

Praise for The Necklace of Goddess Athena

"I was glued to the pages by the author's vivid descriptions and her beautiful, almost poetic way of writing."

~Angel Sefer, author of The Greek Isles series

"This story is a beautifully crafted, Urban Fantasy adventure. It is refreshing with a quality descriptive writing style that transports the reader to Athens from the first page."

~Amazon customer

"Effrosyni's descriptions create a live sensation i.e. you easily see, hear, and smell. I truly fell under the spell of her apt writing."

~Amazon customer

Excerpt from The Necklace of Goddess Athena

By Effrosyni Moschoudi

Prologue

Efimios stood at the edge of the precipice. Down below, the sea raged with tremendous force. A howling wind caused his long robes to billow like broken sails on a ship that's lost in a storm. He opened his hand and stared odiously at the necklace. The salty bite of the wind stung his eyes but funnily enough, that gave him comfort. He couldn't have chosen a better place for what he was about to do.

"Athena, almighty Pallada! Protectress of the city of Athens, hear me!" he cried out with all his might and yet, his voice was barely audible over the deafening crash of the waves on the rocks below. As he stretched out his hand, the sky erupted with lightning and loud crashes of thunder. The pendant was now hidden from view inside his fist, but its golden chain was swirling in the wind, whipping his hand. Undeterred and not in the slightest afraid, he looked up to the rumbling heavens, his teeth clenched, his eyes alight with fury.

"Here in my hand," he yelled, "I hold your necklace that you entrusted me with when I was only a child. For the

services that I have offered you devotedly for the protection of Athens, you have repaid me with cruelty! I could perhaps understand it if you were to punish only me but my son? What has Phevos ever done to you? He is just a boy! How could you do this to him?"

Efimios lowered his hand to take one last look at the necklace. It glowed brilliantly as lightning bolts ripped the sky but its beauty was lost upon him.

"Do you forget so easily?" he burst out, his face contorted with wild exasperation. "I have been at your command for so long! And this is how you thank me? Did you think that following your orders has been easy for me? Because of you, I belonged nowhere and to no one, having anything but a normal life... but since you chose to repay me in this manner, surely you cannot expect me to serve you any longer! Indeed, this is where it all ends! Your wretched cave in the Acropolis hill will never be used again! I have made sure of that! As for your precious necklace, this evil noose that you had me wear around my neck, I have minded it for you long enough!"

With a forceful throw, the necklace of Goddess Athena disappeared in the vastness of the foamy sea. A myriad of thunderbolts flashed all around Efimios as he started to walk away from the precipice. He quickened his pace, and his face

brightened with the promise of a smile. His heart felt lighter already. Without a shadow of a doubt, he knew that one day his suffering would end.

Chapter 1

Eleven years later

First, there was this tremendous roar. Everything around them shook with force and then, a blinding light surrounded them as they were taken through a cyclone of ear-piercing sounds.

Phevos held the hand of his sister Daphne inside the forceful vortex of Time. Neither of them knew where they were headed as they swirled frightened beyond description, their bodies surrendered to the powerful whirlwind. Their eyes were tightly shut to the blinding flashes of light, and a sound that resembled a sweeping tornado tortured their ears. In the twenty years of his life, Phevos could never have imagined the intensity of the experience.

Although still captured in this unprecedented storm of light and sound, he managed to recall random pieces from his father's stories. Efimios, his father and teacher, had described to him hundreds of times his experience of the

Passage through Time, but Phevos had never expected there would come a day when he would experience it himself and at that, in such a different way.

Gasping with panic, he realized that his sister's hand had slipped away from his. He started calling out her name, but through the roar he couldn't even hear himself speak. All at once, there was darkness and a soothing silence and next thing he knew, he was lying on the ground.

A strong buzz still sounded in his ears. It took a few moments to fade as he opened his eyes and tried to gather his wits. His body felt numb at first, but he managed to sit up somehow and look around him. The ground felt wet under him and the air smelt of grass. The moon shone high above on a starry sky with a velvet light that was ample, allowing him to inspect his surroundings quite easily. He was in an orchard. There were trees, plants and bushes all around him. Panicking, he realized that he was alone.

"Daphne!" he called out, looking around him frantically. His sister was only nineteen. Up until a few minutes ago, she had been living a secluded life within the safe walls of their rich estate house and its beautiful gardens. Her overprotective brother knew well that adventure did not suit her disposition.

“Over here!” came a wavering voice from the bushes to his left. Fearing the worst, he sprang to his feet. His attire, a white shirt and jeans, although perfectly suitable for a young man his age, would have been baffling to anyone who might have known where he had just come from. Both garments were heavily stained with mud. He ignored a slight dizziness that hit his temples when he stood up and ran jumping over the bushes, his shoulder-length blond hair waving in the air like a lion’s mane.

Sat by a lemon tree, Daphne was holding her head with one hand. When she looked up, her face betrayed her distress. Her eyes were huge, childlike. Her auburn hair fell on her shoulders in rich curls. Her skin was perfectly white; her facial features flawless and delicate. She looked like a fine porcelain doll despite wearing just a simple, rather unimaginative sleeveless dress in deep blue. However, the stunning jewels that she wore on her ears and around her neck befitted perfectly her rare beauty.

“Almighty Zeus! What has happened? Are you all right?” asked Phevos breathlessly as he knelt before her. Willing himself to calm down, he used the cuff of his sleeve to wipe the blood from a minor wound on her temple. It was only a scratch, but Phevos felt guilty all the same. He had tried all he could to hold her hand through the Passage but he had

somehow allowed it to slip away. What if he hadn't been able to find her at all? He shuddered at the very thought. Daphne grimaced when he pressed the fabric on her temple again, but then she smiled faintly.

"Don't worry," she said, "it is nothing... I just slipped and fell. I must have hit my head on a rock." As her voice trailed off, her face contorted with discomfort. Her temples were pounding with an increasingly strong headache.

"It'll be all right," he mumbled, not knowing what else to say. He was still quite confused. How had this happened? Why hadn't their father chosen to come along? Phevos did think that the scratch was nothing to worry about but felt uneasy all the same to know that he could no longer ensure his sister's safety in this unknown world. The thought overwhelmed him, and he made a silent plea to the Gods for protection.

"Come here sweet Sister, try and stand up!" he encouraged her, as he pulled her up gently. Cautiously, he attempted to let go of her, but she faltered on her feet and grabbed his waist to steady herself.

"I do not think I can walk Phevos... I feel rather dizzy," she said with regret. At that exact moment, they both heard frantic barking. When they turned to look, they saw a small-sized dog standing a few feet before them, making an

incredibly loud noise for his size. Phevos and Daphne were stunned by this encounter but not frightened. The dog didn't look fierce. No doubt he just felt protective of his territory.

His fearless bark compared to his small size seemed rather comical to them, and they would have grinned, amused, had their situation not been grave. In all their misery, the last thing they needed was a yappy dog who could attract strangers to them, even trouble.

Ksenia sighed. Manos's room was messy as usual. As much as she loved her little brother and enjoyed taking care of him, she wished she could trade one of his many good points for his unprecedented disregard for tidiness.

At the age of twelve, the only things that interested him were computers and pc games. A few items of clothing were lying messily on the armchair, and Ksenia knew she would have to lift them one by one if she were to ensure that her washing wouldn't include any items that didn't belong there.

Today, the 'catch' was again rather rich: a mutated warrior, a T-Rex, and a half-eaten pack of biscuits. There were scattered magazines on the bed and underneath it, she could see two pairs of shoes and scattered socks lying messily on the floor turned inside out. She wrinkled her nose

with disapproval and picked the socks up, adding them to the pile on her hands.

As she turned to go, she noticed the pc screen on the desk. A screensaver she hadn't seen before displayed a series of stunning underwater pictures. Intrigued, she abandoned the clothes on the armchair and approached the monitor to take a closer look. Although she didn't have her own pc, at the university where she studied Business Administration she had plenty of opportunity to use them. She was quite computer literate as you would expect from a nineteen-year-old, but her little brother was already a bit of an expert. She didn't mind that he spent hours staring at a screen at home, although she'd prefer that he spent less time indoors and more out on the street, playing with other children.

Manos had expressed a passion for computers from a very young age. Three years earlier, after harassing her unstopably for weeks to buy him a specific one he wanted, he had finally got his wish and had delved into pc use with the dexterity and dedication of a teenager. She supervised his Internet use of course and felt proud of him for not just using it for fun, but also to study for school. Ksenia gave the mouse a gentle nudge to reveal the program running on the

pc. It looked like Manos was on the Internet again, downloading freeware games.

“What are you doing here?” came the abrupt interruption from the door. The dark-haired boy that stood there had his hands on his hips in an inquiring manner, but his face revealed no trace of irritation.

“Busted!” Ksenia giggled raising both hands. She picked up the messy heap of clothes from the armchair and turned to face him again. “Actually, I came in here to find you and instead, I found these.” She put out her arms and pulled a face of mock indignation.

Manos rolled his eyes. “If you save me from this talk, I’m willing to forget that you were spying in here! How’s that?” he offered with a crooked smile.

“Sounds good to me!” Kenia laughed as she walked past him. “And just to show you what a multi-talented spy I am, I’m going to go in there now and make you pasta for tonight, all right?” Smirking, she pointed to the kitchen across the hall.

“Great, I’m starving!” Manos rubbed his tummy, as he turned around to follow his sister. “Oh! I’d better feed Odysseus. He must be hungry too by now.”

Ksenia rolled her eyes. “That’s for sure! I wonder why he’s not barking to remind us.”

The kitchen felt warm. The big table that reminded Ksenia of happy dinners with her parents was set with a white tablecloth. On one corner, there were neat piles of freshly ironed clothes. Thick curtains of flowery patterns hid the view to the orchard from the window. Ksenia placed the dirty clothes in the wash and put away the ironing board while Manos opened a dog food can and went out the kitchen door to feed their pet.

The young girl looked at the round clock on the wall. The time was eight p.m. and this surprised her although she followed the same pattern every Saturday. On weekdays, having to attend classes at the university and then to help out Mrs. Sofia at the family guesthouse, she never had time to do house chores. Luckily she managed to do it all on Saturdays. She didn't mind that it took her all day to finish as long as her Sundays remained her own to do as she pleased.

In the past eleven years since their parents' mysterious disappearance, Ksenia and Manos had no other family but each other. Sunday was their special day, which they always spent together having fun. If they chose to stay at home, they would watch TV or play good old-fashioned board games. Sometimes they would go out instead, but it never had to be anything fancy. After all, simple things often provide greater pleasure.

Every week they would decide together what they would like to do for the coming Sunday. This was something that their parents used to practice and now the children carried on the family tradition. Ksenia had experienced countless Sunday pleasures in the company of her parents. Her memories were crystal clear despite the fact that she couldn't have been older than eight years old at the time. She remembered for example having ice cream cones together in the summer. Under the scorching sun, they would wind up giggling madly as they licked melted chocolate off their fingers.

Sometimes they'd sit in a park feeding and petting the stray cats. Even today, the purr of a cat reminded Ksenia of her dad. He was a bit of a cat-whisperer, in the sense that he could tame even the wildest creature, getting even the biggest males to lie belly up and purr loudly in response to his gentle petting. Yet, amongst all the simple Sunday pleasures that they often sought as a family, there were some that were quite exceptional. The fact that you had to wait for months on end for these, only made them even more special. Those were truly unique, unforgettable experiences.

There were nights in August for instance, when the view of the full moon from the top of the Acropolis hill or from a high terrace could steal your breath away. The moon would

slide over the clouds like a seducing princess dressed in her finest, silvery silk. And the sky would be full of stars that trembled feebly, like servants that bowed before her. During those nights under the light of the August full moon, the city of Athens would become an enchanted kingdom that slept lazily under the sweet light of its ethereal mistress.

Those nights had the power to make you feel strong and weak at the same time, because the soul could then fly all the way to the moon. In those moments, you inevitably felt that if you were to whisper a wish, the stars would surely hear you. And that is what Ksenia as a child strongly believed on those special nights. These are beliefs that once entered in the soul of a child, can never be uprooted from it, no matter what blows life may have in store. And so, the power of faith was safely kept inside her chest, where her soul remained forever gazing at a starry sky with the scent of basil lingering in the air.

Ksenia smiled melancholically. She had just returned to the kitchen after putting away the ironed clothes. She walked to the window to peer outside, but it was far too dark to make anything out. Her mind wandered again. Manos was only a baby when their parents disappeared, so he had no memories of them. Ksenia on the other hand, remembered so much... One Sunday, they had all returned

home wet to the bone. A sudden rain had caught them by surprise, as they were walking lazily around the lanes of Plaka, the old quarter of Athens where Ksenia still lived. Despite being wet, they were laughing madly when they got home. Their spirits were high on the smell of the soil and the aroma of honeysuckle and jasmine coming from every front yard.

This particular memory often led Ksenia back to the same lanes. She often picked flowers during her walks there, like her mother used to. She would put them in the vase that still stood on the windowsill in the kitchen and Ksenia now did that too. She felt it was her duty to pass on her memories to her brother and to keep them alive for their parents' sake.

Tenderly, her fingers caressed the heads of two pink carnations that stood rather lonesome inside the vase. Ksenia would never give up on her parents. She always hoped that one day they would return and explain everything. She knew in her heart that they were alive, and that was enough to her as to keep believing.

She turned her back to the window and tried to focus her mind on happier thoughts. Her brother would walk in any moment, and she didn't want him to see the sorrow in her eyes. For the next morning, they had planned a walk to the Pillars of Olympian Zeus through the lanes of Plaka. Then,

they would visit a computer & games exhibition at the nearby Zappeion Hall. This would be Manos's main treat for Sunday morning.

Afterwards, her contribution to the plan for the day would take them to the adjoining National Garden for a leisurely stroll. This was her favorite place in the whole of Athens. She couldn't wait to sit on a bench before the duck pond. She could see the sunlight now, dancing with the thick foliage of the trees, fluttering above her. Soon, it would reach down to caress her face again. It would fuse with the children's laughter behind her closed eyelids, lifting her out of herself for a while.

The sound of the door opening startled her out of her reverie.

"Ksenia, Odysseus is not outside. I can't find him!" Manos looked ruddy-cheeked, and his facial features were pinched with anxiety.

Ksenia gave an exasperated sigh. "Not again! Hang on; I'll just get our jackets. Let's try and find him before he causes chaos for yet another time," she said, leaving the kitchen hurriedly. Five minutes later, they were outside in the cold, March night. Manos led the way holding a flashlight. Odysseus hadn't got his name by chance. He had been named after the leading character of the Odyssey for a reason. His

roaming adventures every now and then had become legendary in their street and had caused them embarrassment with the neighbors more than once.

Somehow, Odysseus managed to find small openings in the wire fencing of the orchard despite their best efforts to mend them. During many of his getaways, he had trampled on the neighbors' vegetable patches. It was particularly embarrassing to have to apologize profusely to an annoyed neighbor who delivers him back, announcing in every detail the damage to his produce.

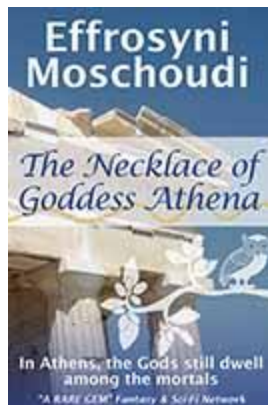
But Ksenia and Manos loved their pet endlessly despite all that. They had raised him from a tiny puppy, and he was now a sprightly three-year-old. To them, he was the most faithful friend and guard. They couldn't get enough of petting him while looking at his clever little eyes that gazed back at them with evident adoration. Whatever frustration his antics caused them to feel, it never lasted long. Of course, they were now livid with him once again. They both had their minds set on telling him off once they caught him, especially as they were out on this cold, miserable night because of him, roaming in the semidarkness while their stomachs grumbled with hunger.

The orchard was inaccessible in many parts, as nobody had tended to it for a good while. It was a stretch of almost

two acres. Wire fencing on either side marked the boundaries between the property and neighboring gardens of fellow Plaka inhabitants. On the back, the land reached up to the foot of the Acropolis hill where a massive rock face stood vertically. Ksenia and Manos felt grateful for the border on this side of their property for two reasons: firstly, the Parthenon towered above their land offering them a stunning view to one of the greatest miracles of the ancient world. Secondly and more trivially, the rock face meant they had one less side to worry about when it came to their pet's Houdini-style escapes.

Tonight, the Parthenon stood proud as always despite its demise over the ages. The moonlight surrounded it with a misty, surreal light. Ksenia looked up for a few moments to marvel at it and then continued to follow Manos, treading carefully, her eyes glued to the rough ground. There were dips and bushes everywhere. Ksenia stubbed her toe on a rocky bump and let out a small cry. Her delicate leather shoes didn't offer much support for trekking in such inhospitable grounds in the dark. She assured her brother who came to her rescue that she was all right and then silently, scolded herself for her procrastination. She was forever putting off finding someone to tend to the orchard and to sort out this unacceptable mess.

And then they heard Odysseus. They exchanged wild glances and broke to a sprint, following the frantic noise that their pet made. It sounded like it was coming from the rock face. Little did they care now about the mud that splattered on their clothes, as they ran carelessly through murky pits of rainwater.



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