

Deadly Secrets

A novel of
The Greek Isles Series

Angel Sefer



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Dedications

In memory of my late mother, Helen, a wonderful mother and my best friend. She will always be remembered for her love, kindness, and wisdom, and she will live in my heart forever.

In memory of my late grandmother, Lili, whose unconditional love and encouragement inspired me throughout the years.

Dedicated to my beloved family in Greece and the USA for all their love, guidance, and support; and, especially, to my wonderful husband, Bill, my loving father Dimitris, my amazing Aunt Angie, and my adorable son Dimitris.

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Chapter One

HELENA SQUEEZED THE WOODEN SHIP railing until her knuckles whitened. Trying to control the turmoil of her emotions, she took a deep breath of fresh, salty air and let it out slowly. Her heart still thundered in her chest... *Am I really going through with this?*

An eerie feeling washed over her, making the hair on the back of her neck stand on end. She scanned her surroundings uneasily. The ship deck was full of people—mostly families. *What about him?* she wondered, and releasing the railing, turned on her heel. A tall, slim man dressed in black, standing on the other side of the deck, stared at her intensely with piercing eyes. Helena swallowed hard. Pushing back the fear, she stared right back at him. Being among so many people gave her a sense of security. The man hesitated for a moment and then walked away.

Stop being paranoid! she reprimanded herself. *There's nothing to worry about... then again, what was that last night?* she shivered, thinking of the night before when someone *accidentally* bumped into her on the pavement in front of her hotel and pushed her right in front of a speeding car. *If the hotel concierge hadn't pulled me back at the very last minute...* She closed her eyes and shook her head to clear her gloomy thoughts. *Everything is going to be all right,* she tried to persuade herself. *I need to do this... I need to do it for my father... I need to do it for myself...*

A little girl's laughter brought her back to reality. She turned and looked at the happy, little face... *I could have been happy like that, if only...*

Closing her eyes, she leaned her head back and stood still, enjoying the caress of the warm sunlight on her face and the revitalizing sea breeze blowing softly through her hair. *What an amazing sensation!*

She opened her eyes and let the captivating scenery fill her vision. It took her breath away. *This is how Dad must have felt every time he stood on the bridge of his ship.* She leaned against the railing, mesmerized by the magnificent view of the crystal clear, sapphire waters of the Aegean Sea. Her thoughts flew back to cherished memories of her childhood, and she was overwhelmed. She could hardly wait...

Feeling restless, she looked around her, wondering how much longer it would take them to get there. Mykonos was only a few hours trip from Athens, but it seemed like ages to her.

It had been thirteen years since she last saw the amazing, blue waters of the Aegean and the beautiful island where she was born. She had been only eight years old when her father was declared dead, and her mother, heartbroken, took little Helena to England.

Since then, the shadows of the past kept her mother away from the island she used to adore. Only after her mother's death had Helena decided to come back to meet her only living relatives, and to try to unravel the mystery surrounding her father's death.

Now, as the ship approached the shores of Mykonos, Helena closed her eyes and saw her mother's pale face, staring at her with eyes wide open from anxiety and fear. *Don't go back! Don't ever go back! I want you to promise me...* Helena could still hear her soft, trembling voice whispering while she was squeezing her hand tightly.

Helena swallowed hard, feeling her heart flutter wildly. *I have nothing to worry about,* she tried to reassure herself. All she needed were some answers, and after that, she would head back to England, and go on with her life. However, deep down inside, she knew it wasn't going to be that simple. Deep down inside, she had this eerie feeling that *destiny was waiting just around the corner for her...*

* * *

Thinking back, she could vividly remember her happy childhood. They used to live in a big, white house on top of a cliff, overlooking the Aegean. She would wake up in the morning and run to her balcony to enjoy the breathtaking view.

Her parents were so happy back then. The main offices of her father's

shipping company were in Piraeus—the harbor of Athens—but he ran the business mainly from the island, in order to spend as much time as possible with her mother and her.

Mykonos was a beautiful island, which took her mother's breath away when she stepped foot on it as a young bride twenty-two years before. The beauty of the land and the kindness of the people kept her captive for a long time. Erin, Helena's mother, was hopelessly in love with her husband, Captain Angelos Sistakis, and never regretted following him to his homeland, or leaving London, with its cloudy days, behind.

The sunshine in Greece warmed people's hearts; something about all these islands spread across the Aegean captivated their souls, and they never wanted to leave.

That's precisely the way Helena felt when her mother told her they were leaving. She'd cried and pleaded to stay, but her mother's decision was final. Her father's mysterious disappearance had broken her mother's heart, and the place had lost its magic touch. Her mother just wanted to get out of there as soon as possible and leave the memories behind.

However, her mother never forgot the love she and Angelos shared and the happy moments at their house on the island. She spent the rest of her life bitter and miserable. Two years ago, she became sick. Helena watched her slowly fade away and wondered if she even tried to recover.

For the last thirteen years, her mother hadn't been the same cheerful and lively woman she used to be. She never got over her husband's tragic death, but deep down inside, Helena knew it was a lot more than that... her mother feared for her little girl's life. She was convinced Angelos' death wasn't an accident, and that Helena was in grave danger, as well...

* * *

The beauty in front of her interrupted her thoughts. She took a deep breath, staring at the shores of Mykonos with the scenic coves and the golden sand beaches. *Welcome home, Helena...* Her heartbeat accelerated, and anticipation washed over her like a cold wave. Tears filled her eyes, seeing her homeland... the land of her adorable father... the land of her ancestors. *She was finally home—the home she'd been deprived of for so long...*

She wiped the tears with the back of a shaky hand. It was so unfair

to lose her father at such a tender age, and to be deprived of everything and everyone she ever knew. Helena, however, knew her mother was scared; she was scared to death. She lived the rest of her life with a threat hovering over her, every step of the way. *Was it real?* Helena wondered, and the scene of the previous night's near miss flashed before her eyes. *Was any of it real?* Helena had thought about it a million times. The only thing she was sure about was that the threat *felt* real to her mother.

And what about Grandma's diary? Helena wondered. According to her mother, Eleana—Angelos' mother—had a gift of *foreseeing* future events and had written them down in her diary. A lot of important events that affected their lives were written down in her diary... years before they happened. *If only I could find that diary*, Helena inwardly wished. She *needed* to find it, not only to get some answers, but to verify it actually existed. Sometimes, she was worried about her mother's state of mind. Maybe the pain and years of bitterness had affected her and made her imagine things. Finding that diary would prove her mother wasn't hallucinating, and this was essential to Helena, since her mother had been the center of her world since they left Greece. And now, she was gone, too.

* * *

As the ship came around a small peninsula, Helena held her breath, looking at the cubed-shaped, white houses of Chora—as the town of Mykonos was commonly known—glowing in the sunlight. Picturesque windmills and countless churches were scattered higher up on the hill, composing a breathtaking picture.

The port was overflowing with life. Numerous ships and colorful fishing boats were anchored everywhere, while dozens of little shops were scattered all over the waterfront. People strolled along the dock, enjoying the beautiful, sunny day.

The ship moved closer, and Helena's heartbeat accelerated. Conflicting emotions of excitement and anxiety made her feel dizzy and disoriented. She felt as if she were floating loose in time and space...

Helena saw people sitting at tables outside the cafes in the shade

of pergolas, lazily drinking their afternoon coffee while kids attacked their ice creams, piled to the top with fruits and nuts. She was so impatient; she could hardly wait for the ship to dock. Squeezing her way through the numerous passengers, she managed to be among the first ones to walk off.

Once she stepped foot on the ground, she felt lost with so many people around—passengers disembarking the ship and workers running back and forth, carrying luggage and boxes.

She stood undecided, letting her eyes wander over the colorful surroundings and listening to people talking in Greek... so fascinating and so different than speaking Greek at school.

Helena had been bilingual since birth. After they moved to England, her mother had sent her to a Greek school in the afternoons, so she continued her education in the Greek language, as well. Speaking Greek helped her remain connected to her late father and the life she was forced to leave behind.

Suddenly, she realized people were staring at her. She could see admiration mixed with curiosity in their glances. She knew she had inherited her mother's tall and slim stature along with her long, silky blonde hair and expressive blue eyes. Among the dark-haired Greeks with the bronzed by the sun bodies, her pale complexion left her out of place.

Where is my ride? By now, they knew she was coming. She hadn't written from England, as she wasn't sure whether she was going through with this visit. When she arrived in Athens, though, she called her Aunt Sophie and told her she was on her way to the island.

Sophie Sistakis was her father's younger sister, and Helena remembered her kind face with warm, brown eyes surrounded by long, black hair. Her aunt was only eight years older than her and used to take her for walks on the beach, play games with her, and read her stories. She felt ashamed she hadn't talked to her aunt in all these years. Though her mother didn't have the right to keep her away from her family, Erin had been scared and heartbroken.

Somehow, Aunt Sophie understood, and she never tried to invade their privacy.

The surprise in her aunt's voice wasn't unexpected, but the pleasure and excitement she expressed helped Helena move beyond her uncertainty.

She didn't have to explain anything before her aunt had made her feel loved and welcome, simply telling her to catch the next ferry home. *Home*. Yes, she was finally home.

"Miss Sistakis?" She jumped, hearing a deep, sensual voice with a thick Greek accent directly behind her.

She turned to face a tall, seductively handsome man with jet-black hair shining in the sun and the most amazing dark brown eyes she had ever seen. She always considered herself tall, being five feet eight inches, but she felt like a child in front of him. He stood at least five inches taller than her, but his size didn't intimidate her. The way his dark, captivating eyes looked at her made her feel small and vulnerable, though.

The handsome face with the strong jaw, and the well-built, muscular body under the sun-tanned skin, accelerated her heartbeat and caused her mouth to go dry.

Helena hadn't realized she was staring until she saw the amusement in his eyes and a smile appeared on his inviting lips. *He's laughing at me, and he has every right to do it*, she reprimanded herself.

"Yes, I'm Helena Sistakis... and who are you?" she questioned in English, her voice nothing more than a whisper.

The man seemed to hesitate for a moment, searching her face. "I'm Dimitris," he replied finally. His name struck a chord somewhere deep inside her. Bewildered, she studied him for a minute. *No*, she thought. *If we had met before, I would definitely remember such a hunk.*

As his captivating gaze roamed over her, Helena felt butterflies in her stomach. Nervously, she licked her lips and dug her nails into her palms.

"Has my aunt sent you to take me home?" she inquired, straightening her back and trying to steady her trembling voice.

"Yes. I'm ready to go when you are. My car is just around the corner," he replied in Greek, obviously aware she spoke it fluently.

She reached for her suitcase, and her hand froze on the handle. The man from the ship stood a few feet away, staring at her, seeming totally unaffected by everything going on around him... Helena noticed the round face with the small, piercing eyes that reminded her of a snake. Her blood turned to ice. "What on earth?"

"Is everything all right?" Dimitris questioned.

Helena didn't respond, totally absorbed by the hostile expression

on the stranger's face.

"Helena..." Dimitris' voice next to her ear and his warm hand on her arm brought her back to reality.

She glanced at him, puzzled. Dimitris' eyes were fixed on her, searching her face. Then he peered at the other man.

"Who's that? Do you know him?" he asked.

"No," she whispered. "First time I saw him was on the ship. He seemed to be watching me..."

"Wait here!" Dimitris ordered her and strode towards the man dressed in black.

Helena watched as the man hesitated for a moment, turned on his heel, and rushed towards the street. Dimitris swiftly took off right after him, like a panther going after his prey. He was closing in on him when a black Mercedes appeared speeding out of nowhere. As the brakes of the car squeaked right in front of the man, he opened the back door and jumped inside. He had barely closed the door when the car launched forward. Dimitris arrived at the street right at the moment the Mercedes was disappearing around a corner.

Helena took a deep breath, unable to move. *What was that all about? Who was he? What did he want?*

Immobilized, she watched Dimitris reaching in his pocket and getting out his cell phone. He spoke on the phone as he was heading back to her.

"Is everything all right, Captain?"

Helena looked at a young sailor who was rushing towards Dimitris.

"Yes," Dimitris replied. "Everything is under control," he added, glancing at the street for one more time.

The sailor hesitated for a moment, then gave Helena a polite smile, and walked away.

"We should be going," Dimitris said, arriving next to her. He picked up her suitcase and pulled her by the arm, leading her on the whitewashed cobble pavement towards the street. She had to run to keep up with him, as he didn't seem willing to slow down.

As they came around the corner of a cafe, she stopped dead in her tracks. An impressive Porsche Cayenne Jeep was parked right behind the building, its black color shining in the summer sun like onyx. Helena took a deep breath... her dream car...

Her thoughts were interrupted as he had already put her suitcase

in the vehicle and was holding the door for her to get in. She blushed as their eyes met, and hastily climbed inside. Sinking into the soft leather seat, she admired the luxurious interior and the impressive dashboard. A thrill washed over her. Riding in a Jeep like this was a dream come true. She drew a deep breath and watched Dimitris walk around the vehicle and get in on the driver's side.

The strong engine came to life, and the car took off. Helena had to hold on to her seat, as he was driving way too fast for these narrow roads. She glanced over at him, trying hard to control her accelerated heartbeat. His eyes were set on the road, and she had a chance to admire the intriguing profile and the broad shoulders. Her gaze moved to the powerful hands with the long fingers holding steadily onto the wheel. A jolt of desire shot right through her. *What would it feel like having those hands touching me... caressing me?*

Bewildered, Helena snapped out of it, wondering where these thoughts came from. She hardly knew the man. She took a deep breath and let it out slowly, flexing her hands to release some of the tension. *What is the matter with me?* she wondered. *It's probably due to the adrenaline rush caused by fear,* she decided. *It just can't be him...*

Turning her gaze to the road ahead of them, she took another deep breath, trying to clear the wild thoughts whirling around in her mind.

She sensed his eyes on her. It took all the strength she could muster to keep from staring back at him. The proximity in the confined area of the car was bad enough; she couldn't handle getting lost in those gorgeous, dark-brown eyes of his again.

Helena kept silent, and so did he.

Trying to draw her attention from his powerful presence, she started noticing the surroundings. They were going up a hill, and things began to seem familiar. She had forgotten how beautiful this place was.

The road was curving around, and she had a great view of the port and Chora with its little white houses built amphitheatrically, overlooking the water. Over to the side, Helena saw a Greek Orthodox Church built on the edge of the hill, dominating the area.

Something about the Cycladic Islands—a group of thirty-three islands in the Aegean Sea forming a circle around the sacred island of Delos—made people feel as if they were in a dreamland... gorgeous sandy beaches, architecture in white and blue, and narrow roads leading

uphill to windmills and beautiful churches which had been standing there for hundreds of years, dominating people and nature.

Helena always liked Greek Orthodox churches with their Byzantine paintings, their gold and marble decorations, their vitro windows, and the strong smell of incense in the air.

When she finally saw the house at the top of the hill, she felt restless, and her heart pounded faster. Just as beautiful as she remembered, it stood drowned in red, pink, and white rosebushes, as well as white and yellow jasmine, while a pergola climbed all the way to the second floor windows. She remembered the exquisite aroma of the flowers and couldn't wait to get closer.

Dizzied by the roller-coaster of her emotions, she glanced at the man next to her and noticed he was watching her again. The look in his eyes was intense and penetrating, and Helena felt as if it could reach all the way to her soul. She drew a deep breath to calm down and instinctively licked her lips. *What is he thinking about?* He wasn't the typical Greek; they usually were so openhearted and friendly.

She didn't have time to think of anything else, as they pulled into the driveway that circled in front of the house.

The front door swung open, and a beautiful young woman with long black hair came outside. She stood at the top of the marble staircase leading to the veranda in front of the house. Helena had the urge to jump out of the car and run into her arms. Instead, she climbed out slowly and hesitated, staring at her aunt for a few seconds. Astonished, she saw her aunt launching down the steps and taking her in her arms. She felt so welcome and happy—like a little girl coming home after a long trip.

She couldn't help glancing towards Dimitris. He was staring at her intensely, his gaze burning into her skin...

She turned back to her aunt. In her crimson red dress and matching sandals, she was more beautiful than she remembered. Her long shiny hair fell in loose, soft waves onto her shoulders, and her skin was tanned. Admiring her aunt, Helena realized for one more time how pale her own skin was.

Her aunt released her hug and took a step back to take a better look at her. Her sparkling eyes gave away how happy she was to see her.

"Welcome home, Helena," she said excited and turned to Dimitris,

who was waiting patiently by the car. "Isn't she beautiful? She looks just like an angel."

Helena's breath caught in her throat as she heard him agreeing with her aunt. She didn't have time to say anything as her aunt went on. "You look just the way I thought you would. I always knew the cute little girl with the sweet blue eyes and the long blonde braid would turn into a gorgeous young woman."

Helena felt her cheeks growing warm, and she spoke quickly so that her aunt wouldn't have a chance to go on appraising her. "It's so good to see you again, Aunt Sophie. I've missed you so much."

"Then why did it take you so long to come back?" the man asked in a low tone of voice, sounding somewhat sarcastic.

Helena was taken aback by his intervention, and facing him, she gave him a hard look. *How dare he get involved in family matters like this?*

Her retort died on her lips when Sophie said, "Dimitris, leave her alone. You know it wasn't her fault." Then, smiling warmly, she turned to Helena. "You have to forgive Dimitris. He's been with us for so long that he gets very protective of the family."

Helena couldn't get over her aggravation. She already felt bad enough for not having contacted Sophie all these years; she didn't appreciate a stranger interfering in a sensitive matter like this. She wanted to set him straight but decided to leave the matter alone for now.

Without giving him another look, she followed her aunt into the house. Going through the huge mahogany doors, she shivered, feeling his intense gaze burning into her back...

Only after she heard the powerful engine coming to life, she realized she was holding her breath. *I never even thanked him for picking me up at the port... Never mind. It serves him right for interfering like this...*

* * *

Dimitris drove too fast for the narrow roads of the island. He had to release some tension... Being so close to her after all these years and trying to act totally unaffected were more than he could handle. She had turned out just as amazing as he had imagined. She was breathtaking... and she *didn't remember him...*

Chapter Two

HELENA TRIED TO BANISH Dimitris and his behavior from her mind, beginning to explore the home around her. Her aunt led her into a large living room with huge windows overlooking the sea. The windows were open, and she could smell the jasmine and the salt from the sea breeze in the air—just as she remembered it. She looked around, and everything started coming back to her. Yes, she remembered this lovely room. There were a few new pieces she didn't recognize, but most of the furniture was still the same.

Her eyes rested on a painting of her father above the fireplace. Dressed in his white captain's uniform and wearing his blue and white cap, he was standing on the bridge of a ship, resting one hand on the wooden railing, while holding his pipe to his mouth with the other. White, frothy waves and a snow-white seagull flying with his silver grey wings wide open could be seen in the background of the picture. Helena swallowed hard, as tears welled up in her eyes, looking at the face she adored.

Her aunt must have read her thoughts, because she came and stood next to her, putting a protective arm around her shoulders. Without thought, Helena burst into tears and cried her heart out. Her aunt just held her and let her release all the pain and sadness built up inside her for so long.

* * *

When Helena finally raised her head to glance at a carved mirror

hanging on the wall, she saw red swollen eyes lingering in her pale face, with her makeup smeared all over it. She didn't care, though. Actually, she felt much better.

Her aunt told her to go to the bathroom and wash up. In the meantime, she was going to ring the bell for some tea to be brought to them.

Helena obediently went to the bathroom down the hallway to wash off. She smiled, realizing she remembered where everything was in the house. It gave her a warm feeling of belonging. When she came back to the living room, their tea was already there, and so were the delicious little cupcakes she used to be so fond of.

Relieved—as if a weight had been lifted off her shoulders—Helena sat there sipping her tea, eating her cupcakes, and talking about the past. It was so healing to be able to talk about her father and not feel guilty, like when she was with her mother.

Sophie must have loved her brother very much. The pain in her voice when she talked about him was heartbreaking.

Helena could tell she had so much in common with her aunt. It felt so good to have someone sharing her pain. She noticed, though, Sophie avoided talking about her father's *accident*. When Helena brought it up, she shifted uncomfortably and changed the subject. *Is it too painful to talk about, or did Sophie share her mother's suspicions?* Helena wondered.

She watched her aunt closely but decided not to press the matter for now. She was tired and too overwhelmed by emotions to be able to talk about something so painful for both of them.

They just sat there in silence, holding each other's hand, lost in their thoughts.

* * *

Sophie was glad her niece had finally come home. She had missed her so much. She felt as if a part of her beloved brother had come back into her life. She loved Angelos so much and had been devastated by his loss. Sophie hadn't been the same since then. The pain was unbearable and so were the regrets. Guilty feelings kept her up night after night. Oh, how she wished her mother was alive. She would know exactly

what to do. She might even have prevented what happened...

Sophie looked at Helena, lost in her thoughts. *Poor little thing, her life was shattered before it even had a chance to bloom...* She sighed. *Maybe I should have said something... But how could I, and to whom?*

Sophie was only sixteen years old when Angelos died. Who would pay attention to a young girl's suspicions? Besides, how could she make any accusations with no proof, based only on things she had heard eavesdropping on her mother's conversations with Erin? *If only I could find the diary.* She was sure she would find some answers in there... maybe even evidence of who was really responsible for her brother's death.

And what about Thomas? Sophie wondered. She was never close with her adopted brother, who was a lot older than Angelos and her. However, he was the only relative she'd had after Angelos died and Erin took Helena to England. She shuddered as gloomy memories came rushing back...

* * *

Sophie finally got up. "You must be tired," she said. "I'll show you to your room."

They walked up the steps, and Helena was delighted to find out she was going to stay in her old room. It made her feel she had really come home, and wasn't just visiting.

Her room hadn't changed much. Her eyes wandered around the spacious bedroom with the pretty white furniture, the four-post bed, the dresser, the little secretarial desk, and the rocking chair by the French doors which lead to the balcony. Everything was there; even some of her stuffed animals were still decorating the room. Overwhelmed, she looked at her aunt.

Probably guessing what Helena was thinking, Sophie said, "I didn't want anything changed. I wanted you to find the place just the way you left it when you finally came home."

Sweet Sophie, Helena thought. *She always knew that sooner or later, I would be coming back.*

When Sophie left her alone, Helena sat on her bed, lost in her thoughts. So many memories... Her eyes rested on the beautiful painting on the wall—a painting her grandmother, Eleana, had painted. She always

loved this portrait of a beautiful, little girl, around the age of seven or eight, standing in a blooming garden with an angel in the background, watching over her from Heaven.

Staring at the painting for the first time through the eyes of an adult, Helena was taken by surprise. She realized how much the girl in the painting resembled her when she was around the same age—the age when she lost her father. Bewildered, she noticed the sadness in the girl's eyes, and tears came to her own eyes, thinking she probably had the same expression after her father vanished from their lives.

Helena took a deep breath and let it out slowly, trying to control the turmoil of emotions stirred up inside her by well-buried memories surfacing again.

She stood up, walked over to the French doors, which were open, and stepped outside. Feeling the fresh breeze on her face, she let her eyes roam over the shimmering blue and gold waters stretching in front of her. She leaned against the black railings with the fancy designs she always remembered and let her thoughts take her back in time...

She went back to those happy days, when her father was still alive and her mother was a cheerful young woman in love. Her mind filled with cherished memories of the past. She could almost see her parents walking on the beach, holding hands, and herself—as a little child—running all over the place and splashing in the water.

She could remember the cold winter nights when they would all gather around the stone fireplace to drink hot chocolate and listen to her father telling stories. Her favorite stories were the ones about the voyages of her father and his ancestors. The men of the Sistakis family—like most people on these islands—had spent a big part of their lives at sea.

It was only after her father met her mother that he gave up travelling and became involved in managing the business. He wanted to be with his wife and daughter, so he would spend most of his time on the island and would only go to the main offices in Piraeus whenever it was absolutely necessary. *So many memories, so much love... while at the same time, so much pain...*

Helena didn't realize she was crying again until teardrops wet the back of her hands, holding on to the railings. She wiped her face with her hands, and turned around to go inside.

A sudden wave of apprehension washed over her, and she stopped

dead in her tracks... she felt like someone was watching her. Cautiously, she scanned her surroundings but didn't see anyone. She glanced down at the garden and all the way to the edge of the cliff. There was nobody there. However, she could still feel it. She checked around her from side to side, and then she saw *him*.

It was Dimitris. He was on one of the balconies on the bottom floor farther to her right, wearing tight fitting jeans and a white shirt open low on his chest. Leaning against the railings, he looked just like a mysterious, seductive pirate on the bridge of his ship.

Helena's breath caught in her throat. He was irresistibly handsome... and he was watching her intensely. To her surprise, he didn't even turn his head to pretend he hadn't seen her. He was just standing there, boldly watching her.

Helena felt her temper rising. Going back inside her bedroom, she slammed the doors shut. It was going to be hot in the room with no air-conditioning, but she didn't care at this point. She couldn't believe he was in the house. *Who is that man?*

The balcony he was on led to one of the bedrooms downstairs. *What on earth is he doing there?* She was going to have a talk with her aunt and put a stop to this man's arrogant actions. She was sure Sophie wasn't aware of him wandering around the house like that.

Trying to put Dimitris out of her mind for now, she walked into her en-suite bathroom. Everything was the same in there, too. Glancing at the big marble bathtub, she had the urge to sink in it. Without a second thought, she turned the water on and took off her clothes. Sinking into the warm water, the fragrance of roses surrounded her. She lay back, closing her eyes, and felt content and relaxed...

* * *

It was a lot later before she opened her eyes again. She looked around, startled. She was sure she'd been there for too long and was going to be late for dinner. She rushed out of the bathtub, grabbed a towel, and went to her bedroom to check her watch. It was almost eight o'clock. She vigorously dried herself and blow-dried her hair. Then she put something on in a hurry and rushed downstairs.

The dining room was empty, so she made her way to the living

room. Sophie was sitting by the window, sipping some wine. Lovelier than ever, she was wearing a champagne dress and had her hair pulled back in a white ribbon. She looked up as Helena walked inside.

Helena was about to apologize for been late but was interrupted by a cynical voice, "It was nice of you to finally show up."

She turned around to face Dimitris. Before she could open her mouth, Sophie stood up and stared at him, disapprovingly. "Dimitris, you have to stop treating Helena like this. It wasn't her fault, and she was hurt as much as the rest of us... maybe more. So don't be so harsh on her."

He seemed as if he was about to say something, but finally remained silent.

Sophie came and took Helena's hand. "Let's go eat, sweetie. I know you must be starving."

Helena let Sophie lead her out of the living room without a backwards glance. They walked into the dining room, with Dimitris following right behind them. As soon as the women sat down, Dimitris went and sat at the head of the table.

Helena was shocked! This was *too much*. This man aggravated her, and the fact he was going to stay for dinner made things even worse. *Who does he think he is, sitting in my father's place at the head of the table?*

She tried to be as polite as possible for Sophie's sake. It was obvious Sophie liked Dimitris, and she seemed so excited to have him and Helena there.

Dimitris, on the other hand, could be very charming if he wanted to. He kept on talking to Sophie, totally ignoring Helena. It was Sophie who drew Helena into the conversation several times, and every time, Dimitris would shut her out.

Helena was furious with his arrogant behavior. However, she was even more furious with herself and her conflicting emotions. What was wrong with her? She wanted to get up and run as far away from him as she could, while at the same time, she was drawn to him like a moth to a flame.

She couldn't help but secretly admire his flawless profile and that perfect, hard to resist body of his. His mere presence set her emotions on fire, and she couldn't think straight.

Helena found herself lost in wild thoughts and was caught off guard when she realized he was talking to her.

She drew a deep breath and stared at him, only to get lost in the

intensity of his gaze. Was that *desire* she could see in his eyes, or was she mistaken? She swallowed hard, and looking around, she realized they were left alone. *Where is Sophie?*

"She went to answer the phone," he responded to her unspoken question.

Helena took a sip of her wine and tried to clear her thoughts. *It's the trip and all the emotions triggered by coming back*, she tried to reason with herself. That's why she was acting so weird. It had to be it... It just couldn't be *him* causing the turmoil inside her and throwing her off balance.

She sat there silently, realizing she never heard what he had told her. *Never mind*, she thought. She had no intention of talking to him, after all. She would just wait until dinner was over, and then he would be gone.

"Why did it..." Dimitris started, but his voice trailed off as Sophie came back.

Helena saw the concerned look in his eyes, as he watched Sophie walking inside with a gloomy expression on her face and her lips pressed into a thin line.

What now? Helena wondered. However, she remained silent.

They finished their dinner in silence, and then Sophie asked them to join her outside on the veranda for coffee and dessert.

Helena was spellbound by the amazing view of the almost black waters of the sea at night, sparkling like liquid silver from the reflection of the bright light of August's full moon. It was breathtaking.

She sunk into a lounge chair and closed her eyes, inhaling the fragrance of jasmine and roses mixed with the salty sea breeze. *What a wonderful sensation!*

Everything would have been so perfect, if he weren't there. She couldn't deny he was a very handsome man, but he was also so arrogant and irritating.

Helena remained silent until after coffee and dessert were served, trying to avoid looking at him. She could feel his eyes burning into her skin, and her heartbeat accelerated. His mere presence set her emotions to overdrive, and she couldn't think straight. *What is the matter with me? Why am I acting like this?* she kept wondering. She had never met

anyone before who had such an effect on her.

When Sophie went inside for a while, Helena stood up and walked over to the railings. She stood there, letting her eyes wander over the sparkling sea and the sky, covered with millions of stars.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" She heard his voice, soft and sensuous, next to her ear. She was taken aback by the proximity and turned to face him. Brushing her arm against his chest, she felt her skin burning from the touch. He was standing unbearably close... and he looked and smelled so good...

"Helena, I don't bite," he said, seeing her instinctive reaction to pull back.

"Oh! But I'm sure you do," she replied, trying to steady her voice and make it sound sarcastic. But instead, it sounded deep and trembling. She was surprised to see the longing in his eyes—those captivating eyes of his, which could so easily make her pulse accelerate. She nervously wet her lips and took a few steps away, trying to place some distance between them.

"Why did it take you so long?" he asked, repeating the question he had asked earlier.

Helena glanced at him, puzzled. *What does he care, anyway?* Then again, judging from the look in his eyes, he did care.

"I don't know," she whispered simply, and her answer surprised even herself. She didn't want to talk about this with anyone, but *especially* with him.

He stared at her for a few seconds, and Helena wished she could tell what was going through his mind.

She watched him take a step closer, and drew a deep breath. She had this crazy feeling he was going to kiss her, and time seemed to stop. She knew she should pull away, but she couldn't—she felt immobilized. *What if he does?* she wondered, and was shocked to realize she wanted him to.

"I'm so sorry to leave you alone, but I had to make a phone call." Sophie's voice brought them back to reality.

Helena walked back to her lounge chair and sat down, while Dimitris leaned against the railings, squeezing them tightly.

"We're all tired," Sophie said, turning to Helena. "I think we better go to sleep," she added and wished them goodnight.

Helena watched her walking towards the French doors, and was

furious to see Dimitris showing no intention of leaving. She jumped out of her seat. "I'm going to bed, too!" She wasn't about to stay out on the veranda with him. She didn't trust him, and above all, she didn't trust herself and her emotions.

She hastily followed Sophie inside. "Who does he think he is, acting like this?" Helena burst out—not being able to hold back any longer—and without waiting for an answer she went on, "How rude of him to remain here, while everybody is going to bed!"

Sophie stared at her, surprised. "But my dear child, Dimitris lives here," she said.

Helena was left speechless.

Chapter Three

HELENA COULDN'T BELIEVE her ears. She stared at her aunt and couldn't say a word. *Who is that man?* It was obvious he wasn't just an employee, as she had assumed at first. He was very handsome and about her aunt's age... *That's it*, she thought. He was probably engaged to her aunt. That would explain his interference in family matters. However, even a fiancé wasn't allowed to move in before the marriage—not in this part of the world. And she was sure he wasn't Sophie's husband... or maybe he was... How could she be so sure? Well, they weren't acting like a married couple. Of course, there was a familiarity between them, but nothing like the closeness of a married couple.

Helena realized Sophie was staring at her, studying her face. She returned her look with one of confusion.

Sophie took her by the hand and guided her towards the stairs. "Come on," she said. "There are a few things we need to talk about before we go to bed."

A warning bell went off somewhere inside Helena's head. Trying to ignore it, she followed Sophie to her room which was also on the second floor.

When they went inside, the room seemed familiar. Helena knew she had been there before. It was a pleasantly decorated room with cherry wood furniture and flower baskets which gave the room a lighter tone.

Sophie walked to the open French doors and invited Helena out onto the balcony. From there, they could enjoy the mystifying scenery of the night and feel the breeze caress them softly. Helena sunk into one of the lounge chairs and let her gaze wander over the black waters

of the sea, parted in the middle by streaks of silver. The whole thing was surreal; she had this overwhelming sensation of being suspended in time.

Taking a deep breath, she smelled the fragrance of jasmine and roses. She closed her eyes for a few seconds, trying to relax. No matter what, she was home. It didn't make any difference if Dimitris was there. That was *her house*, and she intended to stay.

Sophie sank into a lounge chair next to her, and they remained out there in silence for a while, just enjoying the stillness of the night.

Finally, Helena glanced at Sophie. For the first time, her aunt looked like she didn't know what to say. A shiver raced up Helena's spine, and the same warning bell went off somewhere in her head, again. *What's wrong?* She could tell Sophie had something to say but didn't know how to start. Helena wished silently it was nothing serious. It was the first time in years she was happy and didn't want anything to ruin that.

"Helena, there are a lot of things you don't know... After your father's death, a lot of things changed," Sophie started. Shifting in her seat, she took Helena's hands in hers. "Your father wasn't only an excellent captain but a very smart businessman at the same time, and he kept the business going while he was alive. After his death, our adopted brother, Thomas, took over. Without Angelos' guidance, Thomas made a lot of mistakes. Two years after your father's death, things got real bad, and Thomas had to sell part of the company to Dimitris' family. Little by little, Stathis Nikolaou—Dimitris' father—took over the rest of the company and everything else that once belonged to our family. Thomas stayed in the company as a Deputy General Manager, but he really has no control over anything and makes no decisions. Sometimes, I think they just keep him on because they know it would kill him not to work for the family business."

Helena was so overwhelmed by all these that she couldn't say a word. Everything was gone. All that her grandfather and her father had worked for were in someone else's hands now. Even *her home* wasn't *hers* any more...

Pulling her hands from Sophie's, she got up and walked towards the edge of the balcony. Devastated, she realized that the man downstairs was the owner of all this and she was just a visitor. She felt her temper rising, thinking of him and his father taking advantage of her family

like this.

Sophie must have read her mind, because she jumped up and took her in her arms.

"Helena, it's not what you think. They didn't do anything wrong. The company was going under, and we needed help. We needed someone strong to help us out, and Stathis Nikolaou was the right person. They had a shipping company of their own, and they were searching for more ships to expand. It was a blessing they were there; otherwise, we would have been out in the streets. Our families have been friends for years. Dimitris' mother was my mom's best friend, and she was devastated when Eleana passed away."

"This wasn't *help*," Helena said bitterly. "This was taking over everything."

"No," Sophie insisted. "They didn't let our company go under and our family be buried in debt. Business is booming, and we stay in the house and live comfortably," she added and caressed Helena's hair softly.

* * *

Helena remained quiet, and Sophie let go and took a step back to look at her face. She remained silent as well, giving Helena time to process all these new information. *It must be really hard on her*, Sophie thought. *She came home after all these years, and now I have to lay this burden on her, too. Oh, how I wish things could be different. But there's nothing I can do...*

Sophie turned towards the sea, taking a deep breath. "Stathis died a few years ago," she went on after a couple of minutes, "and Dimitris, who is a ship captain and was commanding one of their largest cargo ships up until then, had to give up his voyages and manage the company. He has a beautiful house in Athens, but Dimitris prefers the island. He runs the business from here, just like your father used to do. Thomas and his wife, Katie, live on the island, also, but right now he's in New York on business. He should be back in a few weeks, though," she said, then was silent for a moment.

Maybe I should tell her everything right now and get it over with, Sophie thought, but then again, she was scared of Helena's reaction. Helena

was way too young to understand, and she was brought up in England—far away from her homeland and its customs and traditions. *We really need to be patient and give her some time to adjust... Then again, I need to prepare her for what's coming...*

* * *

"I would like you to get to know Dimitris," Sophie said after a while. "He's a really nice man."

Helena bit her lower lip to stop herself from telling her aunt exactly what she thought of Dimitris. He was arrogant and had taken advantage of her family, and she would *never* forgive him for that.

Sophie stared at her with clear understanding in her eyes. "I know how hard this must be for you. I didn't want to tell you yet, but after the tension I sensed tonight between the two of you, I wanted to set things straight."

"Oh, Aunt Sophie, you should have told me!" Helena cried out. "I would have never come."

"I knew you wouldn't. That's why I never said anything. I wanted you to come. This is still our house, you know," Sophie said.

Helena wanted to tell her she was wrong about that, but she didn't want to disappoint her aunt. She was so sweet and vulnerable, and she trusted everybody.

Her mind was working overtime. First thing in the morning, she was moving out. She couldn't stay here a minute longer.

Now, she wished she had thought better before deciding to come here. But she always listened to her heart. Her mother had told her many times that her impulsiveness would get her into trouble one day.

Sophie's voice brought her back to reality, "We should go inside. It's chilly out here, and the wind is picking up. I think a storm is brewing."

Helena followed her inside without saying a word. A storm was brewing as a matter of fact, but it had nothing to do with the weather... It was brewing inside Helena. Hastily, she wished Sophie goodnight and went to her room. Her heart felt really heavy in her chest, and she was blinded by hot tears running down her face.

In a desperate need to escape reality, she rushed to her balcony and stood at the edge. Holding tightly onto the iron handrail, she felt the

wind blowing hard now. However, Helena didn't mind. The turmoil around her was actually a reflection of what was going on inside her. Glancing up at the sky, she saw the bright moon halfway covered by heavy, threatening clouds. She lowered her eyes to the massive body of water stretching out in front of her. There was still enough moonlight to be able to see the white frothy waves, covering the black waters. She felt in tune with nature's unleashed rage.

Closing her eyes, she listened to the howling of the wind and the sound of the waves smashing on the rocks surrounding the small private cove. She took some deep breaths and squeezed the handrail even harder. The rain started abruptly, and she lifted her face to the sky, keeping her eyes shut...

* * *

Helena had lost track of time, standing there, crying her heart out, when she started feeling really cold.

Shivering, she walked back inside and into her bathroom to change. She was soaked to the bone. Taking a quick, hot shower, she rubbed herself dry with a fluffy towel and put on her nightgown.

She knew she wouldn't be able to sleep tonight. So much had happened in the last few hours... she had finally found her home, and it had been taken away from her *again*. Oh, how much she hated Dimitris Nikolaou. She wished she were miles away, in her cozy apartment back in England.

She lay down on her bed for hours, thinking about the past and the happy days she had spent on the island with her parents. She couldn't help but wonder how different her life would have been if her father hadn't disappeared. None of these things would have happened. Her mother would be alive, and they would still live on the island. The company and the house would belong to her family, and Sophie and Thomas wouldn't have to depend on the *generosity* of Dimitris Nikolaou.

Wild thoughts whirled around in her mind—bittersweet memories mixed with thoughts about Dimitris. She couldn't stop thinking about him. She hated him with all her heart. *Oh, how much he must be enjoying this little game*. He never said a word and let her keep on thinking he

was just an employee. Then again, he never really said that... actually, he never said anything. What an intolerable person he was.

I'm leaving first thing in the morning, she decided. She couldn't stay another day under the same roof with him. She was going to miss Sophie and this place, not to mention the fact she would never get any answers about what really happened to her father. Then again, she had no other choice. Of course, she could go to a hotel and stay for a few days. After all, it would be a shame to come back to the island after all these years and not even stay for a while. But how would she explain that to her aunt? Greeks were very sensitive about anyone rejecting their hospitality.

Well, she decided she really didn't care. She had a life of her own, and she wouldn't allow Dimitris to run her life as he was running Sophie's and Thomas'. She was leaving in the morning, and that was it.

After she had made up her mind, she felt a lot better and finally drifted off to sleep.

* * *

When Helena opened her eyes next morning, the sun was shining brightly through the windows. She looked around the familiar room and felt warmth in her heart.

All of a sudden, she recalled last night's events and jumped out of bed. She rushed to the French doors and stared outside. It was a mess—ruined bushes and toppled trees all over the place. The thunderstorm had destroyed the magnificently maintained yard. Even the small gazebo at the edge of the yard wasn't spared by the wrath of nature's outburst.

Feeling numb inside, Helena walked to her bathroom to wash up. Then she put on a pair of white shorts and a yellow top. Looking in the mirror, she saw the dark circles under her eyes. She hastily put some makeup on. Even though, she felt defeated and heartbroken, she wasn't about to let *him* know that.

Raising her chin stubbornly, she walked downstairs. She didn't want to be late for breakfast, and give him another reason to complain.

After having breakfast with her aunt, she would take her things to a small hotel on the waterfront, which she had noticed the day before

when she got off the ship.

She walked around downstairs, but no one seemed to be in the house. Hearing voices from the veranda, she walked outside.

Sophie was sitting on a lounge chair with a glass of orange juice in her hand, and a very pretty young woman—about Helena's age—was sitting right next to her. She had beautiful, long black hair and dark-brown eyes. Her skin was tanned like Sophie's, only she was a lot prettier.

As Helena came outside, the conversation stopped. Sophie smiled at her and invited her to join them, but somehow, Helena felt she had interrupted something really important—she could feel the electricity in the air.

She glanced at the girl, who didn't say a word; she only stared at Helena intensely behind half-closed eyelashes. Helena was uncomfortable being examined like this and experienced an instant dislike towards her.

Sophie introduced the girl—whose name was Stella—and explained to her niece that Stella lived down the street, and as soon as she heard they had a visitor, she came by to welcome her on the island. However, the expression in Stella's eyes didn't make Helena feel welcome at all.

Helena glanced around and noticed a few workers cleaning up the mess in the yard.

"It was a really bad storm," Sophie stated, following her look. "We get a lot of thunderstorms around here, but the intensity of the one last night was something else."

"Yes, it was," Stella agreed, keeping her eyes on Helena. "I'm surprised Dimitris left and didn't stick around to overlook the repairs."

"He had a business appointment," Sophie explained. "But he should be back after lunch."

Hearing Dimitris wasn't there, Helena felt a little more relaxed and sunk into one of the lounge chairs.

Sophie poured some orange juice for her and offered her some croissants fresh from the oven. Helena suddenly felt really hungry and spread some butter and jelly on her croissant, keeping her eyes away from Stella. She had so much on her mind; she couldn't care less about Stella and her frosty behavior.

The conversation between Sophie and Stella went on talking about people Helena didn't know. She listened to them absentmindedly, until

they started talking about Dimitris again. Helena kept quiet, listening to Stella talking about him. It was obvious she was very fond of him, to say the least. She would melt just by saying his name.

Helena felt uncomfortable and shifted in her chair. Stella gave her a cold look and stood up, saying it was time for her to go. She wished Helena to enjoy her *short* stay on the island, and Helena didn't miss the hint.

"Thank you so much," she replied politely. "Even though, I'm not here just for a few days. I'm here to stay," she told Stella, and was utterly satisfied to see the shocked expression on her face.

Sophie looked at her, somewhat surprised too, but didn't say a word. She just gave her niece a smile and wished Stella good-bye.

"What was that all about?" Sophie asked smiling, after Stella left.

"I'm not sure," Helena replied, truthfully. "I just get very touchy when people try to tell me what to do."

Sophie laughed and reached over to caress her niece's cheek. "You have to forgive Stella," she said. "She's in love with Dimitris, and she feels threatened by your presence here."

"Oh!" Helena said, surprised. "I didn't know there was something going on between them."

"I didn't say that," Sophie replied. "There's absolutely *nothing* going on between Stella and Dimitris," she pointed out. "The fact she's in love with him doesn't mean he's responding to her feelings. As a matter of fact, Dimitris has made it very clear long time ago that..." Sophie stopped mid-sentence, looking at Helena nervously.

"Dimitris has made what very clear?" Helena asked puzzled and intrigued.

"Nothing," Sophie replied and stood up in a hurry. "Come on," she changed the subject abruptly. "Let's go for a drive. I want to show you around."

Helena stared at her aunt, bewildered, but before she could say anything, Sophie was already on her way inside. Helena remained in her seat for a couple of minutes, looking towards the French doors her aunt had disappeared through. Why did her aunt go out of her way to make it clear there was nothing going on between Dimitris and Stella? And what was she going to say about Dimitris when she stopped? Helena's mind was working overtime, trying to make some sense out

of her aunt's strange behavior.

And what about Stella? What was the story with her? If there was nothing going on between them, why would she be so hostile towards Helena? Maybe the Greeks weren't the warm-hearted people she grew up to believe, after all. So far, the only person who seemed really pleased to have her here was her aunt.

"I know you must be ready to go for a ride," Sophie said, coming back outside, holding her purse in her hands. "I also need to do some shopping, and then we can sit at one of the cafes by the waterfront and have some ice-cream."

Helena was excited. She really wanted to go into town, since she didn't have a chance to see much, yesterday. *And what about that man at the port?* she wondered, anxiously. Not wanting to upset her aunt, she hadn't told Sophie anything about that. And from what she understood, Dimitris hadn't mentioned anything, either. *No*, she decided. *It was probably nothing... just some weirdo watching a pretty girl. But then again, what about the Mercedes speeding by to pick him up?* Helena took a deep breath. *The whole thing was bizarre, she admitted, but there's no need to overreact. I'll just keep an eye to make sure he won't approach me again.*

"I'll be just a minute," she told her aunt and rushed upstairs to take her purse. She was downstairs in a flash and followed Sophie outside. Waiting for her to get the car from the garage behind the house, gloomy thoughts clouded her day. She needed to talk to Sophie about her decision to move to a hotel, but she didn't want to spoil their day. *No*, she thought, *I'll talk to her later on in the afternoon, after we come back.*

Her aunt pulled up in a silver BMW Jeep.

"This is beautiful!" Helena cried out, as she opened the door to climb inside.

"I know. I love it," Sophie replied, smiling. "Let's go have some fun."

Helena lay back in the soft leather seat and closed her eyes. For now, all she wanted was to forget about everything and have a good time.

Little did she know what fate had in store for her...

Chapter Four

HELENA REALLY ENJOYED the visit to Chora—one of the nicest and most charming towns of the Greek islands—with her aunt. The weather was beautiful, and the air was so clear. The waterfront was filled with little stores with Greek art, souvenirs, jewelry, and small objects made out of seashells. Even behind the harbor front, there were endless small streets with shops, churches, windmills, terraces and whitewashed houses.

She was thrilled wandering around and visiting every single store, discovering little treasures everywhere. She felt like a little girl, rushing from one store to the other. With her arms aching from all the shopping bags she was carrying, she kept on walking down the street to the next store.

"I'm so glad you're here with me," she told Sophie. "I would have gotten lost otherwise. All these small streets give me the impression I'm going around in circles."

"The street layout was intended to be like that," Sophie explained. "It was built this way to confuse pirates."

"Oh, that's very interesting," Helena said, thinking she should learn a little bit more about the history of this fascinating island.

Sophie seemed very happy to see Helena having such a good time. They were walking together, laughing, when Helena stopped at the window of yet another shop. Her eyes were fixed on a beautiful miniature of a sailing boat. *Oh, how beautiful!* Helena thought and glanced back at Sophie, smiling. She had to have it. During the cold winter nights back in England, this exquisite craft would always remind her of the sunshine and the bright days on the island.

They walked inside the little shop. The interior was cool and seemed

kind of dark, coming inside from the bright sunshine. Sophie called out for the shopkeeper, but there was no one around. Helena walked over to the window and took a closer look of the sailing boat. In the meantime, Sophie walked to the back of the shop calling Maria, the shopkeeper.

"Do you know her?" Helena asked.

"But of course. She's a very nice lady. She'll be very happy to meet you," Sophie replied.

Maria was nowhere to be found, and Sophie disappeared in the back of the shop.

Helena heard the little bell hanging over the door ringing and realized that another customer had come in.

All of a sudden, she sensed someone standing behind her and was taken aback, hearing a child's voice saying in English, "Some things reach all the way to our soul."

Helena turned around to face a young boy, around seven or eight years old.

The boy was standing there staring at her.

"What did you say?" she asked.

"I said that some things reach all the way to our soul," the boy repeated.

"What do you mean by that?" Helena asked and stared at the child, puzzled.

"All I'm saying is what my grandmother told me to say," the boy replied and pointed to the old lady who was standing a few feet away.

Helena glanced at the old lady—whom she hadn't noticed until now—dressed in black, with a black kerchief covering her head. She looked almost a hundred years old. Then again, Helena couldn't be sure. People on the islands usually appeared older than their actual age due to the hard work out in the sun and the sea. Plus, the way these old women insisted on covering their heads with kerchiefs made them look even older.

Helena walked towards her and inquired in Greek, "What did you mean by that?"

The lady stared at Helena closely. Her lips moved, but all Helena heard was a murmur.

"Grandma is having a hard time speaking sometimes," the boy explained in Greek this time. "You have to lean really close to her to

be able to hear what she has to say.”

Helena smiled politely at the lady, even though, she felt uncomfortable with those piercing black eyes fixed on her. “I see,” she said, and having no intention to lean close to her, she started to walk away.

Hearing the old lady’s whispering voice saying something to the child, she stopped and turned around to face them again. She didn’t know why, but she could tell those words were meant for her.

“What did she say?” she asked the boy.

“She wants to read your palm,” he replied.

Helena laughed. *Oh! No! A fortuneteller*, she thought, *that’s all I need.*

“No, thanks,” she said facing the lady and started to move away for the second time. Out of the blue, something made her stop—she wasn’t sure exactly what it was. Glancing towards the old woman, she saw her standing still. Without a second thought, Helena approached her and raised her right hand, instinctively turning her palm upwards. The lady didn’t touch it. She reached over and took Helena’s left hand and turned it over, so that the palm was facing up. She didn’t even look at it. She kept her eyes fixed on Helena’s face while she traced the lines on her palm with her other hand.

Helena shivered from the old lady’s touch. Her hands were wrinkled and cold, and Helena was uncomfortable, already having second thoughts.

The old woman whispered something, and Helena stared at the boy inquiringly.

“Grandma says you have come a long way,” the boy said, and Helena laughed again.

Yes, right, she thought. Having inherited her English mother’s looks made it obvious she had come a long way.

“She’s talking about your heart and your feelings,” the boy continued, and Helena glanced at the old lady, surprised.

“Your life will be filled with joy and happiness, if only you make the right choice...” the boy went on.

Life is full of choices, Helena thought. *Which one is the right one?*

“You know the right one,” he went on, repeating out loud the old lady’s fading whispers. “You know it in your heart, but you’re fighting your feelings, and that upsets the balance of things.”

Helena stared at the old lady and felt uncomfortable, since she seemed to be able to read her mind. She was so involved that she jumped, surprised, when she heard Sophie’s voice calling her from the back of

the shop.

"Helena, we're coming," Sophie said.

Looking over her shoulder towards the back of the shop, Helena tried to pull her hand away. She was surprised to feel the old lady's trembling hand holding on to it tightly. Turning to face her, she saw her whispering something to the boy in a shivering voice. The boy stared at Helena without saying a word. The old lady touched him on the shoulder and murmured something again.

"What is it?" Helena asked, seeing the boy's hesitation.

"Grandma says you should be very careful," the boy said, and his voice wasn't steady. "It's not good for business," he continued, more to himself than to Helena.

"What are you talking about?" Helena asked, puzzled.

"It's not good telling someone he's facing death," the boy replied hesitantly.

Helena froze for a couple of seconds and then stared at the old lady in confusion.

"Your grandmother said I'm going to die?" she asked the boy, keeping her eyes on the old lady's wrinkled face.

"She said you're in *grave danger* and you need to be very careful."

"But why?" Helena asked anxiously. "What did she see?"

However, before she could say anything else, the old lady had already left the shop—with surprising swift moves for her age—and the boy ran after her.

Helena was still standing there, feeling lost, when Sophie and Maria walked towards her.

"This is my niece I told you about," Sophie said to Maria, and turning to Helena, she said, "Maria is a very good friend of ours. When my mother was still alive, they were good friends with Maria's mother, and we used to spend a lot of time in each other's houses."

"I'm so glad to finally meet you," Maria said and extended her hand to Helena for a handshake. "I'm so sorry to keep you waiting, but I had to go upstairs to check on my mother, who is very ill."

Helena gave the lady her hand but kept looking over her shoulder towards the side of the street the old lady had disappeared to. *She didn't even wait to get paid*, Helena thought.

Sophie stared at her, puzzled, but she kept quiet.

Helena managed to have a friendly conversation with Maria, and only after she had purchased the sailing boat and walked out of the shop, she realized how tense she had been for the last few minutes.

"Helena, what's wrong?" Sophie asked, and Helena could hear the concern in her voice.

"Nothing, I'm fine," Helena reassured her. She could tell Sophie didn't believe her, even though she didn't insist.

They walked for a few more minutes on the waterfront, but since they had both lost their enthusiasm, they decided to head back home.

"We didn't even have that ice-cream we were talking about all day," Helena said as soon as they walked inside the house, feeling kind of guilty for ruining her aunt's day like this. She had decided to ignore the old lady's warnings, and she was mad at herself for paying attention to nonsense like this.

"It's okay," Sophie said. "We can have our ice-cream on the veranda. The view from up here is even better." Leaving the bags she was carrying on the steps, she walked to the kitchen.

Helena left her bags next to Sophie's and walked out on the veranda. She gazed at the deep blue sea, took a deep breath, and let it out slowly.

"That sounded like something very serious is puzzling your mind," Dimitris said, and Helena looked at him, surprised. He was sitting on a lounge chair on the far side of the veranda.

"Hello, Dimitris," she said simply.

"Do you want to talk about it?" he continued, as if she hadn't spoken at all.

"No," Helena said and turned her back to him, walking towards the railings. She grabbed hold of the handrail and kept her eyes fixed on the water. She stood there for several minutes, when she sensed him standing right behind her.

"Sometimes, it helps to talk about things," he said.

"Dimitris, it's nothing," she insisted. But seeing that she wasn't going to get away with this so easily, she told him in a few words what had happened. She tried to make it sound funny, but Dimitris didn't seem amused at all. On the contrary, he was staring at her very seriously.

"It's probably nothing," he finally said. "But it doesn't hurt to be careful," he added, and Helena was shocked to hear those words coming

from him. She never expected a strong man like him to believe in fortunetellers and things like that. But then again, what did she know about him?

"I'm going to take the stuff I bought upstairs," Helena said and hastily walked back inside the house.

Dimitris didn't say a word and kept on standing by the railings, where she was a minute ago, staring out towards the sea. Helena took the bags upstairs and threw them on her bed. She was going to empty them later. Right now, the only thing she wanted was to take a hot bath and try to unwind.

She walked over to her bathroom and filled up her tub. She took off her clothes and sunk into it. Little by little, she felt the tension leaving her body, and when she was finally relaxed, she got out and reached for her towel.

She had put on a robe and was blow-drying her hair, when she heard a knock on the door.

"Come in," she said, expecting to see Sophie or Martha—the sweet, old housekeeper. However, it was Dimitris who came in.

"Sorry to bother you," he said, and Helena heard the uncertainty in his voice.

She stared at him, without saying a word, as he walked towards the open French doors, which led to the balcony. She followed him outside and waited for him to talk when he was ready. She could tell there was something bothering him.

"Helena, listen..." he said after a while. "It might seem nonsense to you, but we Greeks believe in fate and destiny. I've heard and seen things you would never believe," he continued.

Helena just stood there silently. She could tell there was more to it.

"I know Asimina—the old lady who talked to you. The whole island knows her. A lot of people have gone to her for answers, and even sometimes for help. Even politicians from Athens come visiting her sometimes. Believe me, she's no fake," he said, probably seeing the disbelief in her eyes.

"What are you saying, Dimitris?" she asked, terrified. "You believe my life is in danger?"

"Of course not," he said uncomfortably and coughed to clear his

throat. "All I'm saying is that it doesn't hurt to be careful."

"I'm not going to lock myself up in the house just because some crazy old lady told me that I'm going to have an accident," Helena said stubbornly.

"Helena, listen," he said. "Asimina foretold my father's death, and I've heard from my mother she had even sent word to your father not to go out on the boat the night he disappeared..."

Helena looked at him, shocked. She couldn't believe her ears. Stormy thoughts whirled around in her mind; she heard in her head her mother's fading voice, warning her not to go back... She shivered and dug her fingernails into her palms. Without saying another word, she rushed into her bathroom, slamming the door behind her. This was too much to handle. Unable to control the turbulence of her emotions, she leaned against the door and took some deep breaths, trying to calm down.

She waited there until she heard her bedroom door closing behind him. She just couldn't face him right now — she couldn't face anyone right now.

He's mad, she thought. I'm not going to be affected by such nonsense, she promised herself, and started brushing her hair really hard. She finally had to stop when she realized her scalp was hurting. "Damn him!" she cursed out loud, and after throwing the brush on the shelf, she walked back into her bedroom.

Feeling the need to get out of the house, she walked out on the balcony and took some deep breaths. She needed to do something to release the tension. On a sudden impulse, she went back inside and put on her bathing suit. Taking a beach towel, she rushed downstairs and out on the veranda. Thankful there was nobody there, as she was in no condition to talk to anyone right now, she rushed down the steps which led to the private beach. Throwing her towel on the sand, she ran to the water. It was nice and refreshing, and she jumped right in.

She swam for a while, then finally turned on her back and floated motionless on the surface, relaxing for a while. Salt water won't allow a body to sink, and one could actually float on it and relax as if on a bed. Helena was surprised that she remembered that. Ever since they had left the island, she had swum in the sea only once, during a trip to Spain. Swimming in the pool wasn't exactly the same, and if one tried to lie still, his body would slowly sink.

Hearing a splashing noise, she turned to see Dimitris swimming

towards her, and her heartbeat accelerated. She watched him swim right past her and out in the open, and couldn't help but admire the strength and self-confidence his effortless, harmonic moves revealed. Taking a deep breath, she swam back to the shore.

Trying to put him out of her mind, she got out and dried herself with her towel. Then she laid it down on the sand and lay on it to get some sun. It was late in the afternoon, so the sun wasn't that hot, and she didn't have to worry about getting burned.

After a while, she felt really hungry. Sophie and she had skipped lunch. Helena didn't want to ruin her appetite for dinner, but she couldn't wait until then either. So she decided to head back to the house and have some fruit. As she was walking up the steps, she saw that Dimitris was still swimming. She walked back to the house and was glad to find some bananas in a large fruit-bowl on the table out on the veranda. This way, she didn't have to go to the kitchen and have to face Martha, who was probably preparing dinner. She grabbed a banana and rushed upstairs to her room. She didn't really feel like talking to anybody.

She ate her banana, then took a quick shower and washed her hair. She put on a long, emerald dress made of fine silk, which she had bought that morning, and a pair of golden sandals. Looking in the mirror, she had to admit the dress fitted her just perfectly. Sophie was right when she had insisted on her buying it.

Walking downstairs, she found Sophie in the living room.

"You're absolutely stunning!" Sophie exclaimed and gave Helena a warm smile. "I knew it was perfect for you," she added.

"Thanks," Helena said simply. "I love the color, and the material feels really good."

"Would you like something to drink?" Sophie asked.

"I'll have some wine," Helena said and walked over to the bar. "Can I get you something?" she asked Sophie.

"I would like some more wine," Sophie said, and gave Helena her glass to fill it back up.

Helena filled up Sophie's glass and gave it back to her. Then she filled up her own and went to sit by the window, letting her eyes wander over the magnificent view.

"Dimitris isn't going to have dinner with us tonight," Sophie said.

Helena didn't comment on that, and even though, she sensed her

aunt's gaze on her, she just sat there avoiding her look.

Silence stretched in the room for a few minutes, as they both seemed lost in their thoughts.

"I'm really sorry about this morning," Helena said suddenly, turning to look at her aunt.

Sophie looked at her, without saying a word.

"I know I'm being foolish, but I became really upset over something that happened," Helena went on. She knew she had been acting rudely to her aunt, and she tried to explain her behavior.

"I knew something made you upset," Sophie said. "But I could tell you didn't want to talk about it."

At that time, Martha came into the room to let them know dinner was ready, and they went to the dining room. Even though, they weren't in the best mood, they enjoyed their dinner. Martha had prepared moussaka for them—a traditional Greek casserole with eggplants, potatoes and hamburger-meat topped with delicious creamy béchamel sauce. Helena thanked her for going into all this trouble, and assured her it was delicious.

After they were served their dessert—sweet apple pie topped with ice-cream—Helena explained to her aunt what had happened that morning, and the conversation she had with Dimitris afterwards.

Sophie was really upset about the whole thing. She got up and gave Helena a big hug.

"You poor child," she said. "She must have scared you to death."

"It's okay," Helena replied. "I'm not going to think about it anymore. It was stupid of me to get upset in the first place."

"I'll talk to Asimina if you want me to," Sophie said.

"No," Helena insisted. "Let's just forget about the whole thing."

Sophie didn't seem to agree, but she kept silent. They finished their pie and went back into the living room. Sophie sat at the piano and played some classical music.

Helena lay back on the sofa and closed her eyes, feeling totally contented and relaxed. Vivaldi was one of her favorites.

After a while, Sophie got up and went to turn the stereo on. They both sat there, listening to Greek love songs.

Unwillingly, Helena realized she couldn't put off any more telling her aunt about her decision to leave. She got up and walked over to

the window, staring at the sea.

Sophie must have sensed her change of mood, because she got up and turned the music down. Then she went back and sat on her chair, waiting for Helena to talk.

"Aunt Sophie," Helena started. "I really hate to do this, but I think it would be better for everybody, if I moved to a hotel."

Sophie let out a deep breath and jumped out of her chair. "What are you saying, sweetie?" she asked. "This is your home. Why would you ever want to leave and go to a hotel?"

Helena could tell she was shocked.

"I think it would be better," Helena whispered, trying to hide the uncertainty in her voice.

"Better for whom?" Sophie insisted.

Helena wanted to explain to her how she felt about Dimitris, and that she didn't feel comfortable staying at his house. On the other hand though, she didn't want to hurt her aunt's feelings, pointing out to her this way that this was really Dimitris' home, and they were just guests.

She shifted uncomfortably, not knowing what to do. Maybe she should just be quiet and stay there for a few more days. After all, she would be gone in a while, and she would put all this behind her. What did she care about him? She wouldn't have to see him again in her life. If she moved to a hotel, her aunt would be heartbroken, and it would also be a shame, and the whole island would talk about it.

Helena knew how important pride was for Greeks. What would people think if Sistas' daughter moved out of her family's home to stay at a hotel? *No*, Helena decided, *I can't do that*.

She suddenly realized Sophie was expecting an answer. She turned and hugged her aunt. "I'm so sorry," she said. "I just didn't want to upset your lives."

"Are you crazy?" Sophie asked. "What are you talking about? We're so happy to have you here. This is your home, Helena, as much as it is ours. This home was built by your great-grandparents and will stay in our family forever. Your children will grow up here and so will their children."

Helena inwardly laughed at that thought but didn't say a word. She didn't want to bring her aunt back to the cruel reality. She would be gone in a few days and most probably, she would never set foot on

this island again. However, she kept her gloomy thoughts to herself.

* * *

Around eleven o'clock at night, they heard the front door open. A couple minutes later, Dimitris walked into the living room.

Helena drew a deep breath and swallowed hard, secretly admiring the seductively handsome man with the flawless face and the incredibly built body showing underneath the tight fitting jeans and t-shirt.

"What are you two up to?" he asked, his gaze set on Helena. The irresistible, sexy smile on his face made Helena's pulse accelerate.

"We're listening to some music," Sophie said. "Did you have a good time?"

"It was all right," he replied, keeping his eyes on Helena.

Walking over to the bar, he poured himself some brandy. He took his glass and went to sit by the window.

"Did you enjoy your swim this afternoon?" Dimitris asked her.

"You went swimming?" Sophie cut in. "You should have told me to come with you. I love swimming. I just don't like going by myself," she continued.

"We can go tomorrow morning," Helena said. "It was wonderful this afternoon, and I want to enjoy it for as long as I stay here."

"We'll go tomorrow morning then," Sophie said and got up. "You have to excuse me, but I'm really tired," she said and left the room.

Helena was uncomfortable being left alone with Dimitris. She went and left her empty glass on the bar and walked towards the window. The surface of the water was lit by the moonlight, and Helena felt the urge to go swimming again. *Don't be ridiculous*, she reprimanded herself.

Dimitris came and stood right behind her, looking outside, too.

"It's beautiful," he said. "Isn't it? I would never trade this place with anywhere in the world."

Helena understood exactly how he felt. She wished she could stay here forever, too.

"How could you stay away for so long?" he asked her, and Helena shifted uncomfortably.

She didn't want to discuss such matters with him. She never really

wanted to leave the island, and all these years she was away, she always dreamed about it. Then again, she knew how her mother felt about this, and she didn't want to upset her. After her mother was gone, she wanted to come back, but she was dreading it, too. She had no idea how to approach her relatives here, after not been in contact with them for so long. And even worse, she wasn't sure they would want her to come back, after her mother's behavior all these years. However, she wasn't about to discuss all these things with Dimitris. He was nothing but a stranger to her.

"I'm really tired," she said and wishing him goodnight, she walked out of the room, leaving him alone.

She thought she heard a soft laugh, but she couldn't be sure. Walking upstairs to her room, she was convinced she wasn't going to be able to sleep. However, she fell asleep the moment she laid her head on the pillow, totally unaware of the dark shadow hovering outside the French doors leading to the veranda, watching her.

End of this sample

Enjoyed the preview?

**The novel is available at Amazon,
Barnes & Noble, and iTunes**

Note from the Author

The Greek Isles Series

The Greek islands—alluring destinations that cast a spell on the visitor from the very first moment—are among my favorite settings. I have written a whole series of standalone mystery romance novels—*The Greek Isles Series*—each taking place on a different island.

In this series, dark mysteries mingle with sizzling romances, while the reader enjoys the virtual experience of visiting some of the most enchanting Greek islands. The impeccable beauty of those islands—where nature exists lavishly in hundred shades of green and blue, and centuries of Greek tradition coexist harmoniously with cosmopolitan activity—will steal the reader’s heart away.

Award-winning, bestseller *Spellbound in His Arms* is the first novel published in *The Greek Isles Series*. In this suspenseful tale of murder, deceit, and political cover-up, sexy investigative reporter Jackie ignites the fury and stirs the passion of mysterious police detective Michael. The action unfolds on majestic Corfu in the dazzling aquamarine waters of the Ionian Sea.

Bestseller *Deadly Secrets* is the second novel published in *The Greek Isles Series*. Stunning Helena and seductive Captain Dimitris confront each other—and make sparks—in this suspenseful tale of murder, deceit, embezzlement, and treachery. The action unfolds on picturesque Mykonos—one of the most beautiful islands in the sparkling sapphire waters of the Aegean Sea—and is supported by a steamy story of forbidden love.

The Heiress of Santorini is the third novel published in *The Greek Isles Series*. The startling truth about her billionaire client drives breathtaking insurance manager Alexandra over the edge but cannot quell her desire for sinfully handsome and off-limits Mark. This tale of non-stop action, suspense, deceit, and murder unfolds in Atlanta, New York, and on the awe-inspiring island of Santorini—a precious

gem in the Aegean Sea that is still an active volcano with spectacular rock formations, impressive lunar landscapes, and breathtaking red and black sand beaches.

Dark Shadows of The Past is the fourth novel in *The Greek Isles Series*. Dazzling Christina is caught in a deadly game of conspiracy, murder, treachery, and vengeance while desperately trying to conceal her real identity. Seductively handsome police detective Dan puts his job and life on the line to protect this feisty enchantress from the threat hovering over her. The non-stop action and steamy romance unfolds in Atlanta, the Blue Ridge Mountains of Northern Georgia, and the island of Cephalonia—the fascinating setting of “Captain Corelli’s Mandolin” in the amazing aquamarine waters of the Ionian Sea. *Dark Shadows of The Past* will be available Winter 2015.



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