid woman found this morning was murdered because he was greedy.”

Nick forced himself not to tense. “But greed is so difficult to resist.” He went with her as she stretched full length on the bench. “Do you know who murdered him, Iona?” She was slipping away from him, losing herself to the excess of champagne. On a silent oath, Nick nipped at her skin to bring her back.

“I don’t like murder, Nicky,” she mumbled, “and I don’t like talking to the police even more.” She reached for him, but her hands fumbled. “I’m tired of being used,” she said pettishly, then added, “Perhaps it’s time to change allegiance. You’re rich, Nicky. I like money. I need money.”

“Doesn’t everyone?” Nick asked dryly.

“Later, we’ll talk later. I’ll tell you.” Her mouth was greedy on his. Forcing everything from his mind, Nick struggled to find some passion, even the pretense of passion, in return. God, he needed a woman; his body ached for one. And he needed Iona. But as he felt her sliding toward unconsciousness, he did nothing to revive her.

Later, as Iona slept in the sun, Nick leaned over the opposite rail and lit a cigarette from the butt of another. The clinging distaste both infuriated and depressed him. He knew that he would have to use Iona, be used by her—if not this time, then eventually. He had to tap her knowledge to learn what he wanted to know. It was a matter of his own safety—and his success. The second had always been more important to him than the first.

If he had to be Iona's lover to gain his own end, then he'd be her lover. It meant nothing. Swearing, he drew deeply on the cigarette. It meant nothing, he repeated. It was business.

He found he wanted a shower, a long one, something to cleanse himself of the dirt which wouldn't wash away. Years of dirt, years of lies. Why had he never felt imprisoned by them until now?

Morgan's face slipped into his mind. Her eyes were cold. Flinging the cigarette out to sea, he went back to the wheel and started the engine.

Chapter Seven

During a leisurely drink after a leisurely tour, Morgan decided the village was perfect. White-washed houses huddled close together, some with pillars, some with arches, still others with tiny wooden balconies. The tidiness, the freshness of white should have lent an air of newness. Instead, the village seemed old and timeless and permanent.

She sat with Andrew at a waterfront *kafenion*, watching the fishing boats sway at the docks, and the men who spread their nets to dry.

The fishermen ranged from young boys to old veterans. All were bronzed, all worked together. There were twelve to each net—twenty-four hands, some wrinkled and gnarled, some smooth with youth. All strong. As they worked they shouted and laughed in routine companionship.

“Must have been a good catch,” Andrew commented. He watched Morgan’s absorption with the small army of men near the water’s edge.

“You know, I’ve been thinking.” She ran a finger down the side of her glass. “They all seem so fit and sturdy. Some of those men are well past what we consider retirement age in the States. I suppose they’ll sail until they die. A life on the water must be a very satisfying existence.” Pirates ... would she ever stop thinking of pirates?

“I don’t know if any of these people think much about satisfaction. It’s simply what they do. They fish or work in Nick’s olive groves. They’ve been doing one or the other for generations.” Toying with his own drink, Andrew studied them too. “I do think there’s a contentment here. The people know what’s expected of them. If their lives are simple, perhaps it’s an enviable simplicity.”

“Still, there’s the smuggling,” Morgan murmured.

Andrew shrugged. “It’s all part of the same mold, isn’t it? They do what’s expected of them and earn a bit of adventure and a few extra drachmas.”

She shot him a look of annoyed surprise. “I didn’t expect that attitude from you.”

Andrew looked back at her, both brows raised. “What attitude?”

“This—this nonchalance over crime.”

“Oh, come on, Morgan, it’s—”

“Wrong,” she interrupted. “It should be stopped.” Morgan swallowed the innocently clear but potent ouzo.

“How do you stop something that’s been going on for centuries in one form or another?”

“It’s current form is ugly. I should think the men of influence like Alex and ... Nicholas, with homes on the island, would put pressure on whoever should be pressured.”

“I don’t know Alex well enough to comment,” Andrew mused, filling her glass again. “But I can’t imagine Nick getting involved in anything that didn’t concern himself or his business.”

“Can’t you?” Morgan murmured.

“If that sounds like criticism, it’s not.” He noted he had Morgan’s full attention, but that her eyes were strangely veiled. “Nick’s been very good to me, lending me the collage and the money for my passage. Lord knows when I’ll be able to pay him back. And it irks quite a bit to have to borrow, but poetry isn’t the most financially secure career.”

“I think I read somewhere that T.S. Eliot was a bank teller.”

Andrew returned her understanding smile with a wry grimace. “I could work out of Nick’s California office.” He shrugged and drank. “His offer wasn’t condescending, just absentminded. It’s rough on the ego.” He looked past her, toward the docks. “Maybe my ship will come in.”

“I’m sure it will, Andrew. Some of us are meant to follow dreams.”

His gaze came back to her. “And artists are meant to suffer a bit, rise beyond the more base needs of money and power?” His smile was brittle, his eyes cool. “Let’s order.” Morgan watched him shake off the mood and smile with his usual warmth. “I’m starved.”

The evening sky was muted as they finished their meal. There were soft, dying colors flowing into the western sea. In the east, it was a calm, deep violet waiting for the first stars. Morgan was content with the vague glow brought on by spiced food and Greek ouzo. There was intermittent music from a mandolin. Packets of people shuffled in and out of the café, some of them breaking into song.

Their waiter cum proprietor was a wide man with a thin moustache and watery eyes. Morgan figured the eyes could be attributed to the spices and cook smoke hanging in the air. American tourists lifted his status. Because he was impressed with Morgan's easily flowing Greek, he found opportunities to question and gossip as he hovered around their table.

Morgan toyed with a bit of *psomaki* and relaxed with the atmosphere and easy company. She'd found nothing but comfort and good will in the Theoharis villa, but this was something different. There was an earthier ambience she had missed in Liz's elegant home. Here there would be lusty laughter and spilled wine. As strong as Morgan's feelings were for both Liz and Alex, she would never have been content with the lives they led. She'd have rusted inside the perpetual manners.

For the first time since that morning, Morgan felt the nagging ache at the base of her skull begin to ease.

"Oh, Andrew, look! They're dancing." Cupping her chin on her hands, Morgan watched the line of men hook arms.

As he finished up the last of a spicy sausage, Andrew glanced over. "Want to join in?"

Laughing, she shook her head. "No, I'd spoil it—but you could," she added with a grin.

"You have," Andrew began as he filled her glass again, "a wonderful laugh. It's rich and unaffected and trails off into something sensuous."

"What extraordinary things you say, Andrew." Morgan smiled at him, amused. "You're an easy man to be with. We could be friends."

Andrew lifted his brows. Morgan was surprised to find her mouth briefly captured. There was a faint taste of the island on him—spicy and foreign. "For starters." At her stunned expression, he leaned back and grinned. "That face you're wearing doesn't do great things

for my ego, either.” He pulled a pack of cigarettes out of his jacket pocket, then dug for a match. Morgan stopped staring at him to stare at the thin black box.

“I didn’t know you smoked,” she managed after a moment.

“Oh, not often.” He found a match. The tiny flame flared, flickering over his face a moment, casting shadows, mysteries, suspicions. “Especially since my taste runs to these. Nick takes pity on me and leaves some at my cottage whenever he happens by. Otherwise, I suppose I’d do without altogether.” When he noticed Morgan’s steady stare, he gave her a puzzled smile. “Something wrong?”

“No.” She lifted her glass and hoped she sounded casual. “I was just thinking—you’d said you roam all over this part of the island. You must have been in that inlet before.”

“It’s a beautiful little spot.” He reached over for her hand. “Or it was. I guess I haven’t been there in over a week. It might be quite a while before I go back now.”

“A week,” Morgan murmured.

“Don’t dwell on it, Morgan.”

She lifted her eyes to his. They were so clear, so concerned. She was being a fool. None of them—Alex, Dorian, Andrew—none of them were capable of what was burning into her thoughts. How was she to know that some maniac from the village hadn’t had a taste for expensive tobacco and back-stabbing? It made more sense, a great deal more sense than her ugly suspicions.

“You’re right.” She smiled again and leaned toward him. “Tell me about your epic poem.”

“Good evening, Miss James, Mr. Stevenson.”

Morgan twisted her head and felt the sky cloud over. She looked up into Tripolos’s pudgy face. “Hello, Captain.”

If her greeting lacked enthusiasm, Tripolos seemed unperturbed. “I see you’re enjoying a bit of village life. Do you come often?”

“This is Morgan’s first trip,” Andrew told him. “I convinced her to come out to dinner. She needed something after this morning’s shock.”

Tripolos clucked sympathetically. Morgan noted the music and laughter had stilled. The atmosphere in the café was hushed and wary.

“Very sensible,” the captain decided. “A young lady must not dwell on such matters. I, unfortunately, must think of little else at the moment.” He sighed and looked wistfully at the ouzo. “Enjoy your evening.”

“Damn, damn, *damn!*” she muttered when he walked away. “Why does he affect me this way? Every time I see him, I feel like I’ve got the Hope diamond in my pocket.”

“I know what you mean.” Andrew watched people fall back to create a path for Tripolos. “He almost makes you wish you had something to confess.”

“Thank God, it’s not just me.” Morgan lifted her glass again, noticed her hands were trembling, and drained it. “Andrew,” she began in calm tones, “unless you have some moral objection, I’m going to get very drunk.”

Sometime later, after learning Andrew’s views on drinking were flexible, Morgan floated on a numbing cloud of ouzo. The thin light of the moon had replaced the colors of sunset. As the hour grew later, the café crowd grew larger, both in size and volume. Music was all strings and bells. If the interlude held a sheen of unreality, she no longer cared. She’d had enough of reality.

The waiter materialized with yet another bottle. He set it on the table with the air of distributing a rare wine.

“Busy night,” Morgan commented, giving him a wide if misty, smile.

“It is Saturday,” he returned, explaining everything.

“So, I’ve chosen my night well.” She glanced about, seeing a fuzzy crush of people. “Your customers seem happy.”

He followed her survey with a smug smile, wiping a hand on his apron. “I feared when the Mitilini captain came, my business would suffer, but all is well.”

“The police don’t add to an atmosphere of enjoyment, I suppose,” she added slowly, “he’s investigating the death of that fisherman.”

He gave Morgan a quick nod. “Stevos came here often, but he was a man with few companions. He was not one for dancing or games. He found other uses for his time.” The waiter narrowed his eyes. “My customers do not like to answer questions.” He muttered something uncomplimentary, but Morgan wasn’t sure if it was directed at Stevos or Tripolos.

“He was a fisherman,” she commented, struggling to concentrate on the Greek’s eyes. “But it appears his comrades don’t mourn him.”

The waiter moved his shoulders eloquently, but she saw her answer. There were fishermen, and fishermen. “Enjoy your evening, *kyrios*. It is an honor to serve you.”

“You know,” Andrew stated when the waiter drifted to another table, “it’s very intimidating listening to all that Greek. I couldn’t pick up on it. What was he saying?”

Not wanting to dwell on the murder again, Morgan merely smiled. “Greek males are red-blooded, Andrew, but I explained that I was otherwise engaged for this evening.” She locked her hands behind her head and looked up at the stars. “Oh, I’m glad I came. It’s so lovely. No murders—no smuggling tonight. I feel marvelous, Andrew. When can I read some of your poetry?”

“When your brain’s functioning at a normal level.” Smiling, he tilted more ouzo into her glass. “I think your opinion might be important.”

“You’re a nice man.” Morgan lifted her glass and studied him as intensely as possible. “You’re not at all like Nicholas.”

“What brought that on?” Andrew frowned, setting the bottle back down again.

“You’re just not.” She held out her glass. “To Americans,” she told him. “One hundred percent pure.”

After tapping her glass with his, Andrew drank and shook his head. “I have a feeling we weren’t toasting the same thing.”

She felt Nick begin to push into her thoughts and she thrust him away. “What does it matter? It’s a beautiful night.”

“So it is.” His finger traced lightly over the back of her hand. “Have I told you how lovely you are?”

“Oh, Andrew, are you going to flatter me?” With a warm laugh, she leaned closer. “Go ahead, I love it.”

With a wry grin, he tugged her hair. “You’re spoiling my delivery.”

“Oh, dear ... how’s this?” Morgan cupped her chin on her hands again and gave him a very serious stare.

On a laugh, Andrew shook his head. “Let’s walk for a while. I might find a dark corner where I can kiss you properly.”

Rising, he helped Morgan to her feet. She exchanged a formal and involved good-night with the proprietor before Andrew could navigate her away from the crowd.

Those not gathered in the *kafenion* were long since in bed. The white houses were closed and settled for the night. Now and then a

dog barked, and another answered. Morgan could hear her own footsteps echo down the street.

“It’s so quiet,” she murmured. “All you can really hear is the water and the night itself. Ever since that first morning when I woke up on Lesbos, I’ve felt as if I belonged. Nothing that’s happened since has spoiled that for me. Andrew.” She whirled herself around in his arms and laughed. “I don’t believe I’m *ever* going home again. How can I face New York and the traffic and the snow again? Rushing to work, rushing home. Maybe I’ll become a fisherman, or give in to Liz and marry a goatherd.”

“I don’t think you should marry a goatherd,” Andrew said practically, and drew her closer. Her scent was tangling his senses. Her face, in the moonlight, was an ageless mystery. “Why don’t you give the fishing a try? We could set up housekeeping in Nick’s cottage.”

It would serve him right, her mind muttered. Lifting her mouth, Morgan waited for the kiss.

It was warm and complete. Morgan neither knew nor cared if the glow was a result of the kiss or the liquor. Andrew’s lips weren’t demanding, weren’t urgent and possessive. They were comforting, requesting. She gave him what she could.

There was no rocketing passion—but she told herself she didn’t want it. Passion clouded the mind more successfully than an ocean of ouzo. She’d had enough of hunger and passions. They brought pain with disillusionment. Andrew was kind, uncomplicated. He wouldn’t turn away when she needed him. He wouldn’t give her sleepless nights. He wouldn’t make her doubt her own strict code of right and wrong. He was the knight—a woman was safe with a knight.

“Morgan,” he murmured, then rested his cheek on her hair. “You’re exquisite. Isn’t there some man I should consider dueling with?”

Morgan tried to think of Jack, but could form no clear picture. There was, however, a sudden, atrociously sharp image of Nick as he

dragged her close for one of his draining kisses.

“No,” she said too emphatically. “There’s no one. Absolutely no one.”

Andrew drew her away and tilted her chin with his finger. He could see her eyes in the dim glow of moonlight. “From the strength of your denial, I’d say my competition’s pretty formidable. No”—he laid a finger over her lips as she started to protest—“I don’t want to have my suspicions confirmed tonight. I’m selfish.” He kissed her again, lingering over it. “Damn it, Morgan, you could be habit forming. I’d better take you home while I remember I’m a gentleman and you’re a very drunk lady.”

The villa shimmered white under the night sky. A pale light glowed in a first-floor window for her return.

“Everyone’s asleep,” Morgan stated unnecessarily as she let herself out of the car. Andrew rounded the hood. “I’ll have to be very quiet.” She muffled irrepressible giggles with a hand over her mouth. “Oh, I’m going to feel like an idiot tomorrow if I remember any of this.”

“I don’t think you’ll remember too much,” Andrew told her as he took her arm.

Morgan managed the stairs with the careful dignity of someone who no longer feels the ground under her feet. “It would never do to disgrace Alex by landing on my face in the foyer. He and Dorian are so dignified.”

“And I,” Andrew returned, “will have to resume my drive with the utmost caution. Nick wouldn’t approve if I ran his Fiat off a cliff.”

“Why, Andrew.” Morgan stood back and studied him owlshly. “You’re almost as sloshed as I am.”

“Not quite, but close enough. However”—he let out a long breath and wished he could lie down—“I conducted myself with the utmost

restraint.”

“Very nicely done.” She went off into a muffled peal of giggles again. “Oh, Andrew.” She leaned against him so heavily that he had to shift his balance to support her. “I did have a good time—a wonderful time. I needed it more than I realized. Thank you.”

“In you go.” He opened the door and gave her a nudge inside. “Be careful on the stairs,” he whispered. “Should I wait and listen for the sounds of an undignified tumble?”

“Just be on your way and don’t take the Fiat for a swim.” She stood on her toes and managed to brush his chin with her lips. “Maybe I should make you some coffee.”

“You’d never find the kitchen. Don’t worry, I can always park the car and walk if worse comes to worse. Go to bed, Morgan, you’re weaving.”

“That’s you,” she retorted before she closed the door.

Morgan took the stairs with painful caution. The last thing she wanted to do was wake someone up and have to carry on any sort of reasonable conversation. She stopped once and pressed her hands to her mouth to stop a fresh bout of giggles. Oh, it felt so good, so good not to be able to think. But this has to stop, she told herself firmly. No more of this, Morgan, straighten up and get upstairs before all is discovered.

She managed to pull herself to the top landing, then had to think carefully to remember in which direction her room lay. To the left, of course, she told herself with a shake of the head. But which way is left, for God’s sake? She spent another moment working it out before she crept down the hall. She gripped the doorknob, then waited for the door to stop swaying before she pushed it open.

“Ah, success,” she murmured, then nearly spoiled it by stumbling over the rug. Quietly, she shut the door and leaned back against it.

Now, if she could just find the bed. A light switched on, as if by magic. She smiled absently at Nick.

“*Yiasou*, you seem to be a permanent fixture.”

The fury in his eyes rolled off the fog as she stepped unsteadily out of her shoes.

“What the hell have you been up to?” he demanded. “It’s nearly three o’clock in the morning!”

“Oh, how rude of me not to have phoned to tell you I’d be late.”

“Don’t get cute, damn it, I’m not in the mood.” He stalked over to her and grabbed her arms. “I’ve been waiting for you half the night, Morgan, I ...” His voice trailed off as he studied her. His expression altered from fury to consideration then reluctant amusement. “You’re totally bombed.”

“Completely,” she agreed, and had to take a deep breath to keep from giggling again. “You’re so observant, Nicholas.”

Amusement faded as her hand crept up his shirt front. “How the hell am I supposed to have a rational conversation with a woman who’s seeing two of everything?”

“Three,” she told him with some pride. “Andrew’s only up to two. I quite surpassed him.” Her other hand slid up to toy with one of his buttons. “Did you know you have wonderful eyes. I’ve never seen eyes so dark. Andrew’s are blue. He doesn’t kiss anything like you do. Why don’t you kiss me now?”

He tightened his grip for a moment, then carefully released her. “So, you’ve been out with young Andrew.” He wandered the room while Morgan swayed and watched him.

“*Young Andrew* and I would have asked you to join us, but it just slipped our minds. Besides, you can be really boring when you’re proper and charming.” She had a great deal of trouble with the last

word and yawned over it. “Do we have to talk much longer? My tongue’s getting thick.”

“I’ve had about enough of being proper and charming myself,” he muttered, picking up a bottle of her scent and setting it down again. “It serves its purpose.”

“You do it very well,” she told him and struggled with her zipper. “In fact, you’re nearly perfect at it.”

“Nearly?” His attention caught, he turned in time to see her win the battle with the zipper. “Morgan, for God’s sake, don’t do that now. I —”

“Yes, except you do slip up from time to time. A look in your eyes—the way you move. I suppose it’s convincing all around if I’m the only one who’s noticed. Then again, it might be because everyone else knows you and expects the inconsistency. Are you going to kiss me or not?” She dropped the dress to the floor and stepped out of it.

He felt his mouth go dry as she stood, clad only in a flimsy chemise, watching him mistily. Desire thudded inside him, hot, strong, and he forced himself back to what she was saying.

“Noticed what?”

Morgan made two attempts to pick up the dress. Each time she bent, the top of the chemise drifted out to show the swell of her breasts. Nick felt the thud lower to his stomach. “Noticed what?” she repeated as she left the dress where it was. “Oh, we’re back to that. It’s definitely the way you move.”

“Move?” He struggled to keep his eyes on her face and away from her body. But her scent was already clouding his brain, and her smile—her smile challenged him to do something about it.

“It’s like a panther,” Morgan told him, “who knows he’s being hunted and plans to turn the attack to his advantage when he’s ready.”

“I see.” He frowned, not certain he liked her analogy. “I’ll have to be more careful.”

“Your problem,” Morgan said cheerfully. “Well, since you don’t want to kiss me, I’ll say good-night, Nicholas. I’m going to bed. I’d see you down your vine, but I’m afraid I’d fall off the balcony.”

“Morgan, I need to talk to you.” He moved quickly and took her arm before she could sink onto the bed. That, he knew, would be too much pressure for any man. But she lost her already uncertain balance and tumbled into his arms. Warm and pliant, she leaned against him, making no objection as he molded her closer.

“Have you changed your mind?” she murmured, giving him a slow, sleepy-eyed smile. “I thought of you when Andrew kissed me tonight. It was very rude of me—or of you, I’m not sure which. Perhaps I’ll think of Andrew if you kiss me now.”

“The hell you will.” He dragged her against him, teetering on the edge. Morgan let her head fall back.

“Try me,” she invited.

“Morgan—the hell with all of it!”

Helplessly, he devoured her mouth. She was quickly and totally boneless, arousing him to desperation by simple surrender. Desire was a fire inside him, spreading dangerously.

For the first time, he let himself go. He could think of nothing, nothing but her and the way her body flowed in his hands. She was softer than anything he’d ever hoped to know. So soft, she threatened to seep into him, become a part of him before he could do anything to prevent it. The need was raging, overpowering, taking over the control he’d been master of for as long as he could remember. But now, he burned to forfeit it.

With her, everything could be different. With her, he’d be clean again. Could she turn back the clock?

He could feel the brush of the bedspread against his thigh and knew, in one movement, he could be on it with her. Then nothing would matter but that he had her—a woman. But it wasn't any woman he wanted. It had been her since the first night she had challenged him on that deserted beach. It had been her since the first time those light, clear eyes had dared him. He was afraid—and he feared little—that it would always be her.

Mixed with the desire came a quick twist of pain. With a soft oath, he pulled her away, keeping his grip firm on her arms.

“Pay attention, will you?” His voice was rough and unsteady, but she didn't seem to notice. She smiled up at him and touched his cheek with her palm.

“Wasn't I?”

He checked the urge to shake her and spoke calmly. “I need to talk to you.”

“Talk?” She smiled again. “Do we have to talk?”

“There are things I need to tell you—this morning ...” He fumbled with the words, no longer certain what he wanted to say, what he wanted to do. How could her scent be stronger than it had been a moment ago? He was drowning in it.

“Nicholas.” Morgan sighed sleepily. “I drank an incredible amount of ouzo. If I don't sleep it off, I may very well die. I'm sure the body only tolerates a certain amount of abuse. I've stretched my luck tonight.”

“Morgan.” His breath was coming too quickly. His own pulse like thunder in his ears. He should let her go, he knew. He should simply let her go—for both their sakes. But his arms stayed around her. “Straighten up and listen to me,” he demanded.

“I'm through listening.” She gave a sleepy, sultry laugh. “Through listening. Make love with me or go.”

Her eyes were only slits, but the clear, mystical blue pulled him in. No struggle, no force would drag him out again. “Damn you,” he breathed as they fell onto the bed. “Damn you for a witch.”

It was all hell smoke and thunder. He couldn't resist it. Her body was as fluid as wine—as sweet and as potent. Now he could touch her wherever he chose and she only sighed. As his mouth crushed possessively on hers, she yielded, but in yielding held him prisoner. Even knowing it, he was helpless. There'd be a payment—a price in pain—for succumbing to the temptation. He no longer cared for tomorrows. Now, this moment, he had her. It was enough.

He tore the filmy chemise from her, too anxious, too desperate, but she made no protest as the material ripped away. On a groan of need, he devoured her.

Tastes—she had such tastes. They lingered on his tongue, spun in his head. The crushed wild honey of her mouth, the rose-petal sweetness of her skin, drove him to search for more, and to find everything. He wasn't gentle—he was long past gentleness, but the quiet moans that came from her spoke of pleasure.

Words, low and harsh with desire, tumbled from him. He wasn't certain if he cursed her again or made her hundreds of mad promises. For the moment, it was all the same. Needs ripped through him—needs he understood, needs he'd felt before. But there was something else, something stronger, greedier. Then his flesh was against her flesh, and everything was lost. Fires and flames, a furnace of passion engulfed him, driving him beyond control, beyond reason. She was melting into him. He felt it as a tangible ache but had no will to resist.

Her hands were hot on his skin, her body molten. He could no longer be certain who led and who followed. Beneath his, her mouth was soft and willing, but he tasted her strength. Under him, her body was pliant, unresisting, but he felt her demand. Her skin would be white, barely touched by the sun. He burned to see it, but saw only the glimmer of her eyes in the darkness.

Then she pulled his mouth back to hers and he saw nothing, nothing but the blur of raging colors that were passion. The wild, sweet scent of jasmine seeped into him, arousing, never soothing, until he thought he'd never smell anything else.

With a last force of will, he struggled for sanity. He wouldn't lose himself in her—to her. He couldn't. Without self-preservation he was nothing, vulnerable. Dead.

Even as he took her in a near violent rage, he surrendered.

[Chapter Eight](#)

The sunlight that poured through the windows, through the open balcony doors, throbbed and pulsed in Morgan's head. With a groan she rolled over, hoping oblivion would be quick and painless. The thudding only increased. Morgan shifted cautiously and tried for a sitting position. Warily she opened her eyes then groaned at the flash of white morning sun. She closed them again in self-preservation. Slowly, gritting her teeth for courage, she allowed her lids to open again.

The spinning and whirling which had been enjoyable the night before, now brought on moans and mutters. With queasy stomach and aching eyes, she sat in the center of the bed until she thought she had the strength to move. Trying to keep her head perfectly still, she eased herself onto the floor.

Carelessly, she stepped over her discarded dress and found a robe in the closet. All she could think of were ice packs and coffee. Lots of coffee.

Then she remembered. Abruptly, blindingly. Morgan whirled from the closet to stare at the bed. It was empty—maybe she'd dreamed it. Imagined it. In useless defense she pressed her hands to her face. No dream. He had been there, and everything she remembered was real. And she remembered ... the anger in his eyes, her own misty,

taunting invitation. The way his mouth had pressed bruisingly to hers, her own unthinking, abandoned response.

The passion—it had been all she had thought it would be. Unbearable, wonderful, consuming. He'd cursed her. She could remember his words. Then he had taken her places she'd never even glimpsed before. She'd given him everything, then mindlessly challenged him to take more. She could still feel those taut, tensing muscles in his back, hear that ragged, desperate breathing at her ear.

He had taken her in fury, and it hadn't mattered to her. Then he had been silent. She had fallen asleep with her arms still around him. And now he was gone.

On a moan, Morgan dropped her hands to her sides. Of course he was gone. What else did she expect? The night had meant nothing to him—less than nothing. If she hadn't had so much to drink ...

Oh, convenient excuse, Morgan thought on a wave of disgust. She still had too much pride to fall back on it. No, she wouldn't blame the ouzo. Walking to the bed, she picked up the torn remains of her chemise. She'd wanted him. God help her, she cared for him—too much. No, she wouldn't blame the ouzo. Balling the chemise in her fist, Morgan hurled it into the bottom of the closet. She had only herself to blame.

With a snap, Morgan closed the closet door. It was over, she told herself firmly. It was done. It didn't have to mean any more to her than it had to Nick. For a moment, she leaned her forehead against the smooth wooden panel and fought the urge to weep. No, she wouldn't cry over him. She'd never cry over him. Straightening, Morgan told herself it was the headache that was making her feel so weak and weepy. She was a grown woman, free to give herself, to take a man, when and where she chose. Once she'd gone down and had some coffee, she'd be able to put everything in perspective.

She swallowed the threatening tears and walked to the door.

“Good morning, *kyrios*.” The tiny maid greeted Morgan with a smile she could have done without. “Would you like your breakfast in your room now?”

“No, just coffee.” The scent of food didn’t agree with her stomach or her disposition. “I’ll go down for it.”

“It’s a beautiful day.”

“Yes, beautiful.” With her teeth clenched, Morgan moved down the hall.

The sound of crashing dishes and a high-pitched scream had Morgan gripping the wall for support. She pressed her hand to her head and moaned. Did the girl have to choose this morning to be clumsy!

But when the screaming continued, Morgan turned back. The girl knelt just inside the doorway. Scattered plates and cups lay shattered over the rug where the food had splattered.

“Stop it!” Leaning down, Morgan grabbed her shoulders and shook Zena out of self-defense. “No one’s going to fire you for breaking a few dishes.”

The girl shook her head as her eyes rolled. She pointed a trembling finger toward the bed before she wrenched herself from Morgan’s hold and fled.

Turning, Morgan felt the room dip and sway. A new nightmare crept in to join the old. With her hand gripping the doorknob; she stared.

A shaft of sunlight spread over Iona as she lay on her back, flung sideways across the bed. Her head hung over the edge, her hair streaming nearly to the floor. Morgan shook off the first shock and dizziness and raced forward. Though her fingers trembled, she pressed them to Iona’s throat. She felt a flutter, faint, but she felt it. The breath she hadn’t been aware she’d held came out in a rush of

relief. Moving on instinct, she pulled Iona's unconscious form until she lay back on the bed.

It was then she saw the syringe laying on the tumbled sheets.

“Oh, my God.”

It explained so much. Iona's moodiness, those tight, jerky nerves. She'd been a fool not to suspect drugs before. She's overdosed, Morgan thought in quick panic. What do I do? There must be something I'm supposed to do.

“Morgan—dear God!”

Turning her head only, Morgan looked at Dorian standing pale and stiff in the doorway. “She's not dead,” Morgan said quickly. “I think she's overdosed—get a doctor—an ambulance.”

“Not dead?”

She heard the flat tone of his voice, heard him start to come toward her. There was no time to pamper his feelings. “Do it quickly!” she ordered. “There's a pulse, but it's faint.”

“What's Iona done now?” Alex demanded in a tone of strained patience. “The maid's hysterical, and—oh, sweet Lord!”

“An ambulance!” Morgan demanded as she kept her fingers on Iona's pulse. Perhaps if she kept them there, it would continue to beat. “In the name of God, *hurry!*” She turned then in time to see Alex rush from the room as Dorian remained frozen. “There's a syringe,” she began with studied calm. She didn't want to hurt him, but continued as his gaze shifted to her. His eyes were blank. “She must have o.d.'d. Did you know she used drugs, Dorian?”

“Heroin.” And a shudder seemed to pass through him. “I thought it had stopped. Are you sure she's—”

“She’s alive.” Morgan gripped his hand as he came to the bed. A wave of pity washed over her—for Iona, for the man whose hand she held in her own. “She’s alive, Dorian. We’ll get help for her.”

His hand tightened on hers for a moment so that Morgan had to choke back a protest. “Iona,” he murmured. “So beautiful—so lost.”

“She’s not lost, not yet!” Morgan said fiercely. “If you know how to pray, pray that we found her in time.”

His eyes came back to Morgan’s, clear, expressionless. She thought as she looked at him she’d never seen anything so empty. “Pray,” he said quietly. “Yes, there’s nothing else to be done.”

It seemed to take hours, but when Morgan watched the helicopter veer off to the west, the morning was still young. Iona, still unconscious, was being rushed to Athens. Dorian rode with her and the doctor while Alex and Liz began hurried preparations for their own flight.

Still barefoot and in her robe, Morgan watched the helicopter until it was out of sight. As long as she lived, she thought, she’d never forget that pale, stony look on Dorian’s face—or the lifeless beauty on Iona’s. With a shudder, she turned away and saw Alex just inside the doorway.

“Tripolos,” he said quietly. “He’s in the salon.”

“Oh, not now, Alex.” Overcome with pity, she held out both hands as she went to him. “How much more can you stand?”

“It’s necessary.” His voice was tight with control and he held her hands limply. “I apologize for putting you through all this, Morgan—”

“No.” She interrupted him and squeezed his hands. “Don’t treat me that way, Alex. I thought we were friends.”

“*Diabolos*,” he murmured. “Such friends you have. Forgive me.”

“Only if you stop treating me as though I were a stranger.”

On a sigh, he slipped his arm around her shoulders. “Come, we’ll face the captain.”

Morgan wondered if she would ever enter the salon without seeing Captain Tripolos seated in the wide, high-back chair. She sat on the sofa as before, faced him, and waited for the questions.

“This is difficult for you,” Tripolos said at length. “For all of you.” His gaze roamed over the occupants of the room, from Morgan to Alex to Liz. “We will be as discreet as is possible, Mr. Theoharis. I will do what I can to avoid the press, but an attempted suicide in a family as well known as yours ...” He let the rest trail off.

“Suicide,” Alex repeated softly. His eyes were blank, as if the words hadn’t penetrated.

“It would seem, from the preliminary report, that your cousin took a self-induced overdose. Heroin. But I hesitate to be more specific until the investigation is closed. Procedure, you understand.”

“Procedure.”

“You found Miss Theoharis, Miss James?”

Morgan gave a quick, nervous jolt at the sound of her name, then settled. “No, actually, the maid found her. I went in to see what was wrong. Zena had dropped the tray and was carrying on ... when I went in I saw Iona.”

“And you called for an ambulance?”

“No.” She shook her head, annoyed. He knew Alex had called, but wanted to drag the story from her piece by piece. Resigned, Morgan decided to accommodate him. “I thought at first she was dead—then I felt a pulse. I got her back into bed.”

“Back into bed?”

Tripolos's tone had sharpened, ever so faintly, but Morgan caught it. "Yes, she was half out of it, almost on the floor. I wanted to lay her down." She lifted her hands helplessly. "I honestly don't know what I wanted to do, it just seemed like the right thing."

"I see. Then you found this?" He held up the syringe, now in a clear plastic bag.

"Yes."

"Did you know your cousin was a user of heroin, Mr. Theoharis?"

Alex stiffened at the question. Morgan saw Liz reach out to take his hand. "I knew Iona had a problem—with drugs. Two years ago she went to a clinic for help. I thought she had found it. If I had believed she was still ... ill," he managed. "I wouldn't have brought her into my home with my wife and my friend."

"Mrs. Theoharis, were you unaware of Miss Theoharis's problem?"

Morgan heard the breath hiss out between Alex's teeth, but Liz spoke quickly. "I was perfectly aware of it." Alex's head whipped around but she continued calmly. "That is, I was aware that my husband arranged for her to have treatment two years ago, though he tried to shield me." Without looking at him, Liz covered their joined hands with her free one.

"Would you, Mr. Theoharis, have any notion where your cousin received her supply?"

"None."

"I see. Well, since your cousin lives in Athens, perhaps it would be best if I worked with the police there, in order to contact her close friends."

"Do what you must," Alex said flatly. "I only ask that you spare my family as much as possible."

“Of course. I will leave you now. My apologies for the intrusion, yet again.”

“I must phone my family,” Alex said dully when the door closed behind Tripolos. As if seeking comfort, his hand went to his wife’s hair. Then he rose and left without another word.

“Liz,” Morgan began. “I know it’s a useless phrase, but if there’s anything I can do ...”

Liz shook her head. She shifted her eyes from the doorway back to her friend’s. “It’s all so unbelievable. That she’s lying there, so near death. What’s worse, I never liked her. I made no secret of it, but now ...” She rose and walked to the window. “She’s Alex’s family, and he feels that deeply. Now, in his heart, he’s responsible for whatever happens to her. And all I can think of is how cold I was to her.”

“Alex is going to need you.” Morgan rose and walked over to put a hand on her shoulder. “You can’t help not liking her, Liz. Iona isn’t an easy person to like.”

“You’re right, of course.” With a deep breath Liz turned and managed a weak smile. “It’s been a hell of a vacation so far, hasn’t it? No, don’t say anything.” She squeezed Morgan’s hand. “I’m going to see if Alex needs me. There’ll be arrangements to be made.”

The villa was silent as Morgan went up to change. As she buttoned her shirt, she stood by the terrace doors, staring out at the view of garden, sea, and mountain. How could it be that so much ugliness had intruded in such a short time? she wondered. Death and near death. This wasn’t the place for it. But even Paradise named its price, she thought, and turned away.

The knock on her door was quiet. “Yes, come in.”

“Morgan, am I disturbing you?”

“Oh, Alex.” As she looked up, Morgan’s heart welled with sympathy. The lines of strain and grief seemed etched into his face. “I know how horrible all this is for you, and I don’t want to add to your problems. Perhaps I should go back to New York.”

“Morgan.” He hesitated for a moment. “I know it’s a lot to ask, but I don’t do it for myself. For Liz. Will you stay for Liz? Your company is all I can give her for a time.” He released Morgan’s hands and moved restlessly around the room. “We’ll have to fly to Athens. I can’t say how long—until Iona is well or—” He broke off as if he wasn’t yet prepared for the word. “I’ll have to stay with my family for a few days. My aunt will need me. If I could send Liz back knowing you’d be here with her, it would make it so much easier.”

“Of course, Alex. You know I will.”

He turned and gave her a phantom of a smile. “You’re a good friend, Morgan. We’ll have to leave you for at least a day and a night. After that, I’ll send Liz back. I can be sure she’ll leave Athens if you’re here.” With a sigh, he took her hand absently. “Dorian might choose to stay in Athens as well. I believe he ... has feelings for Iona I didn’t realize before. I’ll ask Nick to look after you while we’re gone.”

“No.” She bit her tongue on the hurried protest. “No, really, Alex, I’ll be fine. I’m hardly alone, with the servants in the house. When will you leave?”

“Within the hour.”

“Alex, I’m sure it was an accident.”

“I’ll have to convince my aunt of that.” He held out his hands, searching his own palms for a moment. “Though as to what I believe ...” His look had hardened when he lifted his eyes again. “Iona courts disaster. She feeds on misery. I’ll tell you now, because I won’t ever be able to speak freely to anyone else. Not even Liz.” His face was a grim mask now. Cold. “I detest her.” He spit the words out

as if they were poison. “Her death would be nothing but a blessing to everyone who loves her.”

When Alex, Liz, and Dorian were gone, Morgan left the villa. She needed to walk—needed the air. This time she avoided her habit of heading for the beach. She was far from ready for that. Instead, she struck out for the cliffs, drawn to their jagged, daring beauty.

How clean the air was! Morgan wanted no floral scents now, just the crisp tang of the sea. She walked without destination. Up, only up, as if she could escape from everything if she could only get higher. If the gods had walked here, she thought, they would have come to the cliffs, to hear the water beat against rock, to breathe the thin, pure air.

She saw, to her pleasure, a scruffy, straggly goat with sharp black eyes. He stared at her a moment as he gnawed on a bit of wild grass he’d managed to find growing in between the rocks. But when she tried to get closer, he scrambled up, lightly, and disappeared over the other side of the cliff.

With a sigh, Morgan sat down on a rock perched high above the water. With some surprise, she saw tiny blue-headed flowers struggling toward the sun out of a crevice hardly wider than a thumbnail. She touched them, but couldn’t bring herself to pluck any. Life’s everywhere, she realized, if you only know where to look.

“Morgan.”

Her hand closed over the blooms convulsively at the sound of his voice. She opened it slowly and turned her head. Nick was standing only a short distance away, his hair caught by the breeze that just stirred the air. In jeans and a T-shirt, his face unshaven, he looked more like the man she had first encountered. Undisciplined. Unprincipled. Her heart gave a quick, bounding leap before she controlled it.

Without a word, Morgan rose and started down the slope.

“Morgan.” He caught her quickly, then turned her around with a gentleness she hadn’t expected from him. Her eyes were cool, but beneath the frost, he saw they were troubled. “I heard about Iona.”

“Yes, you once told me there was little that happened on the island you didn’t know.”

Her toneless voice slashed at him, but he kept his hands easy on her arms. “You found her.”

She wouldn’t let that uncharacteristic caring tone cut through her defenses. She could be—would be—as hard and cold as he had been. “You’re well informed, Nicholas.”

Her face was unyielding, and he didn’t know how to begin. If she would come into his arms, he could show her. But the woman who faced him would lean on no one. “It must have been very difficult for you.”

She lifted a brow, as though she were almost amused. “It was easier to find someone alive than to find someone dead.”

He winced at that—a quick jerk of facial muscles, then dropped his hands. She’d asked him for comfort once, and now that he wanted to give it, needed to give it, it was too late. “Will you sit down?”

“No, it’s not as peaceful here as it was.”

“Stop slashing at me!” he exploded, grabbing her arms again.

“Let me go.”

But the faint quaver in her voice told him something her words hadn’t. She was closer to her own threshold than perhaps even she knew. “Very well, if you’ll come back to the house with me.”

“No.”

“Yes.” Keeping a hand on her arm, Nick started up the rough path.
“We’ll talk.”

Morgan jerked her arm but his grip was firm. He propelled her up the rough path without looking at her. “What do you want, Nicholas? More details?”

His mouth thinned as he pulled her along beside him. “All right. You can tell me about Iona if you like.”

“I don’t like,” she tossed back. They were already approaching the steps to his house. Morgan hadn’t realized they were so close. What devil had prompted her to walk that way? “I don’t want to go with you.”

“Since when have I cared what you want?” he asked bitterly and propelled her through the front door. “Coffee,” he demanded as Stephanos appeared in the hall.

“All right, I’ll give you the details,” Morgan raged as she whirled inside the door of the salon. “And then, by God, you’ll leave me be! I found Iona unconscious, hardly alive. There was a syringe in bed with her. It seems she was an addict.” She paused, unaware that her breath was starting to heave. “But you knew that, didn’t you, Nicholas? You know all manner of things.”

She’d lost all color, just as she had when she’d run across the beach and into his arms. He felt a twinge, an ache, and reached out for her.

“*Don’t touch me!*” Nick’s head jerked back as if she’d slapped him. Morgan pressed her hands against her mouth and turned away.
“Don’t touch me.”

“I won’t put my hands on you,” Nick managed as they balled into fists. “Sit down, Morgan, before you keel over.”

“Don’t tell me what to do.” Her voice quavered, and she detested it. Making herself turn back, she faced him again. “You have no right to tell me what to do.”

Stephanos entered, silent, watchful. As he set the coffee tray down, he glanced over at Morgan. He saw, as Nick couldn't, her heart in her eyes. "You'll have coffee, miss," he said in a soft voice.

"No, I—"

"You should sit." Before Morgan could protest, Stephanos nudged her into a chair. "The coffee's strong."

Nick stood, raging at his impotence as Stephanos clucked around her like a mother hen.

"You'll have it black," he told her. "It puts color in your cheeks."

Morgan accepted the cup, then stared at it. "Thank you."

Stephanos gave Nick one long, enigmatic look, then left them.

"Well, drink it," Nick ordered, furious that the old man had been able to hack through her defenses when he felt useless. "It won't do you any good in the cup."

Because she needed to find strength somewhere, Morgan drank it down quickly. "What else do you want?"

"Damn it, Morgan, I didn't bring you here to grill you about Iona."

"No? You surprise me." Steadier, she set the cup aside and rose again. "Though why anything you do should surprise me, I don't know."

"There's nothing too vile you wouldn't attribute to me, is there?" Ignoring the coffee, Nick strode to the bar. "Perhaps you think I killed Stevos and left the body for you to find."

"No," she said calmly, because she could speak with perfect truth. "He was stabbed in the back."

"So?"

“You’d face a man when you killed him.”

Nick turned away from the bar, the glass still empty in his hand. His eyes were black now, as black as she’d ever seen them. There was passion in them barely, just barely, suppressed. “Morgan, last night —”

“I won’t discuss last night with you.” Her voice was cold and final, cutting through him more accurately than any blade.

“All right, we’ll forget it.” This time he filled the glass. He’d known there would be a price to pay; somehow he hadn’t thought it would be quite so high. “Would you like an apology?”

“For what?”

He gave a short laugh as his hand tightened on the glass. He tossed back the liquor. “God, woman, you’ve a streak of ice through you I hadn’t seen.”

“Don’t talk to me of ice, Nicholas.” Her voice rose with a passion she’d promised herself she wouldn’t feel. “You sit here in your ancestral home, playing your dirty chess games with lives. I won’t be one of your pawns. There’s a woman barely alive in an Athens hospital. You make your money feeding her illness. Do you think you’re remote from the blame because you cross the strait in the dead of night like some swashbuckling pirate?”

Very carefully, he set down the glass and turned. “I know what I am.”

She stared at him until her eyes began to fill again. “So do I,” she whispered. “God help me.”

Turning, she fled. He didn’t go after her.

Moments later, Stephanos came back into the room. “The lady’s upset,” he said mildly.

Nick turned his back to fill his glass again. “I know what the lady is.”

“The past two days have been difficult for her.” He clucked his tongue. “She came to you for comfort?”

Nick whirled but managed to bite back the words. Stephanos watched calmly. “No, she didn’t come to me. She’d go to the devil himself before she came to me again.” With an effort, he controlled the rage and his tone. “And it’s for the best, I can’t let her interfere now. As things stand, she’ll be in the way.”

Stephanos caressed his outrageous moustache and whistled through his teeth. “Perhaps she’ll go back to America.”

“The sooner the better,” Nick muttered and drained his glass. At the knock on the door, he swore. “See who the hell it is and get rid of them if you can.”

“Captain Tripolos,” Stephanos announced a few moments later. There was a gleam in his eye as he melted out of sight.

“Captain.” Nick fought off the need to swear again. “You’ll join me for coffee?”

“Thank you.” Tripolos settled into a chair with a few wheezes and sighs. “Was that Miss James I just saw going down the cliff path?”

“Yes.” With some effort, Nick prevented his knuckles from whitening against the handle of the pot. “She was just here.”

Both men watched each other with what seemed casual interest. One was Morgan’s panther—the other a crafty bear.

“Then she told you about Miss Theoharis.”

“Yes.” Nick offered the cream. “A nasty business, Captain. I intend to call Athens later this morning to see what news there is. Is Iona’s condition why you’re here?”

“Yes. It’s kind of you to see me, Mr. Gregoras. I know you are a very busy man.”

“It’s my duty to cooperate with the police, Captain,” Nick countered as he sat back with his coffee. “But I don’t know how I can help you in this case.”

“As you were with Miss Theoharis all of yesterday afternoon, I hoped you could shed some light on her frame of mind.”

“Oh, I see.” Nick sipped his coffee while his mind raced with possibilities. “Captain, I don’t know if I can help you. Naturally, Iona was distressed that the man’s murder was practically on her doorstep. She was edgy—but then, she often is. I can’t say I saw anything different in her.”

“Perhaps you could tell me what you did on your boat trip?” Tripolos suggested. “If Miss Theoharis said anything which seemed to indicate she was thinking of suicide?”

Nick lifted a brow. “We weren’t overly engaged in conversation.”

“Of course.”

Nick wondered how long they could continue to fence. He decided to execute a few flourishes of his own. “I will say that Iona seemed a trifle nervous. That is, as I said, however, a habitual trait. You’ll find that the people who know her will describe Iona as a ... restive woman. I can say with complete honesty that it never entered my mind that she was contemplating suicide. Even now, to be candid, I find the idea impossible.”

Tripolos settled back comfortably. “Why?”

Generalities, Nick concluded, would suffice. “Iona’s too fond of herself to seek death. A beautiful woman, Captain, and one greedy for life’s pleasures. It’s merely an opinion, you understand. You know much more about this sort of thing.” He shrugged. “My opinion is that it was an accident.”

“An accident, Mr. Gregoras, is unlikely.” He was fishing for a reaction, and Nick gave him another curious lift of brow. “There was

too much heroin in her system for any but an amateur to take by mistake. And Miss Theoharis is no stranger to heroin. The marks of the needle tell a sad story.”

“Yes, I see.”

“Were you aware that Miss Theoharis was an addict?”

“I didn’t know Iona very well, Captain. Socially, of course, but basically, she’s a cousin of a friend—a beautiful woman who isn’t always comfortable to be around.”

“Yet you spent the day with her yesterday.”

“A beautiful woman,” Nick said again, and smiled. “I’m sorry I can’t help you.”

“Perhaps you’d be interested in a theory of mine.”

Nick didn’t trust those bland eyes but continued to smile. “Of course.”

“You see, Mr. Gregoras,” Tripolos went on. “If it was an accident, and if your instincts are correct, there is only one answer.”

“One answer?” Nick repeated then allowed his expression to change slowly. “Do you mean you think someone attempted to ... murder Iona?”

“I’m a simple policeman, Mr. Gregoras.” Tripolos looked plumply humble. “It is my nature to look at such matters from a suspicious point of view. May I be frank?”

“By all means,” Nick told him, admiring the captain’s plodding shrewdness. Frank be damned, Nick mused, he’s going to try to give me enough rope to hang myself.

“I am puzzled, and as a man who knows the Theoharis family well, I would like your opinion.”

“Whatever I can do.”

Tripolos nodded. “I will tell you first—and of course, you understand this cannot leave this room?”

Nick merely inclined his head and sipped his coffee.

“I will tell you Anthony Stevos was part of a smuggling ring operating on Lesbos.”

“I must admit, the thought had crossed my mind.” Amused, Nick took out a box of cigarettes, offering one to Tripolos.

“It’s no secret that a group has been using this island’s nearness to Turkey to smuggle opium across the strait.” Tripolos admired the thin wisp of elegant tobacco before he bent closer to Nick for a light.

“You think this Stevos was murdered by one of his cohorts?”

“That is my theory.” Tripolos drew in the expensive smoke appreciatively. “It is the leader of this group that is my main concern. A brilliant man, I am forced to admit.” Reluctant respect crossed his face. “He is very clever and has so far eluded any nets spread for his capture. It is rumored he rarely joins in the boat trips. When he does, he is masked.”

“I’ve heard the rumors, naturally,” Nick mused behind a mist of smoke. “I put a great deal of it down to village gossip and romance. A masked man, smuggling—the stuff of fiction.”

“He is real, Mr. Gregoras, and there is nothing romantic about backstabbing.”

“No, you’re quite right.”

“Stevos was not a smart man. He was being watched in hopes he would lead us to the one we want. But ...” As was his habit, Tripolos let the sentence trail off.

“I might ask, Captain, why you’re telling me what must be police business.”

“As an important man in our community,” Tripolos said smoothly, “I feel I can take you into my confidence.”

The old fox, Nick thought, and smiled. “I appreciate that. Do you think this masked smuggler is a local man?”

“I believe he is a man who knows the island.” Tripolos gave a grim smile in return. “But I do not believe he is a fisherman.”

“One of my olive pickers?” Nick suggested blandly, blowing out a stream of smoke. “No, I suppose not.”

“I believe,” Tripolos continued, “from the reports I have received on Miss Theoharis’s activities in Athens, that she is aware of the identity of the man we seek.”

Nick came to attention. “Iona?”

“I am of the opinion that Miss Theoharis is very involved in the smuggling operation. Too involved for her own safety. If ... when,” he amended, “she comes out of her coma, she’ll be questioned.”

“It’s hard for me to believe that Alex’s cousin would be a part of something like that.” *He’s getting entirely too close*, Nick realized, and swore silently at the lack of time. “Iona’s a bit untamed,” he went on, “but smuggling and murder. I can’t believe it.”

“I am very much afraid someone tried to murder Miss Theoharis because she knew too much. I will ask you, Mr. Gregoras, as one who is acquainted with her, how far would Miss Theoharis have gone for love—or for money?”

Nick paused as if considering carefully while his mind raced at readjustments to plans already formed. “For love, Captain, I think Iona would do little. But for money”—he looked up—“for money, Iona could justify anything.”

“You are frank,” Tripolos nodded. “I am grateful. Perhaps you would permit me to speak with you again on this matter. I must confess”—Tripolos’s smile was sheepish, but his eyes remained direct—“it is a great help to discuss my problems with a man like yourself. It allows me to put things in order.”

“Captain, I’m glad to give you any help I can, of course.” Nick gave him an easy smile.

For some time after Tripolos left, Nick remained in his chair. He scowled at the Rodin sculpture across the room as he calculated his choices.

“We move tonight,” he announced as Stephanos entered.

“It’s too soon. Things are not yet safe.”

“Tonight,” Nick repeated and shifted his gaze. “Call Athens and let them know about the change in plan. See if they can’t rig something up to keep this Tripolos off my back for a few hours.” He laced his fingers together and frowned. “He’s dangled his bait, and he’s damn well expecting me to bite.”

“It’s too dangerous tonight,” Stephanos insisted. “There’s another shipment in a few days.”

“In a few days, Tripolos will be that much closer. We can’t afford to have things complicated with the local police now. And I have to be sure.” Jet eyes narrowed, and his mouth became a grim line. “I haven’t gone through all this to make a mistake at this point. I have to speed things up before Tripolos starts breathing down the wrong necks.”

[Chapter Nine](#)

The cove was blanketed in gloom. Rocks glistened, protecting it from winds—and from view. There was a scent—lush wet leaves, wild blossoms that flourished in the sun and hung heavy at night. But

somehow it wasn't a pleasant fragrance. It smelt of secrets and half-named fears.

Lovers didn't hold trysts there. Legend said it was haunted. At times, when a man walked near enough on a dark, still night, the voices of spirits murmured behind the rocks. Most men took another route home and said nothing at all.

The moon shed a thin, hollow light over the face of the water, adding to rather than detracting from the sense of whispering stillness, of mystic darkness. The water itself sighed gently over the rocks and sand. It was a passive sound, barely stirring the air.

The men who gathered near the boat were like so many shadows—dark, faceless in the gloom. But they were men, flesh and blood and muscle. They didn't fear the spirits in the cove.

They spoke little, and only in undertones. A laugh might be heard from time to time, quick and harsh in a place of secrets, but for the most part they moved silently, competently. They knew what had to be done. The time was nearly right.

One saw the approach of a new shadow and grunted to his companion. Stealthily, he drew a knife from his belt, gripping its crude handle in a strong, work-worn hand. The blade glittered dangerously through the darkness. Work stopped; men waited.

As the shadow drew closer, he sheathed the knife and swallowed the salty taste of fear. He wouldn't have been afraid to murder, but he was afraid of this man.

The thick, sturdy fingers trembled as they released the knife. "We weren't expecting you."

"I do not like to always do the expected." The answer was in brisk Greek as a pale finger of moonlight fell over him. He wore black—all black, from lean black slacks to a sweater and leather jacket. Lean and tall, he might have been god or devil.

A hood concealed both his head and face. Only the gleam of dark eyes remained visible—and deadly.

“You join us tonight?”

“I am here,” he returned. He wasn’t a man who answered questions, and no more were asked. He stepped aboard as one used to the life and sway of boats.

It was a typical fishing vessel. Its lines were simple. The decks were clean but rough, the paint fresh and black. Only the expense and power of its motor separated it from its companions.

Without a word, he crossed the deck, ignoring the men who fell back to let him pass. They were hefty, muscled men with thick wrists and strong hands. They moved away from the lean man as if he could crush them to bone with one sweep of his narrow hand. Each prayed the slitted eyes would not seek him out.

He placed himself at the helm, then gazed casually over his shoulder. At the look, the lines were cast off. They would row until they were out to sea and the roar of the motor would go unnoticed.

The boat moved at an easy pace, a lone speck in a dark sea. The motor purred. There was little talk among the men. They were a silent group in any case, but when the man was with them, no one wanted to speak. To speak was to bring attention to yourself—not many dared to do so.

He stared out into the water and ignored the wary glances thrown his way. He was remote, a figure of the night. His hood rippled in the salt-sprayed wind—a carefree, almost adventurous movement. But he was still as a stone.

Time passed; the boat listed with the movement of the sea. He might have been a figurehead. Or a demon.

“We are short-handed.” The man who had greeted him merged with his shadow. His voice was low and coarse. His stomach trembled.

“Do you wish me to find a replacement for Stevos?”

The hooded head turned—a slow, deliberate motion. The man took an instinctive step in retreat and swallowed the copper taste that had risen to his throat.

“I will find my own replacement. You would all do well to remember Stevos.” He lifted his voice on the warning as his eyes swept the men on deck. “There is no one who cannot be ... replaced.” He used a faint emphasis on the final word, watching the dropping of eyes with satisfaction. He needed their fear, and he had it. He could smell it on them. Smiling beneath the hood, he turned back to the sea.

The journey continued, and no one else spoke to him—or about him. Now and then a sailor might cast his eyes toward the man at the helm. The more superstitious crossed themselves or made the ancient sign against evil. When the devil was with them, they knew the full power of fear. He ignored them, treated them as though he were alone on the boat. They thanked God for it.

Midway between Lesbos and Turkey, the motor was shut off. The sudden silence resounded like a thunderclap. No one spoke as they would have done if the figure hadn't been at the helm. There were no crude jokes or games of dice.

The boat shifted easily in its own wake. They waited, all but one swatting in the cool sea breeze. The moon winked behind a cloud, then was clear again.

The motor of an approaching boat was heard as a distant cough, but the sound grew steadier, closer. A light signaled twice, then once again before the glow was shut off. The second motor, too, gave way to silence as another fishing vessel drifted alongside the first. The two boats merged into one shadow.

The night was glorious—almost still and silvered by the moon. Men waited, watching that dark, silent figure at the helm.

“The catch is good tonight,” a voice called out from the second boat. The sound drifted, disembodied over the water.

“The fish are easily caught while sleeping.”

There was a short laugh as two men leaned over the side and hauled a dripping net, pregnant with fish, onto the deck. The vessel swayed with the movement, then steadied.

The hooded man watched the exchange without word or gesture. His eyes shifted from the second vessel to the pile of fish lying scattered and lifeless on the deck. Both motors roared into life again and separated; one to the east, one to the west. The moon glimmered white. The breeze picked up. The boat was again a lone speck on a dark sea.

“Cut them open.”

The men looked up sharply into the slitted eyes. “Now?” one of them dared to ask. “Don’t you want them taken to the usual place?”

“Cut them open,” he repeated. His voice sent a chill through the quiet night. “I take the cache with me.”

Three men knelt beside the fish. Their knives worked swiftly and with skill while the scent of blood and sweat and fear prickled the air. A small pile of white packets grew as they were torn from the bellies of fish. The mutilated corpses were tossed back into the sea. No one would bring that catch to their table.

He moved quickly but without any sense of hurry, slipping packets into the pockets of his jacket. To a man they scrambled back from him, as if his touch might bring death—or worse. Satisfied, he gave them a brief survey before he resumed his position at the helm.

Their fear brought him a grim pleasure. And the cache was his for the taking. For the first time, he laughed—a long, cold sound that had nothing to do with humor. No one spoke, in even a whisper, on the journey back.

Later, a shadow among shadows, he moved away from the cove. He was wary that the trip had gone so easily, exhilarated that it was done. There had been no one to question him, no one with the courage to follow, though he was one man and they were many. Still, as he crossed the strip of beach, he moved with caution, for he wasn't a fool. He had more than just a few frightened fishermen to consider. And he would have more to deal with before he was done.

The walk was long, and steep, but he took it at an easy pace. The hollow call of an owl caused him to pause only briefly to scan the trees and rocks through the slits in the mask. From his position, he could see the cool white lines of the Theoharis villa. He stood where he was a moment—watching, thinking. Then he spun away to continue his climb.

He moved over rocks as easily as a goat—walking with a sure, confident stride in the darkness. He'd covered that route a hundred times without a light. And he kept clear of the path—a path meant men. He stepped around the rock where Morgan had sat that morning, but he didn't see the flowers. Without pausing, he continued.

There was a light in the window. He'd left it burning himself before he had set out. Now for the first time he thought of comfort—and a drink to wash the taste of other men's fear from his throat.

Entering the house, he strode down the corridor and entered a room. Carelessly, he dumped the contents of his pockets on an elegant Louis XVI table, then removed his hood with a flourish.

“Well, Stephanos.” Nick's teeth flashed in a grin. “The fishing was rich tonight.”

Stephanos acknowledged the packets with a nod. “No trouble?”

“One has little trouble with men who fear the air you breathe. The trip was as smooth as a whore's kiss.” Moving away, he poured two drinks and handed one to his companion. The sense of exhilaration

was still on him—the power that comes from risking death and winning. He drained his drink in one swallow. “A seedy crew, Stephanos, but they do their job. They’re greedy, and”—he lifted the hood, then let it fall on the cache of opium, black on white —“terrified.”

“A terrified crew is a cooperative one,” Stephanos commented. He poked a stubby finger at the cache of opium. “Rich fishing indeed. Enough to make a man comfortable for a long time.”

“Enough to make him want more,” Nick stated with a grin. “And more. *Diabolos*, the smell of fish clings to me.” He wrinkled his nose in disgust. “Send our cache to Athens, and see they send a report to me of its purity. I’m going to wash off this stink and go to bed.”

“There’s a matter you might be interested in.”

“Not tonight.” Nick didn’t bother to turn around. “Save your gossip for tomorrow.”

“The woman, Nicholas.” Stephanos saw him stiffen and pause. There was no need to tell him which woman. “I learned she doesn’t go back to America. She stays here while Alex is in Athens.”

“*Diabolos!*” Nick swore and turned back into the room. “I can’t be worried about a woman.”

“She stays alone until Alex sends his lady back.”

“The woman is not my concern,” he said between his teeth.

As was his habit, Stephanos sniffed the liquor to add to his appreciation. “Athens was interested,” he said mildly. “Perhaps she could still be of use.”

“No.” Nick took an agitated turn around the room. Nerves that had been cold as ice began to thaw. Damn her, he thought, she’ll make me careless even thinking of her. “That woman is more trouble than

use. No,” he repeated as Stephanos lifted his brows. “We’ll keep her out of it.”

“Difficult, considering—”

“We’ll keep her out of it,” Nick repeated in a tone that made Stephanos stroke his moustache.

“As you wish, *kyrios*.”

“Go to the devil.” Annoyed with the mock respectful tone, Nick picked up his glass, then set it down again. “She’s no use to us,” he said with more calm. “More of a stumbling block. We’ll hope she keeps her elegant nose inside the villa for a few days.”

“And if she pokes her elegant nose out?” Stephanos inquired, enjoying his liquor.

Nick’s mouth was a grim line. “Then I’ll deal with her.”

“I think perhaps,” he murmured as Nick strode from the room, “she has already dealt with you, old friend.” He laughed and poured himself another drink. “Indeed, the lady’s dealt you a killing blow.”

After he had bathed, Nick couldn’t settle. He told himself it was the excess energy from the night, and his success. But he found himself standing at his window, staring down at the Theoharis villa.

So she was alone, he thought, asleep in that big soft bed. It meant nothing to him. He’d climbed that damn wall to her room for the last time. He’d gone there the night before on impulse, something he’d known better than to do. He’d gone to see her, with some mad idea of justifying his actions to her.

Fool, he called himself as his hands curled tight around the stone railing. Only a fool justifies what he does. He’d gone to her and she’d taunted him, driven him to give up something he had no business giving up. His heart. Damn her, she’d wrenched it out of him.

His grip tightened as he remembered what it had been like to have her—to taste her and fill himself with her. It had been a mistake, perhaps the most crucial one he'd ever made. It was one matter to risk your life, another to risk your soul.

He shouldn't have touched her, Nick thought on yet another wave of anger. He'd known it even as his hands had reached for her. She hadn't known what she was doing, drunk on the ouzo Andrew had bought her. Andrew—he felt a moment's rage and banked it. There'd been moments when he hated Andrew, knowing he'd kissed her. Hated Dorian because Morgan had smiled at him. And Alex because he could touch her in friendship.

And, he knew, Morgan would hate him for what had passed between them that night. Hadn't he heard it in the icy words she'd flung at him? He'd rather have handed her his own knife than to have the words of a woman slash at him that way. She would hate him for taking her when she was vulnerable—while that damn medal hung around her neck. And she would hate him for what he was.

On a rising wave of temper, Nick whirled away from the window. Why should it concern him? Morgan James would slip out of his life like a dream in only a few weeks in any case. He'd chosen his path before, long before he'd seen her. It was his way. If she hated him for what he was, then so be it. He wouldn't allow her to make him feel dirty and soiled.

If she'd touched his heart, he could deal with it. Sprawling into a chair, Nick scowled into the darkness. He would deal with it, he promised himself. After all he'd done, and all he'd faced, no blue-eyed witch would take him under.

Morgan felt completely alone. The solitude and silence she had so prized only a few days before now weighed down on her. The house was full of servants, but that brought her no comfort, no company. Alex and Liz and Dorian were gone. She wandered listlessly through the morning as she had wandered restlessly through the night. The

house felt like a prison—clean and white and empty. Trapped inside it, she was too vulnerable to her own thoughts.

And because her thoughts centered too often on Nick, she found the idea of lying in the bed they had shared too painful. How could she sleep in peace in a place where she could still feel his hands on her, his lips ruthlessly pressing on hers? How could she sleep in a room that seemed to carry that faint sea-smell that so often drifted from him?

So she couldn't sleep, and her thoughts—and needs—haunted her. What could have happened to her to cause her to love such a man? And how long could she fight it? If she surrendered to it, she'd suffer for the rest of her life.

Knowing she was only adding to her own depression, Morgan changed into a bathing suit and headed for the beach.

It was ridiculous to be afraid of the beach, afraid of the house, she told herself. She was here to enjoy both for the next three weeks. Locking herself in her room wouldn't change anything that had happened.

The sand glistened, white and brilliant. Morgan found that on facing it again, the horror didn't materialize. Tossing aside her wrap, she ran into the sea. The water would ease the weariness, the tension. And maybe, just maybe, she would sleep tonight.

Why should she be keeping herself in a constant state of nerves over the death of a man she didn't even know? Why should she allow the harmless stub of a cigarette to haunt her? It was time to accept the simple explanations and keep her distance. The man had been killed as a result of a village brawl, and that was that. It had nothing to do with her, or anyone she knew. It was tragic, but it wasn't personal.

She wouldn't think about Iona, she told herself. She wouldn't think about smuggling or murders or—here she hesitated a moment and

dived under a wave—Nicholas. For now, she wouldn't think at all.

Morgan escaped. In a world of water and sun, she thought only of pleasures. She drifted, letting the tension sink beneath the waves. She'd forgotten, in her own misery, just how clean and alive the water made her feel. For a few moments she would go back to that first day, to that feeling of peace she'd found without even trying.

Liz was going to need her in the next day or two. And Morgan wouldn't be any help at all if she were haggard and tense. Yes, tonight she'd sleep—she'd had enough of nightmares.

More relaxed than she had been in days, Morgan swam back toward shore. The sand shifted under her feet with the gentle current. Shells dotted the shoreline, clean and glistening. She stood and stretched as the water lapped around her knees. The sun felt glorious.

“So Helen rises from the sea.”

Lifting her hand, Morgan shielded her eyes and saw Andrew. He sat on the beach by her towel, watching her.

“It's easy to understand how she set kingdoms at odds.” He stood and moved to the water's verge to join her. “How are you, Morgan?”

“I'm fine.” She accepted the towel he handed her and rubbed it briskly over her hair.

“Your eyes are shadowed. A blue sea surrounded by clouds.” He traced her cheek with a fingertip. “Nick told me about Iona Theoharis.” He took her hand and led her back to the white sand. Dropping the towel, Morgan sat beside him. “It's a bit soon for you to have to handle something like that, Morgan, I'm sorry you had to be the one to find her.”

“It seems to be a talent of mine.” She shook her head. “I'm much better today, really.” Smiling, she touched his cheek. “Yesterday I felt ... actually I don't think I felt much of anything yesterday. It was like I

was watching everything through a fisheye lens. Everything was distorted and unreal. Today it's real, but I can cope with it."

"I suppose that's nature's way of cushioning the senses."

"I feel this incredible sorrow for Alex and Liz—and for Dorian." She leaned back on her elbows, wanting to feel the sun as it dried the water on her skin. "It's so hard on them, Andrew. It leaves me feeling helpless." She turned her face to his, pushing at her streaming hair. "I hope this doesn't sound hard, but I feel, after these past two days, I think I've just realized how glad I am to be alive."

"I'd say that's a very healthy, very normal reaction." He, too, leaned back on his elbows, narrowing his eyes against the sun as he studied her.

"Oh, I hope so. I've been feeling guilty about it."

"You can't be guilty about wanting to live, Morgan."

"No. Suddenly I realized how much I want to do. How much I want to see. Do you know, I'm twenty-six, and this is the first time I've been anywhere? My mother died when I was a baby and my father and I moved to New York from Philadelphia. I've never seen anything else." As drops of water trickled down her skin, she shook her damp hair back. "I can speak five languages, and this is the first time I've been in a country where English isn't needed. I want to go to Italy and France." She turned to face him more directly. Her eyes, though still shadowed, were huge with adventure. "I want to see Venice and ride in a gondola. I want to walk on the Cornish moors and on the Champs d'Élysées." She laughed and it felt marvelous. "I want to climb mountains."

"And be a fisherman?" He smiled and laid a hand over hers.

"Oh, I did say that, didn't I?" She laughed again. "I'll do that, too. Jack always said my taste was rather eclectic."

"Jack?"

“He’s a man I knew back home.” Morgan found the ease with which she put him in the past satisfying. “He was in politics. I think he wanted to be king.”

“Were you in love with him?”

“No, I was used to him.” She rolled her eyes and grinned.

“Isn’t that a terrible thing to say?”

“I don’t know—you tell me.”

“No.” she decided. “Because it’s the truth. He was very cautious, very conventional, and, I’m sorry to say, very boring. Not at all like ...” Her voice trailed off.

Andrew followed her gaze and spotted Nick at the top of the cliff. He stood, legs apart, hands thrust in his pockets, staring down at them. His expression was unreadable in the distance. He turned, without a wave or a sign of greeting, and disappeared behind the rocks.

Andrew shifted his gaze back to Morgan. Her expression was totally readable.

“You’re in love with Nick.”

Morgan brought herself back sharply. “Oh, no. No, of course not. I hardly know him. He’s a very disagreeable man. He has a brutal temper, and he’s arrogant and bossy and without any decent feelings. He shouts.”

Andrew took in this impassioned description with a lifted brow. “We seem to be talking about two different people.”

Morgan turned away, running sand through her fingers. “Maybe. I don’t like either one of them.”

Andrew let the silence hang a moment as he watched her busy fingers. “But you’re in love with him.”

“Andrew—”

“And you don’t want to be,” he finished, looking thoughtfully out to sea. “Morgan, I’ve been wondering, if I asked you to marry me, would it spoil our friendship?”

“What?” Astonished, she spun her head back around. “Are you joking?”

Calmly, he searched her face. “No, I’m not joking. I decided that asking you to bed would put a strain on our friendship. I wondered if marriage would. Though I didn’t realize you were in love with Nick.”

“Andrew,” she began, uncertain how to react. “Is this a question or a proposal?”

“Let’s take the question first.”

Morgan took a deep breath. “An offer of marriage, especially from someone you care for, is always flattering to the ego. But egos are unstable and friendships don’t require flattery.” Leaning over, she brushed his mouth with hers. “I’m very glad you’re my friend, Andrew.”

“Somehow I thought that would be your reaction. I’m a romantic at heart.” Shrugging, he gave her a rueful smile. “An island, a beautiful woman with a laugh like a night wind. I could see us setting up house in the cottage. Fires in the winter, flowers in the spring.”

“You’re not in love with me, Andrew.”

“I could be.” Taking her hand, he turned it palm up and studied it. “It isn’t your destiny to fall in love with a struggling poet.”

“Andrew—”

“And it isn’t mine to have you.” Smiling again, he kissed her hand. “Still, it’s a warm thought.”

“And a lovely one. Thank you for it.”

He nodded before he rose. “I might decide Venice offers inspiration.” Andrew studied the protruding section of the gray stone wall before turning back to her. “Maybe we’ll see each other there.” He smiled, the flashing boyish smile, and Morgan felt a twinge of regret. “Timing, Morgan, is such an essential factor in romance.”

She watched him cross the sand and mount the steps before she turned back to the sea.

Chapter Ten

The villa whispered and trembled like an old woman. Even after all her promises to herself that morning, Morgan couldn't sleep. She rolled and tossed in her bed, frantically bringing herself back from dreams each time she started to drift off. It was too easy for Nick to slip into her mind in a dream. Through sheer force of will, Morgan had blocked him out for most of the day. She wouldn't surrender to him now, for only a few hours' sleep.

Yet awake and alone, she found herself remembering the inlet—the face under the water, the slim black stub of a cigarette. And Iona, pale and barely alive, with her thick mane of hair streaming nearly to the floor.

Why was it she couldn't rid herself of the thought that one had something to do with the other?

There was too much space, too much quiet in the villa to be tolerated in solitude. Even the air seemed hot and oppressive. As fatigue began to take over, Morgan found herself caught between sleep and wakefulness, that vulnerable land where thoughts can drift and tease.

She could hear Alex's voice, cold and hard, telling her that Iona would be better off dead. There were Dorian's eyes, so calm, so cool, as he lifted a thin black cigarette to his lips. Andrew smiling grimly as he waited for his ship to come in. Liz vowing passionately that she would protect her husband from anyone and anything. And the knife blade, so sharp and deadly. She knew without seeing that Nick's hand gripped the handle.

On a half scream, Morgan sat up and willed herself awake. No, she wouldn't sleep, not alone. She didn't dare.

Before giving herself time to think, she rose and slipped on jeans and a shirt. The beach had given her peace that afternoon. Maybe it

would do the same for her tonight.

Outside, she found the openness comforting. There were no walls here or empty rooms. There were stars and the scent of blossoms. She could hear the cypress leaves whisper. The feeling of dread slid from her with every step. She headed for the beach.

The moon was nearly full now, and white as bone. The breeze off the water was degrees cooler than the air had been in her room. She followed the path without hesitation, without fear. Some instinct told her nothing would harm her that night.

After rolling up her pants legs, she stood, letting the water lap over her ankles, warm and silky. Gratefully, she breathed in the moist sea air and felt it soothe her. She stretched her arms toward the stars.

“Will you never learn to stay in bed?”

Morgan spun around to find herself face-to-face with Nick. Had he already been there? she wondered. She hadn't heard him walk behind her. Straightening, she eyed him coolly. Like her, he wore jeans and no shoes. His shirt hung unbuttoned over his bare chest. What madness was it, she wondered, that made her long to go to him. Whatever madness drew her to him, she suppressed.

“That's not your concern.” Morgan turned her back on him.

Nick barely prevented himself from yanking her back around. He'd been standing sleepless at his window when he'd seen her leave the house. Almost before he had known what he was doing, he was coming down the beach steps to find her. And it was ice, that same ice, she greeted him with.

“Have you forgotten what happens to women who wander night beaches alone?” The words rang with mockery as he tangled his fingers in her hair. He'd touch her if he chose, he thought furiously. No one would stop him.

“If you plan to drag me around this time, Nicholas, I warn you, I’ll bite and scratch.”

“That should make it interesting.” His fingers tightened as she tossed her head to dislodge his grip. “I’d think you’d have had your fill of beaches today, Aphrodite. Or are you expecting Andrew again?”

She ignored the taunt and the peculiar thrill that came whenever he called her by that name. “I’m not expecting anyone. I came here to be alone. If you’d go away, I could enjoy myself.”

Hurting, wanting, Nick spun her around. His fingers bruised her skin so that she made a surprised sound of pain before she could clamp it down. “Damn you, Morgan, don’t push me any more. You’ll find me a different breed from young Andrew.”

“Take your hands off me.” She managed to control her voice to a hard, cold steadiness. Her eyes glimmered with frost as they stared into his. She wouldn’t cower before him again, and she wouldn’t yield. “You’d do well to take lessons from Andrew”—deliberately, she tossed her head and smiled—“or Dorian on how to treat a woman.”

Nick swore with quick Greek expertise. Unable to do otherwise, he gripped her tighter, but this time she made no sound. Morgan watched as the dark fury took total command of his face. He was half devil now, violent, with barely a trace of the man others knew. It gave her a perverse enjoyment to know she had driven him to it.

“So you offer yourself to Dorian as well?” He bit off the words as he fought to find some hold on his control. “How many men do you need?”

A flood of fury rose, but she stamped it down. “Isn’t it strange, Nicholas,” she said calmly, “how your Greek half seems to take over when you’re angry? I simply can’t see how you and Andrew can be related, however remotely.”

“You enjoy leading him on, don’t you?” The comparison stroked his fury higher. Morgan found she was gritting her teeth to prevent a

whimper at the pain. She wouldn't give him the satisfaction. "Heartless bitch," he hissed at her. "How long do you intend to dangle and tease?"

"How dare you!" Morgan pushed against him. Anger, unreasonable and full, welled up in her for all the sleepless hours he'd given her, and all the pain. "How dare you criticize me for anything! You, with the filthy games you play, and the lies. You care about *no one*—no one but yourself. I detest you and everything you are!" Wrenching free, Morgan fled into the sea, blind and senseless with rage.

"Stupid woman!" Nick tore through two sentences of furious Greek before he caught her and pulled her around. The water lapped around her hips as he shook her. When her feet slipped on the bottom, he dragged her back up. He couldn't think now, couldn't reason. His voice whipped out with the violence of his thoughts. "I'll be damned if you'll make me crawl. Damned if I'll beg for your good feelings. I do what I have to do; it's a matter of necessity. Do you think I enjoy it?"

"I don't care about your necessities or your smuggling or your murders! I don't care about anything that has to do with you. I hate you!" She took a swing at his chest and nearly submerged again. "I hate everything about you. I hate myself for ever letting you touch me!"

The words cut at him, deeper than he wanted them to. He fought not to remember what it had felt like to hold her, to press his mouth against her and feel her melt against him.

"That's fine. Just keep your distance and we'll get along perfectly."

"There's nothing I want more than to keep away from you." Her eyes glittered as the words brought her a slash of pain. "Nothing I want more than to never see your face again or hear your name."

He controlled himself with an effort—for there was nothing he wanted more at that moment than to crush her against him and beg,

as he'd never begged anyone, for whatever she'd give him. "Then that's what you'll have, Aphrodite. Play your games with Dorian if you like, but tread carefully with Andrew. Tread carefully, or I'll break your beautiful neck."

"Don't you threaten me. I'll see Andrew just as often as I like."
Morgan pushed at her dripping hair and glared at him. "I don't think he'd appreciate your protection. He asked me to marry him."

In one swift move, Nick lifted her off her feet and dragged her against his chest. Morgan kicked out, succeeding only in drenching both of them. "What did you tell him?"

"It's none of your business." She struggled, and though she was slick as an eel in the water, his hold remained firm. "Put me *down!* You can't treat me this way."

Fury was raging in him, uncontrollable, savage. No, he wouldn't stand by and watch her with another man. "Damn you, I said what did you tell him!"

"No!" she shouted, more in anger than in fear. "I told him *no.*"

Nick relaxed his grip. Morgan's feet met the sea bottom again as he formed a brittle smile. Her face was white as chalk and he cursed himself. God, would he do nothing but hurt her? Would she do nothing but hurt him? If there weren't so many walls in his way ... if he could break down even one of them, he'd have her.

"That's fine." His voice was far from steady, but she had no way of knowing it was from panic rather than temper. "I won't stand by and watch you lead Andrew along. He's an innocent yet." He released her, knowing it might be the last time he'd ever touch her. "I don't suppose you chose to tell him about the lover you left behind."

"Lover?" Morgan pushed at her hair as she took a step back. "What lover?"

Nick lifted the medallion at her neck, then let it fall before he gave into the need to rip it from her. “The one who gave you the trinket you treasure so much. When a woman carries another man’s brand, it’s difficult to overlook it.”

Morgan closed her hand over the small piece of silver. She had thought nothing could make her more angry than she already was. She was blind and trembling with it. “Another man’s brand,” she repeated in a whisper. “How typical of you. No one brands me, Nicholas. No one, no matter how I love.”

“Your pardon, Aphrodite,” he returned coolly. “An expression only.”

“My father gave me this,” she tossed at him. “He gave it to me when I was eight years old and broke my arm falling out of a tree. He’s the kindest and most loving person I’ve ever known. You, Nicholas Gregoras, are a stupid man.”

She turned and darted toward the beach, but he caught her again while the water was still around her ankles. Ignoring her curses and struggles, Nick turned her to face him. His eyes bored into hers. His breath was coming in gasps, but not from rage. He needed an answer, and quickly, before he exploded.

“You don’t have a lover in America?”

“I said let me *go!*” She was glorious in fury—eyes glittering, skin white as the moonlight. With her head thrown back, she dared him to defy her. In that moment he thought he would have died for her.

“Do you have a lover in America?” Nick demanded again, but his voice was quiet now.

Morgan threw up her chin. “I haven’t a lover *anywhere.*”

On an oath that sounded more like a prayer, Nick drew her close. The heat from his body fused through the soaked shirts as if they had been naked. Morgan’s breath caught at the pressure and the sudden gleam of triumph in his eyes.

“You do now.”

Capturing her mouth, he pulled her to the sand.

His lips were urgent, burning. His talk of branding raced through her head, but Morgan accepted the fire eagerly. And already he was stripping off her shirt as if he couldn't bear even the thin separation between them.

Morgan knew he would always love like this. Intensely, without thought, without reason. She gloried in it. Desire this strong took no denial. Her own fingers were busy with his shirt, ripping at the seam in her hurry to be flesh to flesh. She heard him laugh with his mouth pressed against her throat.

There was no longer any right or wrong. Needs were too great. And love. Even as passion drove her higher, Morgan knew and recognized her love. She had waited for it all of her life. With the heat building, there was no time to question how it could be Nick. She only knew it was, whatever, whoever, he was. Nothing else mattered.

When his hands found her naked breasts, he groaned and crushed his lips to hers again. She was so soft, so slender. He struggled not to bruise her, not again, but desire was wild and free in him. He'd never wanted a woman like this. Not like this. Even when he had taken her the first time, he hadn't felt this clean silver streak of power.

She was consuming him, pouring inside his mind. And the taste. Dear God, would he never get enough of the taste of her? He found her breast with his mouth and filled himself.

Morgan arched and dove her fingers into his hair. He was murmuring something, but his breathing was as ragged as hers and she couldn't understand. When his mouth was back on hers, there was no need to. She felt him tugging her jeans over her hips, but was too delirious to realize she had pulled at his first. She felt the skin stretched tight over his bones, the surprising narrowness of his body.

Then his lips and hands were racing over her—not in the angry desperation she remembered from the night before, but in unquestionable possession. There was no gentleness, but neither was there a fierceness. He took and took as though no one had a better right. Those strong lean fingers stroked down her, making her gasp out loud in pleasure, then moan in torment when they lay still.

His mouth was always busy, tongue lightly torturing, teeth taking her to the edge of control. There seemed to be no part of her, no inch he couldn't exploit for pleasure. And the speed never slacked.

Cool sand, cool water, and his hot, clever mouth—she was trapped between them. There was moonlight, rippling white, but she was a willing prisoner of the darkness. In the grove of cypresses a night bird called out—one long, haunting note. It might have been her own sigh. She tasted the sea on his skin, knew he would taste it on hers as well. Somehow, that small intimacy made her hold him tighter.

They might have been the only ones, washed ashore, destined to be lovers throughout their lives without the need for anyone else. The scent of the night wafted over her—his scent. They would always be the same to her.

Then she heard nothing, knew nothing, as he drove her beyond reason with his mouth alone.

She was grasping at him, demanding and pleading in the same breathless whispers for him to give her that final, delirious relief. But he held her off, pleasing himself, and pleasing her until she thought her body would simply implode at the pressure that was building.

With a wild, hungry kiss he silenced her while leading her closer to the edge. Though she could feel his heart racing against hers, he seemed determined to hold them there—an instant, an hour—hovering between heaven and hell.

When he drove them over, Morgan wasn't certain on which side they had fallen—only that they had fallen together.

* * *

Morgan lay quiet, cushioned against Nick's bare shoulder. The waves gently caressed her legs. In the aftermath of the demands of passion she was light and cool and stunned. She could feel the blood still pounding in his chest and knew no one, no one had ever wanted her like this. The sense of power it might have given her came as an ache. She closed her eyes on it.

She hadn't even struggled, she thought. Not even a token protest. She had given herself without thought—not in submission to his strength, but in submission to her own desires. Now, as the heat of passion ebbed, she felt the hard edge of shame.

He was a criminal—a hard, self-seeking man who trafficked in misery for profit. And she had given him her body and her heart. Perhaps she had no control over her heart, but Morgan was honest enough to know she ruled her own body. Shivering, she drew away from him.

“No, stay.” Nick nuzzled in her hair as he held her against his side.

“I have to go in,” she murmured. Morgan drew her body away as far as his arm would permit. “Please, let me go.”

Nick shifted until his face hovered over hers. His lips were curved in amusement; his face was relaxed and satisfied. “No,” he said simply. “You won't walk away from me again.”

“Nicholas, please.” Morgan turned her head aside. “It's late. I have to go.”

He became still for a moment, then took her face firmly in his hand and turned it back to his. He saw the gleam of tears, tightly controlled, and swore. “It occurs to you suddenly that you've just given yourself to a criminal and enjoyed it.”

“Don't!” Morgan shut her eyes. “Just let me go in. Whatever I've done, I've done because I wanted to.”

Nick stared down at her. She was dry-eyed now, but her eyes were bleak. Swearing again, he reached for his partially dry shirt and pulled Morgan into a sitting position. Athens, he thought again, could fry in hell.

“Put this on,” he ordered, swinging it over her shoulders. “We’ll talk.”

“I don’t want to talk. There’s no need to talk.”

“I said we’ll talk, Morgan.” Nick pushed her arm into a sleeve. “I won’t have you feeling guilty over what just happened.” She could feel the simmering anger pulsing from him as he pulled his shirt over her breasts. “I won’t have that,” he muttered. “It’s too much. I can’t explain everything now ... there are some things I won’t ever explain.”

“I’m not asking for explanations.”

His eyes locked on hers. “You ask every time you look at me.” Nick pulled a cigarette from the pocket of the shirt, then lit it. “My business in import-export has made me quite a number of contacts over the years. Some of whom, I imagine, you wouldn’t approve of.” He mused over this for a moment as he blew out a hazy stream of smoke.

“Nicholas, I don’t—”

“Shut up, Morgan. When a man’s decided to bare his soul, a woman shouldn’t interrupt. God knows how dark you’ll find it,” he added, as he drew in smoke again. “When I was in my early, impressionable twenties, I met a man who considered me suitable for a certain type of work. I found the work itself fascinating. Danger can become addicting, like any other drug.”

Yes, she thought as she stared out over the water. If nothing else, she could understand that.

“I began to—freelance.” He smiled at the term, but it had little to do with humor. “For his organization. For the most part I enjoyed it. In

any case, I was content with it. It's amazing that a way of life, ten years of my life should become a prison in a week's time."

Morgan had drawn her knees close to her chest while she stared out over the water. Nick laid a hand on her hair, but she still didn't look at him. He was finding it more difficult to tell her than he had imagined. Even after he'd finished, she might turn away from him. He'd be left with nothing—less than nothing. He drew hard on his cigarette, then stared at the red glow at the tip.

"Morgan, there are things I've done ..." He swore briefly under his breath. "There are things I've done I wouldn't tell you about even if I were free to. You wouldn't find them pleasant."

Now she lifted her face. "You've killed people."

He found it difficult to answer when she was looking at him with tired despair in her eyes. But his voice was cool with control. "When it was necessary."

Morgan lowered her head again. She hadn't wanted to think him a murderer. If he had denied it, she would have tried to have taken him at his word. She hadn't wanted to believe he was capable of what she considered the ultimate sin. The taking of a life.

Nick scowled at the cigarette and hurled it into the sea. I could have lied to her, he thought furiously. Why the hell didn't I just lie—I'm an expert at it. Because I can't lie to her, he realized with a tired sigh. Not anymore. "I did what I had to do, Morgan," he said flatly. "I can't erase the way I've lived for ten years. Right or wrong, it was my choice. I can't apologize for it."

"No, I'm not asking you to. I'm sorry if it seems that way." She drew herself up again and faced him. "Please, Nicholas, let's leave it at this. Your life's your own. You don't have to justify it to me."

"Morgan—" If she had hurled abuse at him, stabbed him with ice, he might have been able to keep silent. But he couldn't be silent while she struggled to understand. He would tell her, and the decision he'd

been struggling with for days would be made. “For the last six months, I’ve been working on breaking the smuggling ring that runs between Turkey and Lesbos.”

Morgan stared at him as though she’d never seen him before. “Breaking it? But I thought ... you told me—”

“I’ve never told you much of anything,” he said curtly. “I let you assume. It was better that way. It was necessary.”

For a moment she sat quietly, trying to sort out her thoughts. “Nicholas, I don’t understand. Are you telling me you’re a policeman?”

He laughed at the thought, and part of his anger drained. “No, Aphrodite, spare me that.”

Morgan frowned. “A spy then?”

The rest of his anger vanished. He cupped her face in his hands. She was so unbearably sweet. “You will romanticize it, Morgan, I’m a man who travels and follows orders. Be content with that, it’s all I can give you.”

“That first night on the beach ...” At last the puzzle pieces were taking a shape she could understand. “You were watching for the man who runs the smuggling ring. That was who Stephanos followed.”

Nick frowned and dropped his hands. She believed him without question or hesitation. Already she’d forgotten that he’d killed—and worse. Why, when she was making it so easy for him did he find it so hard to go on? “I had to get you out of the way. I knew he’d cross that section of beach on his way to Stevos’s cottage. Stevos was eliminated because he knew, as I don’t yet, the man’s exact position in the organization. I think he asked for a raise and got a knife in the back.”

“Who is he, Nicholas?”

“No.” His eyes came back to hers. His face was hard again, unreachable. “Even if I were sure, I wouldn’t tell you. Don’t ask me questions I can’t answer, Morgan. The more I tell you, the more dangerous your position becomes.” His eyes grew darker. “I was ready to use you once, and my organization is very interested in your talent with languages, but I’m a selfish man. You’re not going to be involved.” His tone was final and just a little furious. “I told my associate you weren’t interested.”

“That’s a bit presumptuous,” Morgan began. She frowned until he twisted his head and looked at her again. “I’m capable of making my own decisions.”

“You haven’t one to make,” Nick countered coolly. “And once I know for certain the identity of the head of the ring, my job’s finished. Athens will have to learn how to function without me.”

“You’re not going to do this ...” She gestured vaguely, not knowing what title to give his work. “This sort of thing anymore?”

“No.” Nick stared back out to sea. “I’ve been in it long enough.”

“When did you decide to stop?”

When I first made love with you, he thought, and nearly said it. But it wasn’t quite true. There was one more thing he would have to tell her. “The day I took Iona on the boat.” Nick let out an angry breath and turned to her. He had his doubts that she would forgive him for what he was going to say. “Iona’s in this, Morgan, deeply.”

“In the smuggling? But—”

“I can only tell you that she is, and that part of my job was to get information out of her. I took her out on the boat, fully intending to make love to her to help loosen her tongue.” Morgan kept her eyes steady and he continued, growing angrier. “She was cracking under pressure. I was there to help her along. That’s why someone tried to kill her.”

“Kill her?” Morgan tried to keep her voice level as she dealt with what he was telling her. “But Captain Tripolos said it was attempted suicide.”

“Iona would no more have committed suicide than she would have tended goats.”

“No,” she said slowly. “No, of course you’re right.”

“If I could have worked on her a little longer, I would have had all that I needed.”

“Poor Alex,” she murmured. “He’ll be crushed if it comes out that she was mixed up in this. And Dorian ...” She remembered his empty eyes and his words. *Poor Iona—so beautiful—so lost*. Perhaps he already suspected. “Isn’t there something you can do?” She looked up at Nick, this time with trust. “Do the police know? Captain Tripolos?”

“Tripolos knows a great deal and suspects more.” Nick took her hand now. He wanted the link badly. “I don’t work directly with the police, it slows things down. At the moment,” he added cheerfully, “Tripolos has me pegged as the prime suspect in a murder, an attempted murder, and sees me in the role of the masked smuggler. Lord, I’d have given him a thrill last night.”

“You enjoy your work, don’t you?” Morgan studied him, recognizing the light of adventure in his eyes. “Why are you stopping?”

His smile faded. “I told you I was with Iona. It wasn’t the first time I used that method. Sex can be a weapon or a tool, it’s a fact of life.” Morgan dropped her gaze to the sand. “She’d had too much champagne to be cooperative, but there would have been another time. Since that day, I haven’t felt clean.” He slid his hand under her chin and lifted it. “Not until tonight.”

She was studying him closely, searching. In his eyes she saw something she had only seen once before—regret, and a plea for

understanding. Lifting her arms, she brought his mouth down to hers. She felt more than his lips—the heady wave of his relief.

“Morgan.” He pressed her back to the sand again. “If I could turn back the clock and have this past week to live over ...” He hesitated, then buried his face in her hair. “I probably wouldn’t do anything differently.”

“You apologize beautifully, Nicholas.”

He couldn’t keep his hands off her. They were roaming again, arousing them both. “This thing should come to a head tomorrow night, then I’ll be at loose ends. Come away somewhere with me for a few days. Anywhere.”

“Tomorrow?” She struggled to keep her mind on his words while her body heated. “Why tomorrow?”

“A little complication I caused last night. Come, we’re covered with sand. Let’s take a swim.”

“Complication?” Morgan repeated as he hauled her to her feet. “What kind of complication?”

“I don’t think our man will tolerate the loss of a shipment,” he murmured as he slipped his shirt from her shoulders.

“You stole it!”

He was pulling her into the water. His blood was already pounding for her as he saw the moonlight glow white over her body. “With incredible ease.” When she was past her waist, he drew her against him. The water lapped around them as he began to explore her again. “Stephanos and I watched the connection from a safe distance on several runs.” His mouth brushed over hers, then traced down to her throat. “We’d just come back from one the night I found you on the beach. Now, about those few days.”

“What will you do tomorrow night?” Morgan drew back enough to stop his roaming hands and mouth. A hint of fear had worked its way in. “Nicholas, what’s going to happen?”

“I’m waiting for some conclusive information from Athens. When it comes, I’ll know better how to move. At any rate, I’ll be there when the boat docks with its cache tomorrow night.”

“Not alone?” She gripped his shoulders. “He’s already killed a man.”

Nick rubbed his nose against hers. “Do you worry for me, Aphrodite?”

“Don’t joke!”

He heard the very real panic in her voice and spoke soothingly. “By late tomorrow afternoon, Tripolos will be brought up to date. If everything goes as planned, I can brief him personally.” He smiled down at the frown on her face. “He’ll gain all official credit for whatever arrests are made.”

“But that’s unfair!” Morgan exclaimed. “After all your work, and the time, why shouldn’t you—”

“Shut up, Morgan, I can’t make love to a woman who’s constantly complaining.”

“Nicholas, I’m trying to understand.”

“Understand this.” Impatience shimmered in his voice as he pulled her close again. “I’ve wanted you from the minute I saw you sitting on that damn rock, and I haven’t begun to have enough. You’ve driven me mad for days. Not anymore, Aphrodite. Not anymore.”

He lowered his mouth, and all else was lost.

[Chapter Eleven](#)

Her jeans were still damp as Morgan struggled into them laughing. “You would make me so furious I’d run into the water fully dressed.”

Nick fastened the snap on his own. “The feeling was mutual.”

Turning her head, she looked at him as he stood, naked to the waist, shaking what sand he could from his shirt. A gleam of mischief lit her eyes. “Oh?” Taking a step closer, Morgan ran her palms up his chest—taking her time—enjoying the hard, firm feel of it before she linked them around his neck. “Did it make you furious thinking I was wearing a token from a lover waiting for me back home?”

“No,” he lied with a careless smile. Gripping his shirt in both hands, Nick hooked it around her waist to draw her closer. “Why should that concern me?”

“Oh.” Morgan nipped lightly at his bottom lip. “Then perhaps you’d like to hear about Jack.”

“I damn well wouldn’t,” he muttered before his mouth crushed down on hers. Even as her lips answered his, Nick heard the low sound of her muffled laughter. “Witch.” Then he took her deeper, deeper, until her laughter was only a sigh. “Maybe you prefer me when I’m angry.”

“I prefer you,” she said simply, and rested her head on his shoulder.

His arms tightened, strong, possessive. Yet somehow he knew strength alone would never keep her. “Dangerous woman,” Nick murmured. “I knew it the first time I held you.”

With a laugh, Morgan tossed back her head. “The first time you held me, you cursed me.”

“And I continue to do so.” But his lips sought hers again without an oath.

“I wish there was only tonight.” Suddenly, she was clinging to him with her heart racing. “No tomorrows, only now. I don’t want the sun

to come up.”

Nick buried his face in her hair as the guilt swamped him. He'd brought her fear from the first instant. Even loving her, he could bring her nothing else. He had no right to tell her now that his heart was hers for the asking. Once he told her, she might beg him to abandon his responsibility, leave his job half finished. And he would do just as she asked, he realized ... and never feel like a man again.

“Don't wish your days away, Morgan,” he told her lightly. “The sun comes up tomorrow, then goes down. And when it comes up again, we'll have nothing but time.”

She had to trust him, had to believe that he would be safe—that the danger he lived with would be over in little more than twenty-four hours.

“Come back with me now.” Lifting her head again, Morgan gave him a smile. Her worry and fears wouldn't help him. “Come back to the villa and make love with me again.”

“You tempt me, Aphrodite.” Bending, he kissed both her cheeks in a gesture she found unbearably gentle and sweet. “But you're asleep on your feet. There'll be other nights. I'll take you back.”

She allowed him to turn her toward the beach steps. “You might not find it as easy to leave me there alone as you think,” she commented with another smile.

With a quiet laugh, he drew her closer to his side. “Not easy perhaps, but—” His head whipped up abruptly, as if he were scenting the air. Narrowed and cold, his eyes swept the darkness of the cliffs above them.

“Nicholas, what—”

But his hand clamped over her mouth as he pulled her, once again, into the shadows of the cypress. Her heart leaped to her throat as it had before, but this time Morgan didn't struggle.

“Be still and don’t speak,” Nick whispered. Removing his hand, he pushed her back against the trunk of a tree. “Not a sound, Morgan.”

She nodded, but he wasn’t looking at her. His eyes were trained on the cliffs. Standing at the edge of the covering, Nick watched and waited. Then he heard it again—the quiet scrape of boot on rock. Tensing, he strained his eyes and at last saw the shadow. So, he thought with a grim smile as he watched the black form move swiftly over the rocks, he’s come for his cache. But you won’t find it, Nick told the shadow silently. And I’ll be like a hound on your tail.

Soundlessly, he moved back to Morgan. “Go back to the villa and stay there.” All warmth had dropped away from him. His voice was as cold as his eyes.

“What did you see?” she demanded. “What are you going to do?”

“Do as I say.” Taking her arm, he pulled her toward the beach steps. “Go quickly, I haven’t got time to waste. I’ll lose him.”

Him. Morgan felt a flutter of fear. She swallowed it. “I’m going with you.”

“Don’t be a fool.” Impatient, Nick dragged her along. “Go back to the villa, I’ll speak to you in the morning.”

“No.” Morgan pulled out of his hold. “I said I’m going with you. You can’t stop me.”

She was standing straight as an arrow, eyes blazing with a combination of fear and determination. Nick swore at her, knowing every second he stayed meant his man was farther away. “I don’t have time—”

“Then you’d better stop wasting it,” Morgan said calmly. “I’m coming.”

“Then come,” he said under his breath as he turned away from her. She won’t last five minutes on the cliffs without shoes, he thought.

She'd limp her way back to the villa in ten. He moved quickly up the beach steps without waiting for her. Gritting her teeth, Morgan raced after him.

As he left the steps to start his scramble up the cliff, Nick paid little attention to her. He cast his eyes to the sky and wished the night were not so clear. A cloud over the moon would allow him to risk getting closer to the man he followed. He gripped a rock and hauled himself up farther—a few pebbles loosened and skidded down. When he glanced back, he was surprised to see Morgan keeping pace with him.

Damn the woman, he thought with a twinge of reluctant admiration. Without a word, he held out his hand and pulled her up beside him. "Idiot," he hissed, wanting to shake her and kiss her all at once. "Will you go back? You don't have any shoes."

"Neither do you," Morgan gritted.

"Stubborn fool."

"Yes."

Cursing silently, Nick continued the climb. He couldn't risk the open path in the moonlight, so kept to the rocks. Though it wouldn't be possible to keep his quarry in sight, Nick knew where he was going.

Morgan clamped her teeth shut as the ball of her foot scraped against a rock. With a quick hiss of breath, she kept going. She wasn't going to whimper and be snapped at. She wasn't going to let him go without her.

On a rough ledge, Nick paused briefly to consider his options. Circling around would take time. If he'd been alone—and armed, he would have taken his chances with the narrow path now. Odds were that the man he followed was far enough ahead and confident enough to continue his journey without looking over his shoulder. But he wasn't alone, he thought on a flare of annoyance. And he had no more than his hands to protect Morgan if they were spotted.

“Listen to me,” he whispered, hoping to frighten her as he grabbed her by the shoulders. “The man’s killed—and killed more than once, I promise you. When he finds his cache isn’t where it should be, he’ll know he’s being hunted. Go back to the villa.”

“Do you want me to call the police?” Morgan asked calmly, though he’d succeeded very well in frightening her.

“No!” The word whipped out, no louder than a breath. “I can’t afford to give up the chance to see who he is.” Frustrated, he glared at her. “Morgan, I don’t have a weapon, if he—”

“I’m not leaving you, Nicholas. You’re wasting time arguing about it.”

He swore again, then slowly controlled his temper. “All right, damn you. But you’ll do exactly as I say or I promise you, I’ll knock you unconscious and shove you behind a rock.”

She didn’t doubt it. Morgan lifted her chin. “Let’s go.”

Agilely, Nick pulled himself over the ridge and onto the path. Before he could reach back to assist her, Morgan was kneeling on the hard ground beside him. He thought, as he looked into her eyes, that she was a woman men dreamed of. Strong, beautiful, loyal. Taking her hand, he dashed up the path, anxious to make up the time he’d wasted arguing with her. When he felt they’d been in the open long enough, he left the path for the rocks again.

“You know where he’s going,” Morgan whispered, breathing quickly. “Where?”

“A small cave near Stevos’s cottage. He thinks to pick up last night’s cache.” He grinned suddenly. Morgan heard it in his voice. “He won’t find it, and then, by God, he’ll sweat. Keep low now—no more talk.”

She could see the beauty of the night clearly in the moonlight. The sky was velvet, pierced with stars, flooded by the moon. Even the thin, scruffy bushes working their way through rock held an ethereal allure. The sound of the sea rose from below them, soft with

distance. An owl sent up a quiet hooting music of lazy contentment. Morgan thought, if she could look, she might find more blue-headed flowers. Then Nick was pulling her over the next ridge and pressing her to the ground.

“It’s just up ahead. Stay here.”

“No, I—”

“Don’t argue,” he said roughly. “I can move faster without you. Don’t move and don’t make a sound.”

Before she could speak, he was scrambling away, silently, half on his belly, half on his knees. Morgan watched him until he was concealed by another huddle of rocks. Then, for the first time since they had begun, she started to pray.

Nick couldn’t move quickly now. If he had misjudged the timing, he’d find himself face-to-face with his quarry. He needed to save that pleasure for the following night. But to know—to know who he had been hounding for six months was a bonus Nick couldn’t resist.

There were more rocks and a few trees for cover, and he used them as he skirted the dead man’s rough cottage. An attempt had been made to clear the ground for a vegetable garden, but the soil had never been worked. Nick wondered idly what had become of the woman who had sometimes shared Stevos’s bed and washed his shirts. Then he heard the quiet scrape of boot on rock again. Less than a hundred yards away, Nick estimated. Eyes gleaming in the darkness, he crept toward the mouth of the cave.

He could hear the movements inside, quiet, confident. Slipping behind a rock, he waited, patient, listening. The furious oath that echoed inside the cave brought Nick a rich thrill of pleasure.

Taste the betrayal, he told the man inside. And choke on it.

The movements inside the cave became louder. Nick’s smile spread. He’d be searching now, Nick concluded. Looking for signs to tell him

if his hiding place had been looted. But no, you haven't been robbed, Nick thought. Your little white bags were lifted from right under your nose.

He saw him then, striding out of the cave—all in black, still masked. Take it off, Nick ordered him silently. Take it off and let me see your face.

The figure stood in the shadows of the mouth of the cave. Fury flowed from him in waves. His head turned from side to side as if he were searching for something ... or someone.

They heard the sound at the same instant. The shifting of pebbles underfoot, the rustling of bushes. Dear God, Morgan! Nick thought and half rose from his concealment. As he tensed, he saw the black-clad figure draw a gun and melt back into the shadows.

With his heart beating in his throat, Nick gripped the rock and prepared to lunge. He could catch the man off-guard, he thought rapidly, gain enough time to shout a warning to Morgan so that she could get away. Fear licked at him—not for himself, but at the thought that she might not run fast enough.

The bush directly across the path trembled with movement. Nick sucked in his breath to lunge.

Bony, and with more greed than wit, a dusty goat stepped forward to find a more succulent branch.

Nick sunk down behind the rock, furious that he was trembling. Though she had done nothing more than what he had told her, he cursed Morgan fiercely.

With a furious oath, the man in black stuck the gun back in his belt as he strode down the path. As he passed Nick, he whipped off his mask.

Nick saw the face, the eyes, and knew.

Morgan huddled behind the rock where Nick had shoved her, her arms wrapped around her knees. It seemed she'd already waited an eternity. She strained to hear every sound—the whisper of the wind, the sigh of leaves. Her heart hadn't stopped its painful thudding since he'd left her.

Never again. Morgan promised herself. Never again would she sit and wait. Never again would she sit helpless and trembling, on the verge of hot, useless tears. If anything happened—she clamped down on the incomplete thought. Nothing was going to happen to Nick. He'd be back any moment. But the moments dragged on.

When he dropped down beside her, she had to stifle a scream. Morgan had thought her ears were tuned to hear even the dust blow on the wind, but she hadn't heard his approach. She didn't even say his name, just went into his arms.

“He's gone,” Nick told her.

The memory of that one shuddering moment of terror washed over him. He crushed his mouth to hers as though he were starving. All of her fears whipped out, one by one, until there was nothing in her but a well of love.

“Oh, Nicholas, I was so frightened for you. What happened?”

“He wasn't pleased.” With a grin that was both ruthless and daring, he pulled her to her feet. “No, he wasn't pleased. He'll be on the boat tomorrow.”

“But did you see who—”

“No questions.” He silenced her again with his mouth, roughly, as though the adventure were only beginning. “I don't want to have to lie to you again.” With a laugh, Nick drew her toward the path and the moonlight. “Now, my stubborn, courageous witch, I'll take you back. Tomorrow when your feet are too sore to stand, you'll curse me.”

He wouldn't tell her any more, Morgan thought. And for now, perhaps it was best. "Share my bed tonight." She smiled as she hooked her arm around his waist. "Stay another hour with me, and I won't curse you."

Laughing, he ran a hand down her hair. "What man could resist such an ultimatum?"

* * *

Morgan awoke as a soft knock sounded at her door. The small maid peeked inside.

"Your pardon, *kyrios*, a phone call from Athens."

"Oh ... thank you, Zena, I'll be right there." Rising quickly, Morgan hurried to the phone in Liz's sitting room, belting her robe as she went. "Hello?"

"Morgan, did I wake you? It's past ten."

"Liz?" Morgan tried to shake away the cobwebs. It had been dawn before she had slept.

"Do you know anyone else in Athens?"

"I'm a bit groggy." Morgan yawned, then smiled with memories. "I went for a late-night swim. It was wonderful."

"You sound very smug," Liz mused. "We'll have to discuss it later. Morgan, I feel terrible about it, but I'm going to have to stay here until tomorrow. The doctors are hopeful, but Iona's still in a coma. I can't leave Alex to cope with his family and everything else alone."

"Please, don't worry about me. I'm sorry, Liz. I know it's difficult for both of you." She thought of Iona's involvement in the smuggling and felt a fresh wave of pity. "How is Alex holding up? He seemed so devastated when he left here."

“It would be easier if the whole family didn’t look to him for answers. Oh, Morgan, it’s so ugly.” Strain tightened her voice and Morgan heard her take a deep breath to control it. “I don’t know how Iona’s mother will handle it if she dies. And suicide—it just makes it harder.”

Morgan swallowed the words she wanted to say. Nick had spoken to her in confidence; she couldn’t betray it even for Liz. “You said the doctors are hopeful.”

“Yes, her vital signs are leveling, but—”

“What about Dorian, Liz? Is he all right?”

“Barely.” Morgan heard Liz sigh again. “I don’t know how I could have been so blind not to see how he felt about her. He’s hardly left her bedside. If Alex hadn’t bullied him, I think he might have slept in the chair beside her last night instead of going home. From the way he looks this morning, I don’t think he got any sleep anyway.”

“Please give him my best—and Alex, too.” On a long frustrated breath she sat down. “Liz, I feel so helpless.” She thought of smuggling, attempted murder and shut her eyes. “I wish there were something I could do for you.”

“Just be there when I get back.” Though her tone lightened, Morgan recognized the effort. “Enjoy the beach for me, look for your goatherd. If you’re going to take moonlight swims, you should have some company for them.” When Morgan was silent Liz continued slowly. “Or did you?”

“Well, actually ...” Smiling, Morgan trailed off.

“Tell me, have you settled on a goatherd or a poet?”

“Neither.”

“It must be Nick then,” Liz concluded. “Imagine that—all I had to do was invite him to dinner.”

Morgan lifted a brow and found herself grinning. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Life was everywhere, she remembered, if you only knew where to look.

“*Mmm-hmmm*. We’ll talk about it tomorrow. Have fun. The number’s there if you need me for anything. Oh, there’s some marvelous wine in the cellar,” she added, and for the first time, the smile in her voice seemed genuine. “If you feel like a cozy evening—help yourself.”

“I appreciate it, Liz, but—”

“And don’t worry about me or any of us. Everything’s going to be fine. I just know it. Give Nick my love.”

“I will,” Morgan heard herself saying.

“I thought so. See you tomorrow.”

Smiling, Morgan replaced the receiver.

“And so,” Stephanos finished, lovingly stroking his moustache, “after several glasses of ouzo, Mikal became more expansive. The last two dates he gave me when our man joined the fishing expedition were the last week in February and the second week in March. That doesn’t include the evening we encountered Morgan James, or when you took the trip in his stead.”

Smiling, Nick flipped through the reports on his desk. “And from the end of February to the first week of April, he was in Rome. Even without my stroke of luck last night, that would have ruled him out. With the phone call I just got from Athens, I’d say we’ve eliminated him altogether from having any part in this. Now we know our man works alone. We move.”

“And you move with an easy heart?” Stephanos noted. “What did Athens say?”

“The investigation on that end is complete. He’s clean. His books, his records, his phone calls and correspondence. From this end, we know he hasn’t been on the island to take part in any of the runs.” Nick leaned back in his chair. “I have no doubt that since our man learned of the loss of his last shipment, he’ll make the trip tonight. He won’t want another to slip through his fingers.” He tapped idly on the papers which littered his desk. “Now that I have the information I’ve been waiting for, we won’t keep Athens waiting any longer. We’ll have him tonight.”

“You were out very late last night,” Stephanos commented, taking out an ugly pipe and filling it.

“Keeping tabs on me, Stephanos?” Nick inquired with a lift of brow. “I haven’t been twelve for a very long time.”

“You are in very good humor this morning.” He continued to fill his pipe, tapping the tobacco with patient care. “You haven’t been so for many days.”

“You should be glad my mood’s broken. But then, you’re used to my moods, aren’t you, old man?”

Stephanos shrugged in agreement or acceptance. “The American lady is fond of walking on the beach. Perhaps you encountered her last night?”

“You’re becoming entirely too wise in your old age, Stephanos.” Nick struck a match and held it over the bowl of the pipe.

“Not too old to recognize the look of a man satisfied with a night of pleasure,” Stephanos commented mildly and sucked to get flame. “A very beautiful lady. Very strong.”

Lighting a cigarette, Nick smiled at him. “So you’ve mentioned before. I’d noticed myself. Tell me, Stephanos, are you also not too old to have ideas about strong, beautiful ladies?”

Stephanos cackled. “Only the dead have no ideas about strong, beautiful ladies, Nicholas. I’m a long way from dead.”

Nick flashed him a grin. “Keep your distance, old man. She’s mine.”

“She is in love with you.”

The cigarette halted on its journey to Nick’s lips. His smile faded. Stephanos stood grinning broadly as he was pierced with one of his friend’s, lancing looks. “Why do you say that?”

“Because it is true, I’ve seen it.” He puffed enjoyably on his pipe. “It is often difficult to see what is standing before your eyes. How much longer is she alone?”

Nick brought his thoughts back and scowled at the papers on his desk. “I’m not certain. Another day or so at least, depending on Iona’s condition. In love with me,” he murmured and looked back at Stephanos.

He knew she was attracted, that she cared—perhaps too much for her own good. But in love with him ... He’d never allowed himself to consider the possibility.

“She will be alone tonight,” Stephanos continued blandly, appreciating Nick’s stunned look. “It wouldn’t do for her to wander from the villa.” He puffed a few moments in silence. “If all does not go smoothly, you would want her safely behind locked doors.”

“I’ve already spoken to her. She understands enough to listen and take care.” Nick shook his head. Today of all days he had to think clearly. “It’s time we invited Captain Tripolos in. Call Mitilini.”

Morgan enjoyed a late breakfast on the terrace and toyed with the idea of walking to the beach. He might come, she thought. I could phone and ask him to come. No, she decided, nibbling on her lip as she remembered all he had told her. If tonight is as important as he thinks, he needs to be left alone. I wish I knew more. I wish I knew

what he was going to do. What if he gets hurt or ... Morgan clamped down on the thought and wished it were tomorrow.

“*Kyrios.*” At the maid’s quiet summons, Morgan gasped and spun. “The captain from Mitilini is here to speak with you.”

“What?” Panic rose and Morgan swallowed it. If Nick had spoken to him, Tripolos would hardly be waiting to see her, she thought frantically. Perhaps Nick wasn’t ready yet. What could Tripolos possibly want with her?

“Tell him I’m out,” she decided quickly. “Tell him I’ve gone to the beach or the village.”

“Very good, *kyrios.*” The maid accepted her order without question, then watched as Morgan streaked from the terrace.

For the second time, Morgan climbed the steep cliff path. This time, she knew where she was going. She could see Tripolos’s official car parked at the villa’s entrance as she rounded the first bend. She increased her pace, running until she was certain she herself was out of view.

Her approach had been noticed, however. The wide doors of Nick’s villa opened before she reached the top step. Nick came out to meet her.

“*Yiasou.* You must be in amazing shape to take the hill at that speed.”

“Very funny,” she panted as she ran into his arms.

“Is it that you couldn’t keep away from me or is something wrong?” He held her close a moment, then drew her back just far enough to see her face. It was flushed with the run, but there was no fear in her eyes.

“Tripolos is at the villa.” Morgan pressed her hand to her heart and tried to catch her breath. “I slipped out the back because I didn’t

know what I should say to him. Nicholas, I have to sit down. That's a very steep hill."

He was searching her face silently. Still struggling for her breath, Morgan tilted her head and returned the survey. She laughed and pushed the hair from her eyes. "Nicholas, why are you staring at me like that?"

"I'm trying to see what's standing in front of my eyes."

She laughed again. "Well, I am, you fool, but I'm going to collapse from exhaustion any minute."

With a sudden grin, Nick swept her off her feet and into his arms. She circled his neck as his mouth came down on hers.

"What are you doing?" she asked, when he let her breathe again.

"Taking what's mine."

His lips came back to hers and lingered. Slowly, almost lazily, he began to tease her tongue with his until he felt her breath start to shudder into his mouth. He promised himself that when everything was over, he would kiss her again, just like this—luxuriously with the heat of the sun warming her skin. When the night's work was finally over, he thought, and for a moment his lips were rough and urgent. Needs rushed through him almost painfully before he banked them.

"So ... " He strolled into the house, still carrying her. "The captain came to see you. He's very tenacious."

Morgan took a deep breath to bring herself back from the power of the kiss. "You said you were going to speak with him today, but I didn't know if you were ready. If you'd gotten the information you needed. And to confess and humiliate myself, I'm a coward. I didn't want to face him again."

"Coward, Aphrodite? No, that's something you're not." He laid his cheek against hers a moment, making her wonder what was going

on in his head. “I called Mitilini,” he continued, “I left a message for Tripolos. After our talk, he should lose all interest in you.”

“I’ll be devastated.” He grinned and took her lips again. “Would you put me down? I can’t talk to you this way.”

“I’m enjoying it.” Ignoring her request, he continued into the salon. “Stephanos, I believe Morgan might like something cool. She had quite a run.”

“No, nothing really. *Efxaristo*.” Faintly embarrassed, she met Stephanos’s checkerboard grin. When he backed out of sight, she turned her head back to Nick. “If you know who the man is who’s running the smuggling, can’t you just tell Captain Tripolos and have him arrested?”

“It’s not that simple. We want to catch him when the cache is in his possession. There’s also the matter of cleaning up the place in the hills where he keeps his goods stored before he ships them on. That part,” he added with an absent interest, “I’ll leave to Tripolos.”

“Nicholas, what will you do?”

“What has to be done.”

“Nicholas—”

“Morgan,” he interrupted. Standing her on feet, he placed his hands on her shoulders. “You don’t want a step-by-step description. Let me finish this without bringing you in anymore than I already have.”

He lowered his mouth, taking hers with uncharacteristic gentleness. He brought her close, but softly, as if he held something precious. Morgan felt her bones turn to water.

“You have a knack for changing the subject,” she murmured.

“After tonight, it’s the only subject that’s going to interest me. Morgan —”

“A thousand pardons.” Stephanos hovered in the doorway. Nick looked up impatiently.

“Go away, old man.”

“Nicholas!” Morgan drew out of his arms, sending him a look of reproof. “Has he always been rude, Stephanos?”

“Alas my lady, since he took his thumb out of his mouth.”

“Stephanos,” Nick began in warning, but Morgan gave a peal of laughter and kissed him.

“Captain Tripolos requests a few moments of your time, Mr. Gregoras,” Stephanos said, respectfully and grinned.

“Give me a moment, then send him in, and bring the files from the office.”

“Nicholas.” Morgan clung to his arm. “Let me stay with you. I won’t get in the way.”

“No.” His refusal was short and harsh. He saw the hurt flicker in her eyes and sighed. “Morgan, I can’t allow it even if I wanted to. This isn’t going to touch you. I can’t let it touch you. That’s important to me.”

“You’re not going to send me away,” she began heatedly.

He arched a brow and looked very cool. “I’m not under the same pressure I was last night, Morgan. And I will send you away.”

“I won’t go.”

His eyes narrowed. “You’ll do precisely what I say.”

“Like hell.”

Fury flickered, smoldered, then vanished in a laugh. “You’re an exasperating woman, Aphrodite. If I had the time, I’d beat you.” To

prove his point, he drew her close and touched his lips to her. "Since I don't, I'll ask you to wait upstairs."

"Since you *ask*."

"Mr. Gregoras. Ah, Miss James." Tripolos lumbered into the room. "How convenient. I was inquiring for Miss James at the Theoharis villa when your message reached me."

"Miss James is leaving," Nick told him. "I'm sure you'll agree her presence isn't necessary. Mr. Adonti from Athens has asked me to speak with you on a certain matter."

"Adonti?" Tripolos repeated. Nick watched surprise and interest move across the pudgy face before his eyes became direct. "So, you are acquainted with Mr. Adonti's organization?"

"Well acquainted," Nick returned mildly. "We've had dealings over the years."

"I see." He studied Nick with a thoughtful purse of his lips. "And Miss James?"

"Miss James chose an inopportune time to visit friends," Nick said and took her arm. "That's all. If you'll excuse me, I'll just see her out. Perhaps you'd care for a drink while you're waiting." With a gesture toward the bar, Nick drew Morgan out into the hall.

"He looked impressed with the name you just dropped."

"Forget the name," Nick told her briefly. "You've never heard it."

"All right," she said without hesitation.

"What have I done to deserve this trust you give me?" he demanded suddenly. "I've hurt you again and again. I couldn't make up for it in a lifetime."

"Nicholas—"

“No.” He cut her off with a shake of his head. In an uncharacteristic gesture of nerves or frustration, he dragged a hand through his hair. “There’s no time. Stephanos will show you upstairs.”

“As you wish,” Stephanos agreed from behind them. Handing Nick a folder, he turned to the stairs. “This way, my lady.”

Because Nick had already turned back to the salon, Morgan followed the old man without a word. She’d been given more time with him, she told herself. She couldn’t ask for any more than that.

Stephanos took her into a small sitting room off the master bedroom. “You’ll be comfortable here,” he told her. “I’ll bring you coffee.”

“No. No, thank you, Stephanos.” She stared at him, and for the second time he saw her heart in her eyes. “He’ll be all right, won’t he?”

He grinned at her so that his moustache quivered. “Can you doubt it?” he countered before he closed the door behind him.

Chapter Twelve

There was nothing more frustrating than waiting, Morgan decided after the first thirty minutes. Especially for someone who simply wasn’t made for sitting still.

The little room was shaped like a cozy box and done in warm, earthy colors with lots of polished wood that gleamed in the early afternoon light. It was filled with small treasures. Morgan sat down and scowled at a Dresden shepherdess. At another time she might have admired the flowing grace of the lines, the fragility. Now she could only think that she was of no more practical use than that pale piece of porcelain. She had, in a matter of speaking, been put on the shelf.

It was ridiculous for Nick to constantly try to ... shield her. Morgan’s sigh was quick and impatient. Hadn’t that been Liz’s words when she had spoken of Alex’s actions? After all, Morgan thought as she rose

again, she was hardly some trembling, fainting scatterbrain who couldn't deal with whatever there was to face. She remembered trembling and fainting dead away in his arms. With a rueful smile, she paced to the window. Well, it wasn't as though she made a habit of it.

In any case, her thoughts ran on, he should know that she would, and could, face anything now that they were together.

If he understood how she felt about him, then ... but did he? she thought abruptly. She'd shown him, certainly she'd shown him in every possible way open to her, but she hadn't told him.

How can I? Morgan asked herself as she sunk into another chair. When a man had lived ten years of his life following his own rules, courting danger, looking for adventures, did he want to tie himself to a woman and accept the responsibilities of love?

He cared for her, Morgan reflected. Perhaps more than he was comfortable with. And he wanted her—more than any man had ever wanted her. But love ... love wouldn't come easily to a man like Nicholas. No, she wouldn't pressure him with hers now. Even the unselfish offer of it would be pressure, she thought, when he had so much on his mind. She was only free to go on showing him, trusting him.

Even that seemed to throw him off-balance a bit, she mused, smiling a little. It was as if he couldn't quite accept that someone could see him as he was, know the way he had lived and still give him trust. Morgan wondered if he would have been more comfortable if she had pulled back from him a little after the things he had told her. He would have understood her condemnations more readily than her acceptance. Well, he'll just have to get used to it, she decided. He'll just have to get used to it because I'm not going to make it easy for him to back away.

Restless, she walked to the window. Here was a different view, Morgan thought, from one she so often looked out on from her

bedroom window. Higher, more dangerous. More compelling, she thought with a quick thrill. The rocks seemed more jagged, the sea less tame. How it suited the man she'd given her heart to.

There was no terrace there, and suddenly wanting the air and sun, Morgan went through to his bedroom and opened his balcony doors. She could hear the sea hissing before she reached the rail. With a laugh, she leaned farther out.

Oh, she could live with the challenge of such a view every day, she thought, and never tire of it. She could watch the sea change colors with the sky, watch the gulls swoop over the water and back to the nests they'd built in the cliff walls. She could look down on the Theoharis villa and appreciate its refined elegance, but she would choose the rough gray stone and dizzying height.

Morgan tossed back her head and wished for a storm. Thunder, lightning, wild wind. Was there a better spot on earth to enjoy it? Laughing, she dared the sky to boil and spew out its worst.

“My God, how beautiful you are.”

The light of challenge still in her eyes, Morgan turned. Leaning against the open balcony door, Nick stared at her. His face was very still, his gaze like a lance. The passion was on him, simmering, bubbling, just beneath the surface. It suited him, Morgan thought, suited those long, sharp bones in his face, those black eyes and the mouth that could be beautiful or cruel.

As she leaned back on the railing, the breeze caught at the ends of her hair. Her eyes took on the color of the sky. Power swept over her, and a touch of madness. “You want me, I can see it. Come and show me.”

It hurt, Nick discovered. He'd never known, until Morgan, that desire could hurt. Perhaps it was only when you loved that your needs ached in you. How many times had he loved her last night? he

wondered. And each time, it had been like a tempest in him. Now, he promised himself, this time, he would show her a different way.

Slowly, he went to her. Taking both of her hands, he lifted them, then pressed his lips to the palms. When he brought his gaze to hers, Nick saw that her eyes were wide and moved, her lips parted in surprise. Something stirred in him—love, guilt, a need to give.

“Have I shown you so little tenderness, Morgan?” he murmured.

“Nicholas ...” She could only whisper his name as her pulses raged and her heart melted.

“Have I given you no soft words, no sweetness?” He kissed her hands again, one finger at a time. She didn’t move, only stared at him. “And you still come to me. I’m in your debt,” he said quietly in Greek. “What price would you ask me?”

“No, Nicholas, I ...” Morgan shook her head, unable to speak, nearly swaying with the weakness this gentle, quiet man brought her.

“You asked me to show you how I wanted you.” He put his hands to her face as if she were indeed made of Dresden porcelain, then touched his lips almost reverently to hers. A sound came from her, shaky and small. “Come and I will.”

He lifted her, not with a flourish as he had on the porch, but as a man lifts something he cherishes. “Now ...” He laid her down with care. “In the daylight, in my bed.”

Again, he took her hand, tracing kisses over the back and palm, then to the wrist where her pulse hammered. All the while he watched her as she lay back, staring at him with something like astonished wonder.

How young she looks, Nick thought as he gently drew her finger into his mouth. And how fragile. Not a witch now, or a goddess, but only a woman. His woman. And her eyes were already clouding, her

breath already trembling. He'd shown her the fire and the storm, he thought, but not once—not once had he given her spring.

Bending, he nibbled lightly at her lips, allowing his hands to touch no more than her hair.

It might have been a dream, so weak and weightless did she feel. Nick kissed her eyes closed so that Morgan saw no more than a pale red glow. Then his lips continued, over her forehead, her temples, down the line of her cheekbones—always soft, always warm. The words he whispered against her skin flowed like scented oil over her. She would have moved to bring him closer if her arms had not been too heavy to lift. Instead, she lay in the flood of his tenderness.

His mouth was at her ear, gently torturing with a trace of tongue, a murmured promise. Even as she moaned in surrender, he moved lower to taste and tease the curve of her neck. With kisses like whispers, and whispers like wine, he took her deeper. Gentleness was a drug for both of them.

Hardly touching her, he loosened the buttons of her blouse and slipped it from her. Though he felt the firm pressure of her breasts against him, he took his mouth to the slope of her shoulder instead. He could feel the strength there, the grace, and he tarried.

Morgan's eyes were closed, weighed down with gold-tipped lashes. Her breath rushed out between her lips. He knew he could watch those flickers of pleasure move over her face forever. With his hands once more buried in her hair, Nick kissed her. He felt the yielding and the hunger before he moved on.

Slowly, savoring, he took his lips down to the soft swell—circling, nibbling until he came to the tender underside of her breast. On a moan, Morgan fretted under him as if she were struggling to wake from a dream. But he kept the pace slow and soothed her with words and soft, soft kisses.

With aching gentleness he stroked his tongue over the peak, fighting a surge of desperation when he found it hot and ready. Her movements beneath him took on a rhythmic sinuousness that had the blood pounding in his brain. Her scent was there, always there on the verge of his senses even when she wasn't with him. Now he wallowed in it. As he suckled, he allowed his hands to touch her for the first time.

Morgan felt the long stroke of his hands, the quick scrape of those strong rough fingers that now seemed sensitive enough to tune violins. They caressed lightly, like a breeze. They made her ache.

Soft, slow, gentle, his mouth traveled down the center of her body, lingering here, exploring there until he paused where her slacks hugged across her stomach. When she felt him unfasten them, she trembled. She arched to help him, but Nick drew them down inch by inch, covering the newly exposed flesh with moist kisses so that she could only lie steeped in a pool of pleasure.

And when she was naked, he continued to worship her with his lips, with his suddenly gentle hands. She thought she could hear her own skin hum. The muscles in her thighs quivered as he passed over them, and her desire leaped from passive to urgent.

“Nicholas,” she breathed. “Now.”

“You’ve scratched your feet on the rocks,” he murmured, pressing his lips against the ball of her foot. “It’s a sin to mar such skin, my love.” Watching her face, he ran his tongue over the arch. Her eyes flew open, dazed with passion. “I’ve longed to see you like this.” His voice grew thick as his control began to slip. “With sunlight streaming over you, your hair flowing over my pillow, your body trembling for me.”

As he spoke, he began the slow, aching journey back, gradually back to her lips. Needs pressed at him and demanded he hurry, but he wouldn't be rushed. He told himself he could linger over the taste and the feel of her for days.

Her arms weren't heavy now, but strong as they curled around him. Every nerve, every pore of her body seemed tuned to him. The harmony seemed impossible, yet it sung through her. His flesh was as hot and damp as hers, his breath as unsteady.

"You ask how I want you," he murmured, thrilling to her moan as he slipped into her. "Look at me and see."

His control hung by a thread. Morgan pulled his mouth to hers and snapped it.

Nick held Morgan close, gently stroking her back while her trembles eased. She clung to him, almost as much in wonder as in love. How was she to have known he had such tenderness in him? How was she to have known she would be so moved by it? Blinking back tears, she pressed her lips to his throat.

"You've made me feel beautiful," she murmured.

"You are beautiful." Tilting her head back, Nick smiled at her. "And tired," he added, tracing a thumb over the mauve smudges under her eyes. "You should sleep, Morgan, I won't have you ill."

"I won't be ill." She snuggled against him, fitting herself neatly against the curve of his body. "And there'll be time for sleeping later. We'll go away for a few days, like you said."

Twining a lock of her hair around his finger, Nick gazed up at the ceiling. A few days with her would never be enough, but he still had the night to get through. "Where would you like to go?"

Morgan thought of her dreams of Venice and Cornish moors. With a sigh, she closed her eyes and drew in Nick's scent. "Anywhere. Right here." Laughing, she propped herself on his chest. "Wherever it is, I intend to keep you in bed a good deal of the time."

"Is that so?" His mouth twitched as he tugged on her hair. "I might begin to think you have designs only on my body."

“It is a rather nice one.” In a long stroke, she ran her hands down his shoulders, enjoying the feel of firm flesh and strong bone. “Lean and muscled ...” She trailed off when she spotted a small scar high on his chest. A frown creased her brow as she stared at it. It seemed out of place on that smooth brown skin. “Where did you get this?”

Nick tilted his head, shifting his gaze down. “Ah, an old battle scar,” he said lightly.

From a bullet, Morgan realized all at once. Horror ripped through her and mirrored in her eyes. Seeing it, Nick cursed his loose tongue.

“Morgan—”

“No, please.” She buried her face against his chest and held tight. “Don’t say anything. Just give me a minute.”

She’d forgotten. Somehow the gentleness and beauty of their lovemaking had driven all the ugliness out of her mind. It had been easy to pretend for a little while that there was no threat. Pretending’s for children, she reminded herself. He didn’t need to cope with a child now. If she could give him nothing else, she would give him what was left of her strength. Swallowing fear, she pressed her lips to his chest then rolled beside him again.

“Did everything go as you wanted with Captain Tripolos?”

A strong woman, Nick thought, linking his hand with hers. An extraordinary woman. “He’s satisfied with the information I’ve given him. A shrewd man for all his plodding technique.”

“Yes, I thought he was like a bulldog the first time I encountered him.”

Chuckling, Nick drew her closer. “An apt description, Aphrodite.” He shifted then, reaching to the table beside him for a cigarette. “I think he’s one of the few policemen I find it agreeable to work with.”

“Why do you—” She broke off as she looked up and focused on the slim black cigarette. “I’d forgotten,” Morgan murmured. “How could I have forgotten?”

Nick blew out a stream of smoke. “Forgotten what?”

“The cigarette.” Morgan sat up, pushing at her tumbled hair. “The stub of the cigarette near the body.”

He lifted a brow, but found himself distracted by the firm white breasts easily within reach. “So?”

“It was fresh, from one of those expensive brands like you’re smoking.” She let out an impatient breath. “I should have told you before, but it hardly makes any difference at this point. You already know who killed Stevos—who runs the smuggling.”

“I never told you I did.”

“You didn’t have to.” Annoyed with herself, Morgan frowned and missed Nick’s considering look.

“Why didn’t I?”

“You’d have told me if you hadn’t seen his face. When you wouldn’t answer me at all, I knew you had.”

He shook his head as a reluctant smile touched his lips. “*Diabolos*, it’s a good thing I didn’t cross you earlier in my career. I’m afraid it would have been over quickly. As it happens,” he added, “I saw the cigarette myself.”

“I should have known you would,” she muttered.

“I can assure you Tripolos didn’t miss it either.”

“That damn cigarette has driven me to distraction.” Morgan gave an exasperated sigh. “There were moments I suspected everyone I

knew—Dorian, Alex, Iona, even Liz and Andrew. I nearly made myself sick over it.”

“You don’t name me.” Nick studied the cigarette in his hand.

“No, I already told you why.”

“Yes,” he murmured, “with an odd sort of compliment I haven’t forgotten. I should have eased your mind sooner, Morgan, about what I do. You might have slept better.”

Leaning over, she kissed him. “Stop worrying about my sleep. I’m going to start thinking I look like a tired hag.”

He slid a hand behind her neck to keep her close. “Will you rest if I tell you that you do?”

“No, but I’ll hit you.”

“Ah, then I’ll lie and tell you you’re exquisite.”

She hit him anyway, a quick jab in the ribs.

“So, now you want to play rough.” Crushing out his cigarette, Nick rolled her beneath him. She struggled for a moment, then eyed him narrowly.

“Do you know how many times you’ve pinned me down like this?” Morgan demanded.

“No, how many?”

“I’m not sure.” Her smile spread slowly. “I think I’m beginning to like it.”

“Perhaps I can make you like it better.” He muffled her laugh with his lips.

He didn’t love her gently now, but fiercely. As desperate as he, Morgan let the passion rule her. Fear that it might be the last time

caused her response and demands to be urgent. She lit a fire in him.

Now, where his hands had trailed slowly, they raced. Where his mouth had whispered, it savaged. Morgan threw herself into the flames without a second thought. Her mouth was greedy, searching for his taste everywhere while her hands rushed to touch and arouse.

Her body had never felt so agile. It could melt into his one moment, then slither away to drive him to madness. She could hear his desire in the short, harsh breath, feel it in the tensing and quivering of his muscles as she roamed over them, taste it in the dampness that sheened his skin. It matched her own, and again they were in harmony.

She arched against him as his mouth rushed low—but it was more a demand than an invitation. Delirious with her own strength and power, Morgan dug her fingers into his hair and urged him to take her to that first giddy peak. Even as she cried out with it, she hungered for more. And he gave more, while he took.

But she wasn't satisfied with her own pleasure. Ruthlessly she sought to undermine whatever claim he still held to sanity. Her hands had never been so clever, or so quick. Her teeth nipped at his skin before she soothed the tiny pains with a flick of her tongue. She heard him groan and a low, sultry laugh flowed from her. His breath caught when she reached him, then came out in an oath. Morgan felt the sunlight explode into fragments as he plunged into her.

Later, much later, when he knew his time with her was nearly up, Nick kissed her with lingering tenderness.

“You're going,” Morgan said, struggling not to cling to him.

“Soon. I'll have to take you back to the villa in a little while.” Sitting up, he drew her with him. “You'll stay inside. Lock the doors, tell the servants to let no one in. No one.”

Morgan tried to promise, and found she couldn't form the words. "When you're finished, you'll come?"

Smiling, he tucked her hair behind her ear. "I suppose I can handle your window vines again."

"I'll wait up for you and let you in the front door."

"Aphrodite." Nick pressed a kiss to her wrist. "Where's your romance?"

"Oh, God!" Morgan threw her arms around his neck and clung. "I wasn't going to say it—I promised myself I wouldn't. Be careful." Biting back tears, she pressed her face against his throat. "Please, please be careful. I'm terrified for you."

"No, don't." Feeling the dampness against his skin, he held her tighter. "Don't cry for me."

"I'm sorry." With a desperate effort, she forced back the tears. "I'm not helping you."

Nick drew her away and looked at the damp cheeks and shimmering eyes. "Don't ask me not to go, Morgan."

"No." She swallowed again. "I won't. Don't ask me not to worry."

"It's the last time," he said fiercely.

The words made her shudder, but she kept her eyes on his. "Yes, I know."

"Just wait for me." He pulled her back against him. "Wait for me."

"With a bottle of Alex's best champagne," she promised in a stronger voice.

He pressed a kiss to her temple. "We'll have some of mine now, before I take you back. A toast," he told her as he drew her away

again. “To tomorrow.”

“Yes.” She smiled. It almost reached her eyes. “I’ll drink with you to tomorrow.”

“Rest a moment.” With another kiss, he laid her back against the pillow. “I’ll go bring some up.”

Morgan waited until the door had closed behind him before she buried her face in the pillow.

Chapter Thirteen

It was dark when she woke. Contused, disoriented, Morgan struggled to see where she was. The room was all shifting shadows and silence. There was a cover over her—something soft and light with a fringe of silk. Beneath it, she was warm and naked.

Nicholas, she thought in quick panic. She’d fallen asleep and he’d gone. On a moan, she sat up, drawing her knees to her chest. How could she have wasted those last precious moments together? How long? she thought abruptly. How long had he been gone? With trembling fingers, she reached for the lamp beside the bed.

The light eased some of her fears, but before she could climb out of bed to find a clock, she saw the note propped against the lamp. Taking it, Morgan studied the bold, strong writing. *Go back to sleep* was all it said.

How like him, she thought, and nearly laughed. Morgan kept the note in her hand, as if to keep Nick close, as she rose to look for her clothes. It didn’t take her long to discover they were gone.

“The louse!” Morgan said aloud, forgetting the tender thoughts she had only moments before. So, he wasn’t taking any chances making certain she stayed put. Naked, hands on her hips, she scowled around the room. Where the devil does he think I’d go? she asked

herself. I have no way of knowing where he is ... or what he's doing, she thought on a fresh flood of worry.

Wait. Suddenly cold, Morgan pulled the cover from the bed and wrapped herself in it. All I can do is wait.

The time dripped by, minute by endless minute. She paced, then forced herself to sit, then paced again. It would be morning in only a few more hours, she told herself. In the morning, the wait would be over. For all of them.

She couldn't bear it, she thought in despair one moment. She had to bear it, she told herself the next. Would he never get back? Would morning never come? On a sound of fury, she tossed the cover aside. She might have to wait, Morgan thought grimly as she marched to Nick's closet. But she'd be damned if she'd wait naked.

Nick shifted the muscles in his shoulders and blocked out the need for a cigarette. Even the small light would be dangerous now. The cove was bathed in milky moonlight and silence. There would be a murmur now and then from behind a rock. Not from a spirit, but from a man in uniform. The cove still held secrets. Lifting his binoculars, Nick again scanned the sea.

"Any sign?" Tripolos seemed remarkably comfortable in his squat position behind a rock. He popped a tiny mint into his mouth and crunched quietly. Nick merely shook his head and handed the glasses to Stephanos.

"Thirty minutes," Stephanos stated, chewing on the stem of his dead pipe. "The wind carries the sound of the motor."

"I hear nothing." Tripolos gave the old man a doubtful frown.

Nick chuckled as the familiar feeling of excitement rose. "Stephanos hears what others don't. Just tell your men to be ready."

“My men are ready.” His gaze flicked over Nick’s profile. “You enjoy your work, Mr. Gregoras.”

“At times,” Nick muttered, then grinned. “This time, by God.”

“And soon it’s over,” Stephanos said from beside him.

Nick turned his head to meet the old man’s eyes. He knew the statement covered more than this one job, but the whole of what had been Nick’s career. He hadn’t told him, but Stephanos knew. “Yes,” he said simply, then turned his eyes to the sea again.

He thought of Morgan and hoped she was still asleep. She’d looked so beautiful—and so exhausted when he’d come back into the room. Her cheeks had been damp. Damn, he couldn’t bear the thought of her tears. But he’d felt a wave of relief that she’d been asleep. He didn’t have to see her eyes when he left her.

She’s safer there than if I’d taken her back, Nick told himself. With luck, she’d still be asleep when he got back and then he’d have spared her hours of worry. Stashing her clothes had been an impulse that had eased his mind. Even Morgan wouldn’t go wandering around without a stitch on her back.

His grin flashed again. If she woke and looked for them, she’d curse him. The idea gave him a moment’s pleasure. He could see her, standing in the center of his room with only the moonlight covering her as she raged.

He felt the low aching need in the pit of his stomach, and promised himself he’d keep her just that way—naked fire—until the sun went down again.

Lifting the binoculars, he scanned the dark sea. “They’re coming.”

The moon threw the boat into silhouette. A dozen men watched her approach from clumps of rock and shadows. She came in silence, under the power of oars.

She was secured with little conversation and a few deft movements of rope. There was a scent Nick recognized. The scent of fear. A fresh bubble of excitement rose, though his face was deadly calm. He's there, Nick thought. And we have him.

The crew left the boat to gather in the shadows of the beach. A hooded figure moved to join them. At Nick's signal, the cove was flooded with light. The rocks became men.

"In the King's name," Tripolos stated grandly, "this vessel will be searched for illegal contraband. Put up your weapons and surrender."

Shouts and the scrambling of men shattered the glasslike quiet of the cove. Men seeking to escape, and men seeking to capture tangled in the sudden chaos of sound and light. Gunfire shocked the balmy air. There were cries of pain and fury.

The smugglers would fight with fist and blade. The battle would be short, but grim. The sounds of violence bounced hollowly off the rocks and drifted out on the air.

Nick saw the hooded figure melt away from the confusion and streak from the cove. Swearing, he raced after it, thrusting his gun back in his belt. A burly form collided with him as another man sought escape. Each swore at the obstacle, knowing the only choice was to remove it.

Together, they rolled over the rocks, away from the noise and the light. Thrown into darkness, they tumbled helplessly until the ground leveled. A blade glistened, and Nick grasped the thick wrist with both hands to halt its plunge to his throat.

The crack of shots had Morgan springing up from her chair. Had she heard, or just imagined? she wondered as her heart began to thud. Could they be so close? As she stared into the darkness, she heard another shot, and the echo. Fear froze her.

He's all right, she told herself. He'll be here soon, and it'll be over. I know he's all right.

Before the sentence had finished racing through her mind, she was running down the steps and out of the villa.

Telling herself she was only being logical, Morgan headed for the beach. She was just going to meet him. He'd be coming along any minute, and she would see for herself that he wasn't hurt. Nick's jeans hung loosely at her hips as she streaked down the cliff path. Her breath was gasping now, the only sound as her feet padded on the hard dirt. Morgan thought it would almost be a relief to hear the guns again. If she heard them, she might be able to judge the direction. She could find him.

Then, from the top of the beach steps, she saw him walking across the sand. With a sob of shuddering relief, she flew down them to meet him.

He continued, too intent on his own thoughts to note her approach. Morgan started to shout his name, but the word strangled in her throat. She stopped running. Not Nicholas, she realized as she stared at the hooded figure. The moves were wrong, the walk. And he'd have no reason to wear the mask. Even as her thoughts began to race, he reached up and tore off the hood. Moonlight fell on golden hair.

Oh God, had she been a fool not to see it? Those calm, calm eyes—too calm, she thought frantically. Had she ever seen any real emotion in him? Morgan took a step in retreat, looking around desperately for some cover. But he turned. His face hardened as he saw her.

“Morgan, what are you doing out here?”

“I—I wanted to walk.” She struggled to sound casual. There was no place for her to run. “It's a lovely night. Almost morning, really.” As he

advanced on her she moistened her lips and kept talking. “I didn’t expect to see you. You surprised me. I thought—”

“You thought I was in Athens,” Dorian finished with a smile. “But as you see, I’m not. And, I’m afraid, Morgan, you’ve seen too much.” He held up the hood, dangling it a moment before he dropped it to the sand.

“Yes.” There was no use dissembling. “I have.”

“It’s a pity.” His smile vanished as though it had never been. “Still, you could be useful. An American hostage,” he said thoughtfully as he scanned her face. “Yes, and a woman.” Grabbing her arm, Dorian began to pull her across the sand.

She jerked and struggled against his hold. “I won’t go with you.”

“You have no choice”—he touched the handle of his knife—“unless you prefer to end up as Stevos did.”

Morgan swallowed as she stumbled across the beach. He said it so casually. *Some people have no capacity for emotion—love, hate.* He hadn’t been speaking of Iona, Morgan realized, but himself. He was as dangerous as any animal on the run.

“You tried to kill Iona too.”

“She’d become a nuisance. Greedy not only for money, but to hold me. She thought to blackmail me into marriage.” He gave a quick laugh. “I had only to tempt her with the heroin. I had thought the dose I gave her was enough.”

Purposely, Morgan fell to her knees as though she’d tripped. “You would have finished her that morning if I hadn’t found her first.”

“You have a habit of being in the wrong place.” Roughly, Dorian hauled her to her feet. “I had to play the worried lover for a time—dashing back and forth between Lesbos and Athens. A nuisance. Still, if I’d been allowed one moment alone with her in the hospital

..." Then he shrugged, as if the life or the death of a woman meant nothing. "So, she'll live and she'll talk. It was time to move in any case."

"You lost your last shipment," Morgan blurted out, desperate to distract him from his hurried pace toward the beach steps. If he got her up there—up there in the rocks ... and the dark ...

Dorian froze and turned to her. "How do you know this?"

"I helped steal it," she said impulsively. "Your place in the hills, the cave—"

The words choked off as his hand gripped her throat. "So you've taken what's mine. Where is it?"

Morgan shook her head.

"Where?" Dorian demanded as his fingers tightened.

A god, she thought staring into his face as the moonlight streamed over it. He had the face of a god. Why hadn't she remembered her own thought that gods were bloodthirsty? Morgan put a hand to his wrist as if in surrender. His fingers eased slightly.

"Go to hell."

Swiftly, he swept the back of his hand across her face, knocking her to the sand. His eyes were a calm empty blue as he looked down at her. "You'll tell me before I'm through with you. You'll beg to tell me. There'll be time," he continued as he walked toward her, "when we're off the island."

"I'll tell you nothing." With the blood singing in her ears, Morgan inched away from him. "The police know who you are, there isn't a hole big enough for you to hide in."

Reaching down, he grabbed her by the hair and hauled her painfully to her feet. "If you prefer to die—"

Then she was free, going down to her knees again as Dorian stumbled back and fell onto the sand.

“Nick.” Dorian rubbed the blood from his mouth as his gaze traveled up. “This is a surprise.” It dropped again to the revolver Nick held in his hand. “Quite a surprise.”

“*Nicholas!*” Scrambling up, Morgan ran to him. He never looked at her. His arm was rigid as iron when she gripped it. “I thought—I was afraid you were dead.”

“Get up,” he told Dorian with a quick gesture of the gun. “Or I’ll put a bullet in your head while you lie there.”

“Were you hurt?” Morgan shook his arm, wanting some sign. She’d seen that cold hard look before. “When I heard the shots—”

“Only detained.” Nick pushed her aside, his gaze fixed on Dorian. “Get rid of the gun. Toss it over there.” He jerked his head and leveled his own revolver. “Two fingers. If you breathe wrong, you won’t breathe again.”

Dorian lifted out his gun in a slow, steady motion and tossed it aside. “I have to admit you amaze me, Nick. It’s been you who’s been hounding me for months.”

“My pleasure.”

“And I would have sworn you were a man concerned only with collecting his trinkets and making money. I’ve always admired your ruthlessness in business—but it seems I wasn’t aware of *all* of your business.” One graceful brow rose. “A policeman?”

Nick gave a thin smile. “I answer to one man only,” he said quietly. “Adonti.” The momentary flash of fear in Dorian’s eyes gave him great pleasure. “You and I might have come to this sooner. We nearly did last night.”

A shadow touched Dorian’s face briefly, then was gone. “Last night?”

“Did you think it was only a goat who watched you?” Nick asked with a brittle laugh.

“No.” Dorian gave a brief nod. “I smelled something more—foolish of me not to have pursued it.”

“You’ve gotten careless, Dorian. I took your place on your last run and made your men tremble.”

“You,” Dorian breathed.

“A rich cache,” Nick added, “according to my associates in Athens. It might have been over for you then, but I waited until I was certain Alex wasn’t involved. It was worth the wait.”

“Alex?” Dorian laughed with the first sign of true pleasure. “Alex wouldn’t have the stomach for it. He thinks only of his wife and his ships and his honor.” He gave Nick a thoughtful glance. “But it seems I misjudged you. I thought you a rich, rather singleminded fool, a bit of a nuisance with Iona this trip, but hardly worth a passing thought. My congratulations on your talent for deceit, and”—he let his gaze travel and rest on Morgan—“your taste.”

“Efxaristo.”

Morgan watched in confusion, then in terror, as Nick tossed his gun down to join Dorian’s. They lay side by side, black and ugly, on the white sand.

“It’s my duty to turn you over to Captain Tripolos and the Greek authorities.” Calmly, slowly, Nick drew out a knife. “But it will be my pleasure to cut out your heart for putting your hands on my woman.”

“No! Nicholas, don’t!”

Nick stopped Morgan’s panicked rush toward him with a terse command. “Go back to the villa and stay there.”

“Please,” Dorian interrupted with a smile as he got to his feet. “Morgan must stay. Such an interesting development.” He pulled out his own knife with a flourish. “She’ll be quite a prize for the one who lives.”

“Go,” Nick ordered again. His hand tensed on the knife. He was half Greek, and Greek enough to have tasted blood when he had seen Dorian strike her. Morgan saw the look in his eyes.

“Nicholas, you can’t. He didn’t hurt me.”

“He left his mark on your face,” he said softly, and turned the knife in his hand. “Stay out of the way.”

Touching her hand to her cheek, she stumbled back.

They crouched and circled. As she watched, the knives caught the moonlight and held it. Glittering silver, dazzling and beautiful.

At Dorian’s first thrust, Morgan covered her mouth to hold back a scream. There was none of the graceful choreography of a staged fight. This was real and deadly. There were no adventurous grins or bold laughs with the thrusts and parries. Both men had death in his eyes. Morgan could smell the sweat and the sweet scent of blood from both of them.

Starlight dappled over their faces, giving them both a ghostly pallor. All she could hear was the sound of their breathing, the sound of the sea, the sound of steel whistling through the air. Nick was leading him closer to the surf—away from Morgan. Emotion was frozen in him. Anger, such anger, but he knew too much to let it escape. Dorian fought coldly. An empty heart was its own skill.

“I’ll pleasure myself with your woman before the night’s over,” Dorian told him as blade met blade. His lips curved as he saw the quick, naked fury in Nick’s eyes.

Morgan watched with horror as a bright stain spread down Nick’s sleeve where Dorian had slipped through his guard. She would have

screamed, but there was no breath in her. She would have prayed, but even her thoughts were frozen.

The speed with which they came together left her stunned. One moment they were separate, and the next they were locked together as one tangled form. They rolled to the sand, a confusion of limbs and knives. She could hear the labored breathing and grunted curses. Then Dorian was on top of him. Morgan watched, numb with terror, as he plunged his knife. It struck the sand, a whisper away from Nick's face. Without thought, Morgan fell on the guns.

Once, the revolver slipped through her wet hands, back onto the sand. Gritting her teeth, she gripped it again. As she knelt, she aimed toward the entwined bodies. Coldly, willing herself to do what she had always despised, she prepared to kill.

A cry split the air, animal and primitive. Not knowing which one of them it had been torn from, Morgan clutched the gun with both hands and kept it aimed on the now motionless heap in the sand. She could still hear breathing—but only from one. If Dorian stood up, she swore to herself, and to Nick, that she would pull the trigger.

A shadow moved. She heard the labored breathing and pressed her lips together. Against the trigger, her finger shook lightly.

“Put that damn thing down, Morgan, before you kill me.”

“Nicholas.” The gun slipped from her nerveless hand.

He moved to her, limping a little. Reaching down, he drew her to her feet. “What were you doing with the gun, Aphrodite?” he said softly, when he felt her tremble under his hands. “You couldn't have pulled the trigger.”

“Yes.” Her eyes met his. “I could.”

He stared at her for a moment and saw she was speaking nothing less than the truth. With an oath, he pulled her against him. “Damn it, Morgan, why didn't you stay in the villa? I didn't want this for you.”

“I couldn’t stay in the house, not after I heard the shooting.”

“Yes, you hear shooting, so naturally you run outside.”

“What else could I do?”

Nick opened his mouth to swear, then shut it again. “You’ve stolen my clothes,” he said mildly. He wouldn’t be angry with her now, he promised himself as he stroked her hair. Not while she was shaking like a leaf. But later, by God, later ...

“You took mine first.” He couldn’t tell if the sound she made was a laugh or a sob. “I thought ...” Suddenly, she felt the warm stickiness against her palm. Looking down, she saw his blood on her hand.

“Oh, God, Nicholas, you’re hurt!”

“No, it’s nothing, I—”

“Oh, damn you for being macho and stupid. You’re *bleeding!*”

He laughed and crushed her to him again. “I’m not being macho and stupid, Aphrodite, but if it makes you happy, you can nurse all of my scratches later. Now, I need a different sort of medicine.” He kissed her before she could argue.

Her fingers gripped at his shirt as she poured everything she had into that one meeting of lips. Fear drained from her, and with it, whatever force had driven her. She went limp against him as his energy poured over her.

“I’m going to need a lot of care for a very long time,” he murmured against her mouth. “I might be hurt a great deal more seriously than I thought. No, don’t.” Nick drew her away as he felt her tears on his cheeks. “Morgan, don’t cry. It’s the one thing I don’t think I can face tonight.”

“No, I won’t cry,” she insisted as the tears continued to fall. “I won’t cry. Just don’t stop kissing me. Don’t stop.” She pressed her mouth

to his. As she felt him, warm and real against her, the tears and trembling stopped.

“Well, Mr. Gregoras, it seems you intercepted Mr. Zoulas after all.”

Nick swore quickly, but without heat. Keeping Morgan close, he looked over her head at Tripolos. “Your men have the crew?”

“Yes.” Lumbering over, he examined the body briefly. He noted, without comment that there was a broken arm as well as the knife wound. With a gesture, he signaled one of his men to take over. “Your man is seeing to their transportation,” he went on.

Nick kept Morgan’s back to the body and met Tripolos’s speculative look calmly. “It seems you had a bit of trouble here,” the captain commented. His gaze drifted to the guns lying on the sand. He drew his own conclusions. “A pity he won’t stand trial.”

“A pity,” Nick agreed.

“You dropped your gun in the struggle to apprehend him, I see.”

“It would seem so.”

Tripolos stooped with a wheeze and handed it back to him. “Your job is finished?”

“Yes, my job is finished.”

Tripolos made a small bow. “My gratitude, Mr Gregoras.” He smiled at the back of Morgan’s head. “And my congratulations.”

Nick lifted a brow in acknowledgment. “I’ll take Miss James home now. You can reach me tomorrow if necessary. Good night, Captain.”

“Good night,” Tripolos murmured and watched them move away.

Morgan leaned her head against his shoulder as they walked toward the beach steps. Only a few moments before she had fought to keep

from reaching them. Now they seemed like the path to the rest of her life.

“Oh, look, the stars are going out.” She sighed. There was nothing left, no fear, no anxiety. No more doubts. “I feel as if I’ve waited for this sunrise all my life.”

“I’m told you want to go to Venice and ride on a gondola.”

Morgan glanced up in surprise, then laughed. “Andrew told you.”

“He mentioned Cornwall and the Champs d’Élysées as well.”

“I have to learn how to bait a hook, too,” she murmured. Content, she watched as day struggled with night.

“I’m not an easy man, Morgan.”

“*Hmm?* No,” she agreed fervently. “No, you’re not.”

He paused at the foot of the steps and turned her to face him. The words weren’t easy for him now. He wondered why he had thought they would be. “You know the worst of me already. I’m not often gentle, and I’m demanding. I’m prone to black, unreasonable moods.”

Morgan smothered a yawn and smiled at him. “I’d be the last one to disagree.”

He felt foolish. And, he discovered, afraid. Would a woman accept words of love when she had seen a man kill? Did he have any right to offer them? Looking down, he saw her, slim and straight in his clothes—jeans that hung over her hips—a shirt that billowed and hid small, firm breasts and a waist he could nearly span with his hands. Right or wrong, he couldn’t go on without her.

“Morgan ...”

“Nicholas?” Her smile became puzzled as she fought off a wave of weariness. “What is it?”

His gaze swept back to hers, dark, intense, perhaps a little desperate.

“Your arm,” she began and reached for him.

“No! *Diabolos.*” Gripping her by the shoulders, he shook her. “It’s not my arm, listen to me.”

“I am listening,” she tossed back with a trace of heat. “What’s wrong with you?”

“This.” He covered her mouth with his. He needed the taste of her, the strength. When he drew her away, his hands had gentled, but his eyes gleamed.

With a sleepy laugh, she shook her head. “Nicholas, if you’ll let me get you home and see to your arm—”

“My arm’s a small matter, Aphrodite.”

“Not to me.”

“Morgan.” Nick stopped her before she could turn toward the steps again. “I’ll make a difficult and exasperating husband, but you won’t be bored.” Taking her hands, he kissed them as he had on his balcony. “I love you enough to let you climb your mountains, Morgan. Enough to climb them with you if that’s what you want.”

She wasn’t tired now, but stunned into full alertness. Morgan opened her mouth, but found herself stupidly unable to form a word.

“Damn it, Morgan, don’t just stare at me.” Frustration and temper edged his voice. “Say yes, for God’s sake!” Fury flared in his eyes. “I won’t let you say no!”

His hands were no longer in hers, but gripping her arms again. She knew, any moment, he would start shaking her. But there was more in his eyes than anger. She saw the doubts, the fears, the fatigue. Love swept into her, overwhelmingly.

“Won’t you?” she murmured.

“No.” His fingers tightened. “No, I won’t. You’ve taken my heart. You won’t leave with it.”

Lifting a hand, she touched his cheek, letting her finger trace over the tense jaw. “Do you think I could climb mountains without you, Nicholas?” She drew him against her and felt his shudder of relief. “Let’s go home.”

* * * * *

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SILHOUETTE

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