

*“Para poli kala, file mou! Welcome back to Naxos! You’ve brought the summer back to us.”*

“Congratulations on your anniversary!” said Helen, kissing Rania on both cheeks. “Forty years of marriage - that’s a real cause for celebration.”

Rania opened their gift and held the glass vase to the light to admire its colour. They had bought it in Bath just before their return to Naxos. It had a flattened rim which suggested the shape of an ancient Greek pot, and its rich blue hue seemed to swirl around the bowl like the sea.

“Thank you, it’s beautiful. You’re very kind. Come in, come in.”

Aristos Iraklidis, revered on the island and often known simply as The Curator, had been in charge of the Archaeological Museum for many years. Day had met him professionally when he first moved to Athens, but had come to regard him as a close friend. He was into his sixties now but he looked younger. His shirt was the azure blue of the Greek flag, which flattered his deeply tanned complexion, slightly wayward white hair and generous grey moustache. His dark eyes were still those of a much younger man.

Day had brought Helen to visit Aristos and Rania for the first time last summer. The terrace still looked the same, sheltered from the sun by its vine-draped pergola, its wonderful old olive tree in one corner, the ornate garden with scarlet bougainvillea and Aristos’s olive trees and vineyard beyond.

Aristos took Helen to inspect the new vines he had planted, and Rania put her hand on Day’s arm.

“You’re rather pale, Martin, you need some good Greek sunshine. Still, you look happy. I’m very pleased to see it. Last time I saw you was in October, wasn’t it? You were quite upset by that business at the tower.”

She was right, he had been stressed before Christmas, but something told him she was asking about his current blatant happiness. When he hesitated, uncharacteristically for a man who always had something to say for himself, Rania gestured towards Helen in the garden.

“I feel as if we’ve known Helen for ever,” she said, “yet it was only last summer that you brought her to meet us. The cold English winter hasn’t done her any harm, in fact she looks extremely content.” She paused expectantly, and Day waited to see whether she would ask him outright.

“Is she staying for the whole summer?”

Day smiled, thinking that the moment had come to give her the whole story, but at that very moment they heard people coming up the steps to the terrace. It was the only other

guests invited to the anniversary celebration, Nick and Despina Kilozioglou and their 11-year old son, Nestoras.

“Hey Martin, how you doing, mate?” called Nick, his Aussie accent a legacy of his childhood in Sydney. He shook Day’s hand and clapped him on the back. “Good to have you back.”

“It’s great to see you both,” said Day. “My god, Deppi, you look radiant. That’s what they say, isn’t it? You really do! When’s the baby due?”

“Early July. You must come out to Plaka and see the new house before there’s a new baby to deal with. I see Helen over there. Let me just put this food in the kitchen for Aunt Rania, and we’ll catch up with you both.”

Day watched them go into the house and heard voices from the kitchen, Rania and Deppi discussing the food. Nestoras took his chance to follow one of the cats into the garden.

An old lady with a stick came out of a ground floor bedroom door, lowered herself into a chair and propped the stick within reach against the wall. She closed her eyes with a smile to enjoy the warmth of the sun that fell gently through the pergola. Day recognised the most senior member of the Iraklidis family and walked over to her. Aristos’s mother rarely appeared when there were visitors, preferring the quiet of her own room. Day had only met her once before, on Rania’s birthday last year, and he remembered that she spoke no English.

“Kyria Anastasia, *kalispera sas*,” he said, bending down and shaking her hand. “*O Martin eimai*.”

The old lady smiled at him as if she needed no reminding. She was Day’s ideal of an elderly Greek lady, majestic in her traditional black dress, her face a beautiful arrangement of wrinkles earned during a long and sun-drenched life. She must be, he guessed, in her late eighties. He talked to her in his highly idiosyncratic mixture of Ancient Greek, *katharevousa* and *demotiki*; it was a benign blend of classical literature, the formal modern Greek language, and the everyday spoken one. This hotchpotch, delivered with embellishments and courtesies, clearly delighted the old lady. She responded in the simplest and clearest Greek that Day had heard in a long time; he would never tire of hearing the language spoken like this. He lodged on the low wall near her chair and they talked for a few minutes before Aristos called everyone to the dining table. Day helped Anastasia from her chair, and soon everyone except Nestoras, who was still somewhere in the garden, was seated in the cushioned white armchairs round the long wooden table.

Aristos emerged from the kitchen with two bottles of cold white wine. A cluster of glasses already stood on the marble table made by his friend, the artist Konstantinos Saris. A perfect meander pattern decorated its deep white rim, and its well-proportioned

pedestal seemed both massive and delicate. Day laid his hand on Helen's on the arm of her chair, no longer interested in secrecy.

"Rania and I are delighted to have you with us today," announced Aristos, who alone remained standing. "Thank you for being here to share our anniversary. Please raise your glasses. To family, friendship and a long and happy life!"

"*Stin yia mas!*"

"*Synharitiria!*"

Amid toasts and congratulations, the meal began with the *mezethes*. There were little chickpea balls, a *melitzanosalata*, tender pieces of octopus in a lemon coating, homemade *dolmades*, grilled vegetables and fresh cubes of local cheese.

From the other side of Helen, Nick leaned round to Day, his enthusiasm obvious.

"Hey, I've just heard your good news, Martin. Congratulations! What a turn-out for you."

Even the old lady stared at Day. He hoped he wasn't blushing. The time had come to tell them all about Helen and himself. It seemed to be becoming more and more difficult, though he could not have explained why.

"I've just told Nick about the *reward*, Martin," said Helen quickly, before he could speak.

"Oh, yes, that. It was a complete surprise."

"What was?" asked Aristos from the end of the table, looking to Helen for the story. Everyone was waiting.

"Martin had a letter from a lawyer in America last month. It was about the stolen antiquities that he tracked down last year. The lawyer said that the owner of the collection had died, leaving instructions that Martin should receive the reward that he offered for the recovery of his treasures."

Day said that the police had done all the hard work.

"Come on, Martin," laughed Helen, "it was all down to you, even if you did take too many risks." She smiled at the others, shaking her head. "Despite this sudden boost to his income he's still taken on two major pieces of work for the summer."

Aristos nodded. "Martin would be lost without his work."

"What do you have lined up, then, Martin?" Nick asked. "Is it enough to keep you out of trouble?"

"The reward is going straight into my currently empty pension pot," said Day, "Work needs to continue as normal. I've got the contract to finish the project that Edward

Childe set up before he died, which is a TV series on Greek marble sculpture. I can see it taking several years and quite a bit of travelling round Greece.”

“Sounds interesting,” said Nick. “And what’s the other job?”

“My agent in London wasn’t convinced we’d get the Childe contract, so he arranged for me to write and present another TV series: each episode will be filmed at a different excavation site in Greece, one which is still active. We’ll be disrupting the excavation teams and I’m supposed to smooth the way.”

“Both jobs will take you away from Naxos quite a lot,” noted Rania.

“Oh, there’s plenty I can do here, I’m in no rush to go anywhere. This island is my delight as well as my home. And Helen will keep me from working too hard, won’t you Helen?”

Everyone laughed. Day’s friends were not afraid that he might suffer from overwork. Why else, after all, had he moved to a quiet Cycladic island? Day loved his work but he had his priorities, and professional ambition was not something that interfered with them.

The table was cleared and Rania went inside to fetch the main course, roasted Greek lamb with potatoes. Fragrant with herbs and garlic, the aroma of the meat was rich with lemon juice and white wine, and the potatoes had been cooked in the tray with the joint. They had absorbed the meat juice and were full of its flavour, but their tops remained crisp. Nestoras was the only person at the table who noticed Day, who loved potatoes in any form, quietly helping himself to one or two more.

“So, tell us about London, Helen,” said Aristos, sitting back for a small rest from the serious business of enjoying his wife’s cooking. Day glanced at Helen, who seemed to hesitate in the same way as he had himself.

“We had a good time,” said Helen. “The highlight was Alex and Kate’s wedding in November. You met Alex last year when he came to see us. The actual ceremony was private, but Martin and I went to the champagne reception in the British Museum, where Alex works, then to a place in Chelsea Square for dinner, about a dozen people in a private room. It was really very special.”

“Then Helen spent most of December and January at her publisher’s beck and call,” continued Day. “Book signings, radio interviews, that kind of thing. If she isn’t careful she’ll be quite famous soon. I just did my usual kind of work. And we had a very good Christmas ...”

It had been a Christmas he would never forget, because it had been the real beginning of their new relationship. He took another sip of his wine and was about to make their announcement when he realised that the conversation had taken another direction.

The lamb course was followed by a dessert. Deppi had made a *myzithropita*, a delicate Greek cheesecake from a traditional recipe from the nearby island of Syros where she grew up. It was a rich combination of the soft local cheese, honey, cinnamon and grated orange peel. Nestoras had a large portion and a second helping. Day was quite sorry to have no fondness for desserts.

They lingered well into the afternoon. Sunset would not be till eight o'clock, but people began to take their leave around six. Kyria Anastasia was the first to excuse herself, and shortly afterwards it was the Kiloziglous. Once Nestoras had been found in the garden, the family left amid promises to meet up soon.

Helen and Day stayed for another hour. Over a final glass of wine with Aristos and Rania they talked about Naxos, London and life in general, but the subject of their relationship did not arise. On the drive back to Filoti they had to laugh and admit their total failure to introduce the subject.

“You were so funny, Martin. At the beginning you cleverly avoided Rania’s hints and questions, then later, when I could see you were dying to tell everybody, you didn’t manage it.”

“Nor did you! There just never seemed to be the perfect moment...”

“I don’t think you need worry, darling. I suspect we don’t have a secret relationship any more.”