

The Atlantis Keystone

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Acknowledgements

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, businesses, companies, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.



“Tell us, said the other, the whole story [of Atlantis], and how and from whom Solon heard this veritable tradition.

He replied: In the Egyptian Delta, at the head of which the river Nile divides, there is a certain district which is called the district of Sais, and the great city of the district is also called Sais, and is the city from which King Amasis came. The citizens have a deity for their foundress; she is called in the Egyptian tongue Neith, and is asserted by them to be the same whom the Hellenes call Athene; they are great lovers of the Athenians, and say that they are in some way related to them.”

—From *Timaeus* by Plato, written 360 BC:

Chapter 1

Thailand, Khao Lak, Boxing Day 2004

The lukewarm breeze from the Indian Ocean was pleasant, like a gentle feather sweeping over her skin. Anna Stenbock sat in a sun lounger on the patio of a stilted hotel bungalow with her husband of eight days, Erik Stenbock, asleep in the chair next to her. The Swedish medieval castle of Torpa, to which Erik was the sole heir, was thousands of miles away. Nevertheless, like so many times before in the last couple of weeks, Anna’s mind wandered to its snow-covered roof and dark irregularly-sized windows. She shivered when she visualised the castle tower. In her mind she climbed the stairs and stopped when she reached the second floor landing. She faced the wall on the opposite side and imagined stroking it with her hand, assessing the material and the thickness of it. She knew that behind the plastered surface was a gap between the inner and outer wall; an unexplained vacuum which according to tradition no one had dared to enter for hundreds of years. A medieval legend told the tale of a girl, the daughter of a knight, who was suspected of having caught the plague on a trip to visit relatives in Denmark six hundred years ago. To prevent an outbreak of the disease, the girl’s father buried her alive inside the wall by blocking up the space where there had been a door. Her screams could be heard for three days and three nights. Local folklore proclaimed that any attempt to open her resting place had been followed by someone’s death, resulting in a lack of enthusiasm for further discovery.

Until recently Anna had believed in the legend and had imagined, like most people who had taken the guided tour of the castle, that if the wall was ever

opened they would find a dusty medieval skeleton with a mummy-like expression of fear forever etched on its skull. Although that was a disturbing notion, it was nothing to what she now knew or rather suspected was actually hidden in there. A few days before the wedding she had made a discovery which revealed a shocking truth about the contents of the void. Although the white-rendered stone building was no longer fit for modern habitation, Anna had spent a lot of time in it since she met Erik five years earlier. She found the place intriguing and irresistible, allowing her to make good use of her history degree, researching rare journals left by generations of Torpa occupants. She now wished she hadn't; desperately wanting to return to her previous ignorant existence.

She took a sip of her coffee and put down the cup before she glanced over at Erik. It was shortly after breakfast but she wasn't surprised that he had allowed himself to get lulled into a happy trance-like state. Apart from being lazy, he was perfect in every way. Appearance wise he was as one would imagine a skilled Renaissance artist capturing a Greek warrior god; his blonde hair flawlessly arranged despite having done nothing to it apart from bathing in salty water and leaving it to dry in the wind; his tanned upper body muscular in an almost pedantic way even though he never went to the gym. At present his face was relaxed and partly concealed by sunglasses but she knew that as soon as he smiled, straight teeth and dimples in both cheeks would appear. She found it funny that he remained completely oblivious to his own good looks and as far as she knew he didn't notice the constant glances and attention he was getting from members of the opposite sex. She loved that about him. In fact she loved everything about him, perhaps apart from his stubbornness... and his dangerous habit of sleepwalking.

She wanted to tell him what she had found out about Torpa, craved to... but she couldn't. Of course she couldn't tell anyone... She moved up and down in the sun lounger, as if she kept adjusting a driving seat in a car. She knew Erik wouldn't appreciate a reminder of the contentious issues of the old place anyway. It would trigger associations with his unhappy childhood. If only the wall could be opened so that she could have it confirmed. In the end she decided she had to at least ask him. She poked his arm, leaned over him and took his sunglasses off.

"Erik, there's something I have to ask you," she said in a loud voice to wake him up. "It's very important so you'll have to listen to me." He appeared startled, held his breath and looked as if he thought she was about to ask for an annulment of their marriage. She moved his feet and sat down at the end of his chair, taking one of his hands and playing with his fingers as she spoke: "You know the legend about the medieval girl buried alive inside a wall at Torpa..."

"Yes..." he said with a mixture of relief and confusion, starting to breathe again. "We need to open the castle wall where the girl may have been buried. The reason why I ask this is because I believe the wall is hiding something of importance."

A familiar wrinkle of irritation appeared between his eyebrows: "How important could a skeleton of a girl buried hundreds of years ago be?" he asked rhetorically.

"I'm telling you; I have reason to believe that the space between the inner and outer wall where she supposedly died is hiding something else. I'm afraid I can't tell you more than that but please believe me when I say that the only way to find

out for sure is to *open that wall.*" She stood up in an attempt to emphasise her words.

Erik was unmoved. "I thought you knew my stance on this. The poor girl's resting place should not be disturbed. Grave robbery is not my business, that's for sure. And the legend about the girl buried alive in the wall is a major tourist attraction for the castle," he added. "To open the wall would ruin this. My mother would simply never allow it." She could see from his momentarily widened eyes that his own reference to his mother had surprised him. That Erik agreed with his mother was very unusual.

"Can you please at least ask her?" she begged.

"No, I know what she'll say. There's no point in having this discussion. Can you please drop it and enjoy our honeymoon." He leaned back in his chair and put his sunglasses back on, pretending that the conversation had never happened.

Anna sat back down in her chair. She regretted bringing it up. She didn't want to ruin what had so far been a wonderful holiday. To lighten up the atmosphere she added with a smirk: "Well I suppose so. We all know what's happened to everyone who has tried to break open the wall." She paused for effect, waived her hands to simulate ghosts and waited for his reaction. He managed a smile but didn't say anything until he suddenly got up.

"I fancy a jog. I'll be back shortly", he said before he went into the bungalow. She silently watched him through the window; put on shorts and T-shirt, come out, kiss her quickly on the mouth, say 'love you' and disappear down the steps leading to the beach. Anna remained seated, considering what line of attack she would use to convince her mother in law when they got back to Sweden.

She had not particularly studied the other hotel guests on the beach; not until they all stood up at the same time as if they had collectively agreed to do so. The distant roaring of the sea changed nature. She glanced down and saw something odd. The water appeared to pull back, leaving several metres of sand, stones and shells exposed, as if Moses had been there with his stick. It was strange. Anna had never seen anything like it and wondered why the tide would suddenly be so low. The water continued to draw back. People were pointing, laughing and some walked down to the exposed ocean floor, testing out the wet sand with naked feet. Apart from the excited voices of the people on the beach everything was peaceful, but this was definitely not right. This was not normal. Somewhere at the back of her mind she remembered something about the effects of earthquakes. There had been an almost imperceptible vibration two hours ago but she was sure it could not have caused the strange behaviour of the ocean now. Anna went down the stairs to the beach to ask what was going on; to see if they knew whether some strange tide phenomenon normally occurred at this time of year. She saw that a middle aged corpulent man boasting a white beer belly and a receding hairline in the neighbouring bungalow was doing the same. She had not spoken to him before but decided to do so now. She was fairly certain he and his wife were Swedish as well.

The man spoke first: "Look at that! Amazing! I saw something similar on holiday in America once. The surfers went mad." At that moment someone screamed and pointed further out the sea. Many stayed put but a few started to run inland towards the reception building which was located on higher ground. A couple of

young boys with surfboards happily ran out in the water. Anna had assumed everyone was excited about the tide but she soon became aware that an enormous wave, larger than she had ever seen, approached. From where she was it looked like a line in the water; a wall moving at high speed. She got cold from fear at the realization of the possible effects of such a wave. Her first instinct was to run for her life as fast as she could but the man next to her laughed and said to her mockingly: "Ha! Look at those people running." The man waived to his wife in the hut and slowly walked down to the water's edge. Perhaps he knew something she didn't.

Anna reassessed the situation and decided that she may be overreacting. She went back up the stairs to her bungalow. Perhaps she was safer up there anyway. She was sure the build quality was good. The hotel was expensive enough... On her way up she noted that several birds deserted the beach area and the nearby trees. She then realised that the wave was enormous, gigantic and even taller than she had first thought. She heard terrified high pitched screams in the distance. Panic stricken she had only just reached the top of the stairs when the wave struck the bungalow, showering her with great force. She managed to grab hold of the fence. She had not predicted the power with which the water quickly filled the shoreline. There was water everywhere. A strong smell of fish or seaweed filled her nostrils. She struggled on in what felt like heavy rain over the patio to the door to the bungalow. With a loud cracking noise the bungalow suddenly started to lean violently. The stilts on which it stood begun to break. Clinging on like a leech she screamed for help but the people on the beach had disappeared, been submerged or carried away by the strong current. With horror she saw that the bungalow next door had already collapsed. Everything seemed to be moving in slow motion even though it was a matter of seconds. She didn't even have time to reflect properly on her situation before something hit her hard over the head. It felt as if her head split open. She was barely conscious but understood that the bungalow had crumbled on top of her. It pulled her down under water. She closed her eyes and waved her arms in an attempt to get to the surface.

Chapter 2

London, England, June 2005

Erik Stenbock looked around and wondered if the other passengers in the crowded tube carriage had noticed his frustration. Unlikely, he concluded after having observed the tired and empty faces surrounding him. He was in a foul mood and had a headache. The fact that he had been forced to travel across London during the five o'clock rush hour made him even more angry with his mother. She normally handled all matters relating to Torpa but this time she had involved him just because he happened to be in London for the day. She clearly hadn't grasped that he had a demanding job as a lawyer and that he would be tired after an early start, a journey to England and an all day meeting with one of

his worst clients. Ignoring the feelings and wishes of others, in particular his, was his mother's specialty. Without first checking with him, she had agreed for Erik to meet up with as she put it: 'a very persistent professor from Oxford University'. This professor apparently had a particular interest in an ancient artefact which had been donated to the British museum in the nineteenth century by a previous Torpa owner. His mother had been thrilled to find out that the artefact in question was referred to as "the Torpa tablet" after its place of discovery. She had seen this information and new important academic contact as an excellent opportunity to get some publicity and perhaps stir up some media attention around Torpa, something which she constantly craved. Interest from Oxford University was not to be ignored in her view. Consequently she had been most helpful to the professor and had already provided all the material requested; in particular copies of historic journals from the estate. Apparently the professor and his team had found something of interest in the journals and had requested a meeting to discuss it.

Erik took off his tie, put it in his pocket and undid the top buttons of his shirt. He was relieved when the tube voice announced that they were in Holborn. He squeezed out on the platform, noting the approving glances from a woman by the door when he took off his suit jacket. Leaving soaring temperatures and sweaty armpits behind, he walked along the yellow line towards the escalators. Glancing at his wristwatch, he realised he was fifteen minutes late and started to run up the stairs and outside. While walking briskly following signs for the British museum he tried to compose himself as best he could for the meeting with the professor. He attempted to shake off his bad mood and to overlook the fact that he lacked any interest in, or knowledge of, ancient history. It was difficult to ignore that he was as excited about the meeting as he would be over an eyelash stuck in the eye. He viewed it as an irritation which would hopefully go away if he blinked sufficiently. Unfortunately, he feared blinking would not help in this case.

He had never been to the British Museum before and as he entered the gate he found an impressive building littered with tourists. It wasn't difficult to spot the professor in the crowd. He was standing on the stairs together with a short, plain and pale young woman, who Erik assumed was one of his students. As he approached them, putting on a forced smile, he was surprised to see that the professor appeared younger than expected, in his thirties, not much older than himself, although still with typically professor-like features. He didn't have a beard but his face showed traces of early stubble. His glasses were outdated and scratched. His hair was almost laughable. It appeared that he hadn't touched it since getting out of bed that morning and had obviously slept on his left side, hence the flattened appearance on that side of his head. Erik smirked and shook the professor's hand, introducing himself.

The professor smiled back and announced: "Paul Simmons, professor of linguistics at Oxford University. Pleased to meet you." He then turned to his colleague and continued: "This is Emma Johnson, one of my most brilliant students, who is writing her dissertation on Linear A and its various theories of decipherment."

The young woman blushed at her professor's flattering words, making the spots on her cheeks seem even redder. "I've been looking forward to meeting you, Mr Stenbock," she said. "I've spent some time studying the Torpa tablet and have read

a lot about Torpa, so I almost feel like I know you, or at least your childhood home.” She laughed nervously and glanced at Paul as if she wondered whether she had said too much. Erik was just about to say something in response when his eyes met hers. He was stunned. Although not much else in this young student resembled his late wife appearance wise, their unusual eyes were almost identical. In addition to the rare colour combination of one eye which was brown and the other green, it was something about them; possibly a slight twinkle, an air of intelligence or insightfulness or the way they were formed and the brightness of the colour green. She had Anna’s eyes. It was almost absurd. She was so unlike Anna in everything else; her complete opposite. Erik had never been speechless in his life and he found the sensation embarrassing. He quickly composed himself and muttered something about how much he looked forward to finding out what they had discovered. He hoped that he had managed to conceal his inner turmoil. They didn’t appear to have noticed. This reminder of Anna had come as a complete shock to him and he had a hard time focussing. In a blow, he saw Anna in her wedding dress, smiling, the tang of salty water in his mouth, the rumbling noise from the water almost submerging the screams, his own scream of powerlessness at the unfairness of the forces of nature, the disappointment at being saved and his squirrel-like search for Anna that followed. Anna’s body had never been recovered and she had been declared dead shortly after the tsunami but her eyes had remained in his consciousness day and night ever since. Seeing this woman’s eyes had opened a wound which had only just started to heal. He resisted an urge to shake her hard; so that the student’s mousy hair, spotty pale face, unplucked eyebrows and generally boring appearance would be exchanged for Anna’s striking radiance, freckled nose, captivating smile and tall slender body. God, he missed her so much.

“Shall we go in?” professor Simmons suggested and led the way through the entrance. Erik plodded along, still out of balance. The professor ventured through the domed entrance hall and stopped just by the entrance to the Egyptian rooms. In front of them was the glass encased Rosetta stone; the pride of the museum and, in spite of fierce competition, arguably its biggest attraction. The professor continued: “You can see before you the trilingual stone which was used to unlock the mystery of Egyptian hieroglyphs.” He waited for Erik to approach the stone. Erik was somewhere else in his mind but to please him he studied it closely, noting that the stone was almost black and full of neat minute writing. He didn’t particularly reflect on what he was looking at exactly and why; too preoccupied with trying to erase the persistent images of his late wife and her brutal death from his mind. “The Rosetta stone bears the same text in three different languages...” The professor rambled on.

Erik decided to force the disturbing thoughts to go away by focussing all his attention on the professor’s mouth as he spoke, silently wondering what the relevance of what he was saying was. Before Erik had managed to understand why they were there, the professor ventured back to the entrance hall and indicated for them to follow. He continued through the lofty room, passed the reception desk, domed library and into an older library on the other side; the King’s library. The student was smug and clearly knew where they were heading. As soon as they entered, Erik noted the smell of old books; it reminded him of visits to the local

library when he was at school; possibly the last time he was in a proper library housing something other than law books. The professor led them to the top floor in the most remote corner. There he picked out a volume hidden away in one of the back rows. Evidently one of the most popular books in the library, Erik mused silently and smirked. The professor immediately found the page he was looking for. At this stage, none of them said anything. The book in question appeared to be listing items in the museum's collection. They walked over to a nearby table and sat down. Professor Simmons smiled and placed the book in front of Erik. There was a black and white picture of a part of a stone showing beautiful ancient writing presented in perfectly straight diagonal lines, crafted with so much care that every hieroglyph was an artwork in itself. He could see that the stone had once been circular in shape but it had been badly damaged and only half of it remained. The edges were uneven and full of ugly cracks. Below the picture was a brief comment about the donation in 1829 and the Swedish donor, Claes Erik Stenbock of Torpa. It also explained that the artefact would have been fifty centimetres in diameter had it been intact. It was four centimetres thick and made of stone. It also detailed that although the artefact appeared to have been circular, most historians agreed that originally it had been tablet shaped, square with a rounded top, with a larger carving at the bottom, probably depicting Pharaoh Ahmose and Queen Tetisheri. The text finished off with a brief statement that the reasons behind the disfiguration were unknown. So this was the Torpa tablet, Erik established. It was a beautiful artefact despite the damage but he was none the wiser about its significance.

The professor started to explain: "I have devoted a major part of my life to trying to decipher the unknown script called Linear A. You might know that this was the writing of the early Minoans on Crete. The Minoans were a powerful people of whom we know fairly little. They populated Crete and some of the other Greek islands in the Bronze Age from about four thousand years ago. We know that they had grand palaces, plumbing, running water and beautiful frescoes. No one has so far managed to decipher the Linear A script." Erik noted a hint of disappointment in the professor's eyes, as if he felt personally responsible for the insufficient levels of success in this regard. "But if we did we might be able to find out more about this astonishingly advanced civilisation. I have to say it's certainly a difficult nut to crack though," he added thoughtfully and glanced at the student. He then took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes.

"I can vouch for that as well," the student added with a brief laugh. "We believe that the underlying language which the script conveys is wholly unknown, which makes it exceedingly difficult. But we hope that we will be able to get some help," she said pointing demonstratively at the book. Erik glanced at it but carefully avoided looking at the student, not wanting to catch a glimpse of her eyes.

The professor continued: "Yes this, my boy, is the Torpa tablet," he said waiving at the picture. "The original is in a museum in Heraklion on Crete, so unfortunately we would have to make do with this picture today." He sounded as if he was giving one of his lectures. "The Torpa tablet is famous among certain linguists and historians since it may be the key to finally decipher Linear A. The reason for this is that, like the Rosetta stone, it has the same text in more than one language; ancient Egyptian hieroglyphic writing on one side, which we can

read, and incomprehensible Linear A on the other. Unfortunately, as you can see, we only have half of it. The other half has never been found. If we had the whole Torpa tablet it may possibly be used to decipher Linear A.” The professor turned the page in the book and fell silent to let Erik study it. Erik still had a headache and didn’t feel like reading anything but forced himself to focus.

On the left page there was an informal translation of the Egyptian side. Erik skimmed it quickly. It appeared to talk about some sort of calamity or war but the text was incomplete:

“...of water which swept in over the land with godly force. Smoke was clouding the sky. By day, the darkness was persisting with no [torch] being lit and by night a pillar of fire could be seen in the [west]. With his council, His Majesty descended in his boat to observe the devastation of the victors...

...coloured white. The descendants of the great Tetisheri [symbols for both priestess and queen] were orphaned and without possessions/[clothes]. His Majesty set about to strengthen the two lands, to cause...

...Before the [tempest] the fleet of the [] [coalition] had conquered the foreign invaders and liberated those who were under their command...

...came out victorious but lost their lives when the gods interfered...

...discontent of the gods [titles] ensured that the...

...disappeared under water. All that existed had...”

On the right page Erik could see a picture of the other side of the tablet; the Linear A side. It was equally impressive, with delicate inscriptions of writing boasting exquisite craftsmanship and skill. To Erik the script itself appeared funny; somewhere between a child’s attempt at coming up with a new alphabet or a very untidy form of the Greek. There were in no way as many pictures of recognisable objects as in Egyptian hieroglyphs. If anything, Erik thought, the writing was closer to our alphabet, with more abstract symbols presumably representing sounds rather than words. He suddenly wondered what Anna would have thought of the tablet. She had a history degree and owned an antiques shop in central Gothenburg; always on the lookout for old things with an interesting history, which was probably also why she had been so obsessed with Torpa. Perhaps this broken Bronze Age item would have been too old and damaged to capture her interest for the shop but she would no doubt have been more interested in it than he was. He had been studying the pages for what to him seemed like an eternity and he felt obliged to say something.

“It’s beautiful. A shame it’s broken. But surely you can get some help from the half tablet?” Erik made an effort to sound interested.

“Well, the problem is that the Linear A and Egyptian texts don’t correspond for an obvious reason: The hieroglyphic side has been inscribed diagonally and the Linear A side horizontally. So it’s useless without the other half.” Erik felt stupid for not having thought of that. Professor Simmons continued: “That’s why we need your help; to give us access to Torpa to search for it. We have recently made a discovery which has given us reason to believe that the lost half is still at Torpa. Obviously well hidden.”

Erik thought about the castle, its cold and empty rooms where it would be very difficult to conceal anything and the several acres of grounds surrounding it. He could not see how it could have remained so well hidden for several hundred years, unless it was buried in a hole in the ground or in vegetation in the woods. By now it would either be impossible to find or ruined by the elements. "Hm... I hate to sound negative but it might be something of a needle in a haystack search," he said. "I understand why Torpa is the obvious place to start but I still think that if it was there and possible to find, someone should have found it by now."

The professor stood up and started to pace back and forth between the table and the shelves for a minute as if he was pondering a particularly tricky issue before he turned to Erik who was still sitting by the table. "Stranger things have happened," he said optimistically and smiled mysteriously. "And we should probably also explain why we think it's likely to be at Torpa." The professor fell silent and waited for the student to give details. With surprise Erik noted that the professor looked at his student affectionately, a look that seemed to convey more than simple admiration. He couldn't help wondering if they were in a relationship and what the rules were on teacher-student affiliations.

The student cleared her throat. "I discovered a note in one of the Torpa journals. It was in the earliest journal from the middle ages. It was a simple drawing trying to imitate the cartouche of the pharaoh Ahmose. We know for sure that the tablet was crafted around 1550 BC, in Ahmose's reign but his name is not mentioned on the half tablet. So the imitation of the cartouche of Ahmose must have been taken from the lost half. This means that the other half must have been at Torpa at some stage."

"We also know that using Linear B values, the sound Ahs appears on the Linear A side," the professor added. He had moved away from them towards the bookshelf and was not looking at them as he spoke. "The cartouche of Ahmose in Egyptian hieroglyphs reads 'Ahms', which is similar." Erik didn't bother to ask what he meant by Linear B values. Instead he looked at his wristwatch and planned his escape.

"Oh my god, is that the time!" he said with make-believe alarm in his voice. In fact, his flight was not for another four hours so there was no real urgency but he was tired, hungry and wanted to be alone with his thoughts. "I really need to rush off to the airport." He stood up and walked over to the professor. He seemed disappointed, as if he had another hour long lecture about the ancient civilisation of the Minoans planned for him.

"I hope that we have managed to convince you that it is of utmost importance that we find the other half of the tablet. The discoveries that could be made if we did manage to decipher Linear A... Who knows what we may find?" He flapped his arms as if to illustrate just how exciting it would be. Erik nodded slowly in response, not sure what else to do. The student stood up and walked over to them. Professor Simmons continued: "We would like to ask you if we could please get access to Torpa to pre-empt the possibility that the tablet is hidden there. I understand that no proper investigation on this has taken place before."

"As far as I'm aware, no," Erik said. He had never heard of the Torpa tablet before and he could not imagine that anyone else at Torpa had either, not even his

grandmother, so it was unlikely that there had been an investigation previously, at least not in the last century. “I will speak to my mother about giving you access. I’m sure there’ll be no problem.”

“We would also very much appreciate if you could have a think.” The student looked sheepish and even took Erik’s hand to emphasise her words. Erik was glad that she didn’t quite manage to look straight at him as he was sure even a glance at her eyes would put him off balance. She continued, speaking quickly: “You might have an idea of where it could be. It’d be so good if you or someone else Swedish could also check the journals; I’d recommend the fifteenth century one and the one from the nineteenth century which mentions the donation.”

Erik promised to do so. They said goodbye and Erik was off. He could not stand the thought of getting on another tube, so he took a taxi to the airport. Feeling the breeze from an open window, Erik could finally relax and gather his thoughts. He was surprised that such an old important object had been found at Torpa and had got its name from the castle; but that his family had forgotten all about it only a few generations after its discovery. It was strange. He wondered how it had got to Torpa in the first place. Probably with the Vikings, he speculated. Although he was glad that his mother would get her share of excitement, he had no intention of getting heavily involved. He didn’t have the time or the desire to spend hours searching for an ancient stone tablet.

Chapter 3

Torpa, Sweden, July 2005

The sledge hammer was heavier than he had expected. Although every step felt like pulling a tonne of bricks with each foot, he progressed at a reasonable pace towards the medieval building in front of him. Wearing his blue and white striped pyjamas and sheepskin slippers, he crossed the draw-bridge over the dried up moat. The white render of the old stone house had an almost purple tinge in the midnight sun. There was no wind and the lake in front of it was tranquil. From a distance he could hear a woman’s muffled scream but he was not able to make out the words. As he reached the black metal door he put down the sledge hammer for a moment. His hands were shaking as he fumbled with the keys. The familiar squeak from the door opening was almost submerged by another chilling scream. It came from upstairs, just as he knew it would. He went into the dark, cold entrance hall. There was a smell of mould mixed with wet clay. He had not brought a torch so he felt his way with his hand on the wall towards the stairs. The surface was uneven like rough sandpaper. Up until that moment he had been glad to be tall and broad shouldered but his size proved to be a major obstacle as he struggled to move in the constricted space. His large slippers didn’t fit on the steps. The weight of the sledge hammer slowed him down. For a moment he thought he was going to get stuck in the bend of the stairs but he managed to break loose. There was another cry, this time much closer. He knew she had been

imprisoned inside a wall at the top of the stairs. Now he could hear what she was saying, voice weak and quivering but yet loud:

“Let me out!”

The words were not wholly unexpected coming from someone essentially buried alive. Now that he had reached his destination he felt calmer but he couldn't bring himself to answer. He took a deep breath and used all his strength to swing the sledge hammer on the wall. It remained intact. He hit it again. Not a scratch. By the third strike he was getting tired. It was as if his slippers were nailed to the ground and as if the floor had turned into a gigantic magnet pulling the hammer down. Frustration and tiredness started to take its toll...

Erik woke up from a stifled thud followed by pain in his left foot. He looked around, drowsy from deep sleep. He found himself in the downstairs library. It was quiet and the room was dark but moonlight from the window illuminated the room to some extent. Three large books had landed on his naked foot. He had been sleepwalking. It had happened many times before. He would sometimes wake up trying to eat soap in his on-suite bathroom or peeing in the walk-in wardrobe but it was the first time he had ventured this far. In front of him was one of the bookshelves. He was alarmed when he noted that he had managed to pull out some of the oldest books there. He stretched down and picked one up. It was one of the valuable Torpa journals; oddly enough the older one that the student, Emma Johnson, had suggested he had a look at a month earlier. He had meant to deal with the student's request by delegating the whole thing to his mother but after London it had slipped his mind. He hadn't been back to Torpa since then. His mother had given permission for Professor Simmons to get access to Torpa to search for the tablet and a visit had been planned for August but Erik had forgotten to ask her to arrange for someone to study the journals further in advance of their visit. It was weird but perhaps his subconscious mind had remembered it and brought him there to remind him. As he was sliding the books back onto the shelf he was relieved to see that they were intact despite the fall. Only one page from the oldest one had come loose but he could easily slip it back in.

Trying to gather his thoughts he went over to the window to look at the moon which appeared unusually bright. It was full moon. He glanced down at the old castle further down the garden and thought about his strange terrifying dream. He almost expected to find the front door open but it wasn't. Anna had been trapped inside the space in the wall where the medieval girl had died. He wasn't sure what the significance of this dream was but he thought it was strange that he had ended up in the library in front of the journals when dreaming of Anna and the space in the wall. Was there a connection which he had missed? It occurred to him that a potential hiding place in which no one had looked in the last few hundred years was the gap between the inner and outer wall of the legend. Could the other half of the Torpa tablet somehow have ended up there? It was certainly a long shot but Erik decided to have a look in the journals.

He quickly picked out the oldest book from the fifteenth century, sat down behind the antique desk and turned the table lamp on. He opened the desk drawer and found a pair of white gloves placed there for the purpose of handling old books. With great care he turned the fragile pages. He could almost feel Anna's

presence as he started to look through the old scribbles. She had spent a lot of time going through the journals. Erik found it all very uninteresting; rows and rows of purchases, sales, expenses, revenues. The Swedish was almost incomprehensible, clearly old-style. It also included some notes about particular assets, such as new horses and cattle, as well as comments about staff, meetings with some named people and tax collections. He noticed a morbid headcount—appearing to be naming people in the district who had died from the plague, old age or been executed for one reason or another. There were also some haphazard comments about church visits and godly punishment displaying a mixture of guilt and deep faith. After an hour he had managed to skim through about hundred and fifty pages of unexciting scribbles. Though he had to admit that this record of daily events from a time long gone was a fairly unique collection of notes, he simply could not understand Anna's fascination, bordering on obsession, with these useless doodles. Just as he was about to give up he came to the page which had come loose when he dropped it on his foot. It was the page with the drawing showing the cartouche of the Egyptian Pharaoh. It was very small and shakily illustrated and he was impressed that the student had spotted it. Next to the miniscule drawing was a comment stating "*Fräls oss ifrån ondo*", appearing to be an extract from the Lord's Prayer: "*Deliver us from evil*". He asked himself whether this could give a clue as to where the tablet may have been hidden away—maybe it had been disposed of to 'deliver them from evil'. The reason why the tablet had been cut in half and why one half had been retained in the house was still a mystery but he suspected that it had been accidentally damaged, judging by the uneven cut which he had seen in the photo. He glanced at his watch and saw that it was nearly morning. The house was still quiet. He continued his deliberations. The tablet was certainly impressive enough, with beautiful writing on both sides. It could perhaps have been sufficiently exotic to the Torpa occupants of that time to create a possible assumption of magical powers. It was generally known that people in the area around the lake had been particularly superstitious, living by an enormous amount of unwritten rules created solely by reason of strange old traditions. This tablet would certainly have been a mystery to them. It could have been put down to ancient spells. Something could have happened to the family at the same time as the tablet had been broken which had made the author of the journals think that the tablet may have had supernatural influence on their lives; inflicting war or ill health or perhaps even protecting them from evil. He immediately thought of the plague and the girl.

Erik started to browse the following pages. The plague had killed thousands of Swedes in the fifteenth century and the journal illustrated this with chilling clarity. The death count showed that the region had lost many lives to the plague. It must have been a terrible time in history, Erik thought. Only a few pages on from the Egyptian Hieroglyph passage there was a reference to a key which belonged to a door which had been removed. There was even a drawing of the key but no further explanation. Erik guessed from the illustration which key this note in the journals referred to—it was still in the family's possession. It was rusty and had been on a shelf in the grand hall ever since Erik could remember. It occurred to him that the gap where this door had once stood could be what had been blocked up to house the dying girl all those hundreds of years ago. That would in

effect tie the space in the wall to the Torpa tablet, given the proximity in the journal of the drawing of the cartouche and the key. They were only five pages apart. The link was not wholly unfounded and the memory of his dream convinced him that Anna would now finally get her last wish fulfilled; perhaps they would now be forced to open the wall. What Anna had known or guessed would then be revealed. Erik doubted that Anna had had the bilingual tablet in mind when she pleaded with him to ask his mother about opening the wall but he hoped that he was right about the link. He decided to call the professor in the morning to mention his theory. Erik almost laughed at the thought that it seemed that Anna had now inhabited the bodies of an Oxford professor and a student to get the wall opened.

Surprised that he had actually found something of interest he put the book back on the shelf and left the room to get another couple of hours sleep.

Chapter 4

Torpa, Sweden, August 2005

Britt-Marie! Kom hit, jag behöver hjälp med mitt korsord!” Emma could hear Erik’s grandmother’s voice echoing from her bedroom all the way to the estate’s library where Emma was sitting attempting to work on her dissertation. It must have been something very important, she thought, as the old woman had a touch of panic in her voice but because she had shouted in Swedish she could not understand a word. Emma sat in a worn, old fashioned leather chair in front of the unlit fireplace. It was comfortable. She liked the room and the chair in particular. She likened it with an old trusted dog which had seen its best days but devoted all its attention and love to its owner. Professor Simmons, or Paul as she now referred to him, was there as well. He was sitting in a similar chair with a footstool supporting his feet, supposedly reading the local paper; in Swedish. In the few days she had been at Torpa she had grown to like the tranquillity and the striking beauty of the place. Although they had spent most of their time outside or in the manor house, the old castle building was not far from view wherever they were. Its mysterious dark windows, the two dark lakes surrounding it, the moat, drawbridge and its many ghost stories, sent shivers down her spine. She knew that the basement had a dungeon but she tried not to think about it. Erik’s family certainly lived very comfortably and they were evidently wealthy but she didn’t envy him. Erik’s childhood had been anything but happy from what she had heard, although Britt-Marie had at least always been there for him.

Britt-Marie had served the family since before Erik was born and had been Erik’s nanny throughout his childhood. She was now in her fifties, her hair primarily grey with bits of dark brown interspersed. Her appearance was motherly, as some would picture a wet nurse. Her rather outdated flowery dress and white apron didn’t conceal the fact that she was short and had a robust slightly overweight body with large bosom and chubby arms and legs. Her face had started

to show signs of aging but her eyes were youthful, full of gentleness and kind-heartedness. She was now in the position of a nurse with the unenviable task of taking care of the old woman. Erik's grandmother was not very old, merely seventy four but she had not been able to walk for at least ten or twenty years. For this reason she stuck to her bed most of the time, shouting orders to Britt-Marie who clearly had the patience of a saint. Emma could not feel any compassion for the old matriarch. She was plain mean and probably the reason why Erik's parents had chosen to spend all of Erik's childhood in their flat in Stockholm, rather than at the grand Torpa estate. Erik had told her that he had basically been raised on the estate by Britt-Marie. Emma felt sorry for him. Britt-Marie seemed like a very nice and fastidious person but it could not have been easy to grow up without the guidance and protection of his parents. It didn't seem to have affected him in a negative way though. When he didn't reminisce about Anna he was certainly charming enough to get a whole army of depressed people to laugh and he must have had a good upbringing to have got to where he was career-wise. She understood that he was on the brink of being made partner in the law firm where he worked; and he was very young for a partner.

Emma had found out from Britt-Marie that the old woman had never approved of Erik's mother's choice of husband—Erik's father. For some unknown reason she had always hated him, going back as far as just after their wedding, and she had ensured that their lives had been turned into a nightmare by spreading rumours about him and not letting him be involved in the running of the estate. Apparently it was a miracle that the grandmother had accepted Erik. In fact, he was the only person whom she tolerated. Emma had seen the old woman only once during her week-long stay at the estate in Sweden. It was the day they arrived. Still in her bed, she had thin long grey hair and was fairly skinny with angry almost frightening eyes refusing to return Emma's nervous smile. She had not even taken Emma's outstretched hand but had muttered something in Swedish to Britt-Marie. Emma was sure she had heard the words 'helvete' and 'jävlar' in her short ramblings. These were two of only a handful Swedish words that Emma had managed to pick up at that stage and she knew it meant 'hell' and 'devils'; very strong words to use for a pensioner. Britt-Marie seemed to have chosen a milder translation and had said apologetically: "She is tired today and would like to be alone for a little bit". Emma had not found this at all strange or insulting at the time. She had assumed that the old woman was seriously ill or perhaps even senile. Her assumption was wrong as other than the fact that she could not walk, she had never showed any signs of illness. It was the constant shouting, bad manners and the way she treated her poor nurse that had further lowered Emma's opinion of her.

"Britt-Marie!"

Here we go again, Emma thought. Less than a few seconds later she could hear Britt-Marie's rushing footsteps out in the corridor.

"They should really install a better communication system; maybe some sort of alarm to save the old woman from shouting!" Paul said, not taking his eyes off the paper.

"Do you really understand what you're reading Paul?" Emma asked with a mixture of admiration and bewilderment.

“No, I’m just looking at the pictures. Other than what I’ve picked up this week, I’ve never learnt any of the Scandinavian languages.” He cleared his throat and resumed his attempted reading.

Emma laughed quietly in response. The thought of Paul, the great linguist, not understanding a word of what he was reading was amusing. She glanced over at him, focussed as he was on the paper. It had been Paul’s suggestion for him and Emma to go to Sweden to speed up the process to get the wall opened. He was afraid that the whole question would be buried in bureaucratic paper-shuffling unless he did something. She was as eager as him to get the permission and had agreed to come without a moment’s hesitation. The thought of spending a couple of weeks in Paul’s company was an appealing prospect to her, albeit intimidating at the same time. She would never admit it to anyone but she had come to terms with the fact that she had feelings for him. At no point in her life had she been interested in romance or relationships. She had been younger than her contemporaries at school due to her being fast-tracked twice as a result of her advanced abilities. As a result, she had not had many friends as a child. This had changed at University where she had started to go out more and socialise. Despite this she had not met anyone who had captured her imagination—until she met Paul in her second year. He was about ten years her senior but still one of the youngest professors at Oxford. He was teaching ancient Egyptian. His thick ill fitting glasses concealed any potentially handsome features but she couldn’t care less about his appearance. She was unsure whether her feelings for him were of admiration for his work or of him as a person—or perhaps of his intelligence and dedication. She figured that it might in part also have been due to the flattering attention he was showing her. Sometimes he was even seeking her out after lectures to discuss points of interest or in the library where she was often studying. Whether this was because he was interested in her on a personal or a professional level was difficult to tell but he had never taken any steps to express feelings or intentions. She was aware that she had an uncommon linguistic talent. Now, after her three year undergraduate degree in linguistics at Oxford, she spoke six languages fluently, including German, French, Spanish, Greek and Arabic, and was studying three ancient languages and scripts; ancient Egyptian, Latin and Linear A. Paul, or Professor Simmons as she used to refer to him as at the time, had seen her potential and had persuaded her to do a master’s degree combining her language skills with archaeology. He had been convinced that she would do well in the academic world and had suggested that she should go on to do a PhD at Oxford after her post graduate degree. He had also been the one who had got her interested in the ancient Minoan civilisation. Emma had always been attracted to unsolved mysteries and cherished a challenge. This advanced civilisation remained a mystery, partly because of the vast amount of written material that remained undeciphered. This was enough to convince her to choose this as the topic of her all important dissertation. If she managed to make progress within this area, she may achieve fame within the academic world. She knew that Paul was working towards the same goal. He had spent many years studying Linear A and although some progress had been made, it appeared a near impossible task. Anyway, she was happy to be there next to Paul, in the Torpa library on their shared quest.

“Erik should be here any minute. There is an article here about the planning permission to break open the wall which I would like him to translate.” Paul handed her the paper. “They mention both my name and Mrs Stenbock’s. I do understand a few words. There are similarities with German. There is a quote there which appears to say something about ‘death’—‘dött’, similar to ‘Tot’ in German.” He leaned over and indicated where it was.

Emma took the opportunity to be funny and suggested: “Perhaps it’s saying that any old professor or a student trying to break the wall will die...” They were both laughing at this as Erik entered the room, panting.

“I’m so sorry about my grandmother. Apparently she had a crossword emergency. I hope she hasn’t disturbed your peace too much this morning. She has always been like this unfortunately; at least as far as I can remember.”

“No worries at all”, Emma said with a smile. “No need to apologise. We were actually discussing an article in today’s local paper. Would you mind translating?” Emma handed him the paper.

“Sure thing, I’ll do my best.” Erik took the paper, cleared his throat and sat down on the chair by the desk, facing them. He was struggling a little bit to find the right words in English but managed very well:

“A request has been submitted to the local council for permission to break open one of the walls in the oldest part of Torpa. The request is...” Erik struggled to find the right word, “monitored with interest by many locals and has resulted in a number of... complaints from the general public. The wall is said to have been ... hm ... raised in the fourteenth, oh no fifteenth, century to block up a door to a small room in the old stone house. The reason to why the door was blocked up at the time is not known. Whether this is the room which according to ... folklore ... contains a girl buried alive is subject to debate but many still believe in the legend, expecting to find the remains of the young girl upon opening the wall. Eighty seven year old Sture Ekman ...Oh I know him”, Erik added, “who lives only three kilometres from Torpa said yesterday: ‘They would certainly be tempting fate by going anywhere near that room. Anyone who has tried to break the wall has died’. One of the objections to the application is that it would be unethical to break open this possible resting place. Leading the initiative to open the wall is Ingrid Stenbock at Torpa. She is being supported by a professor from Oxford University, Professor Paul Simmons, who suggests that the hidden room may house an important ancient artefact. The debate continues. The local council has given no indication of when they are likely to come to a final decision.”

“I had no idea this would cause such uproar”, Paul said as he started to put his slippers on. “The whole ‘threat of death’ folklore is amusing but surely no one can actually believe that opening a wall can cause someone’s demise! It actually makes me more convinced that there is something of value hidden inside.”

“Consider Tutankhamun’s curse,” Emma pointed out. “After Tutankhamun’s tomb in the Valley of the Kings had been opened, a number of people present at the opening ceremony later died in more or less unexplained circumstances. I personally don’t believe in any type of curse or supernatural hocus-pocus but you never know...”

“Well, in this instance I think you do. It’s ridiculous to suggest, firstly, that opening the wall in pursuit of science—in pursuit of the *truth*—would be

sacrilegious and, secondly, that anyone would die in the process". Paul suddenly seemed a bit out of spirits. Emma was certain that he had enjoyed his first few days on Swedish soil in the beautiful Torpa estate. Now she understood that the process of waiting for the Swedish local council to make the decision to allow the opening of the wall was starting to take its toll on his mood.

Erik's parents had already given their permission to go-ahead with the opening of the wall. Emma's first impression was that Erik's mother, who appeared to be a shrewd business woman, had only accepted this on the basis that it would attract media attention and visitors to the estate. His father seemed a fairly quiet and laid back character who didn't really care what happened to it. He had left the decision to his wife. The mere fact that Erik's parents had honoured them with their presence in the house given their tragic relationship with the old woman was in a way surprising, although Erik had told Emma that his parents had started to live there more frequently since his grandmother had become less active. She could not blame them. Emma herself could imagine spending the rest of her days next to the breathtakingly beautiful lake surrounding the house, breathing the wonderfully fresh air. Compared to London, where she had grown up, this was the equivalent to living on a health farm.

The decision was now in the hands of the Swedish local authority. The weight of the mere opinion of an Oxford professor had already given significant credibility to the whole idea but Paul had felt that he needed to be on site to ensure that it actually happened and to relieve Erik and Mrs Stenbock of some of the pressure. There had been a surprising amount of press-coverage, albeit only in the local paper and on the regional news. This was clearly an issue close to many locals' hearts.

"I really cannot understand the locals' resistance to the opening of the wall. Surely, it will add to the attraction of the area to have an important ancient artefact added to its name..."

"You forget, Paul", Erik added, "that we haven't found anything yet and the grounds on which we base the find of the other half are very far from watertight. In fact, I have heard many neighbours mention that the evidence is merely circumstantial."

"They lack vision and faith is all I can say." Paul continued: "In my view the evidence is overwhelming. This is the opportunity we've been waiting for, at least for the last five years. Even though I still have my doubts, I cannot see how the signs can be clearer."

Emma joined the conversation: "I agree but you have to remember that they care a lot less about this missing artefact than you or I do." She noticed Paul's eyes widen as if he took this as a personal insult. She quickly continued: "The Torpa journals are clearly telling us something. The name of 'Ahmose' simply must have been copied from the missing half of the tablet. Therefore, both sides of the tablet have to have been present on the estate in the fifteenth century when the cartouche drawing in the journals was made. Perhaps the likelihood of finding the tablet in the space in the wall is slim but unless we find a better place to look, I think it's definitely worth a check."

"I seem to be the only one convinced that we will find the tablet there," Paul said. "I have a feeling that this is our ticket to decipher Linear A. I'm not giving up,

that's for sure! In fact, why don't we go to the local authority office again now, to see what they have to say?"

Paul needed to go back to the UK in less than a week's time at the very latest. Both Paul and Emma were working whilst in Sweden but Paul needed to get back to lecturing. Emma had no more lectures and could focus on her dissertation. She had brought much of the material she needed to get through for this purpose and was not in a hurry to get back to Oxford. She had already accomplished a great deal since her arrival in Sweden a few days ago. She felt that the fresh air and tranquillity was having a positive effect on her mood and productivity.

"Let's go into town then, shall we?" Paul said as he stood up and started to walk out of the room. He was half way out when a horrendous noise made him stop in his tracks.

Erik jumped to his feet, almost overthrowing the chair as he searched his pockets. He found what he was looking for and answered his mobile phone, silencing the annoying ring tone on his way out of the room: "Ja, det är Erik här", he said in Swedish. "Oh, vad skönt. Tack så mycket för den glada nyheten!" By this stage Paul had returned to the room and Emma was standing by the door, pretending not to listen but trying her hardest to understand what Erik was saying. It was clear to them both that Erik had had good news of some kind. As he re-entered the library a moment later as soon as he had hung up Paul and Emma were standing like two candles waiting to be lit.

"It's clear!" Erik said beaming. "The local authorities have given their permission, not to open the wall but to take a look using a special camera which can be inserted into small spaces. This means that it wouldn't be necessary to open the wall but to drill a hole for the miniscule camera. It would then be possible to see if there is anything hidden in there. I think they probably regarded this as a good compromise."

Emma knew that the same methodology had frequently been used in ancient Egypt to find hidden artefacts; in particular in the concealed chambers of the Giza pyramids. Erik was still smiling widely, content with the response from the local authorities, waiting for their delayed reaction. His white teeth were almost sparkling in the sunshine through the window, his eyes shining blue like tropical ocean water. Emma looked at Paul who was standing in a darker part of the room and the contrast between them was striking. Whilst Erik was perfect in every way, Paul's hair was a bit too long and his glasses were outdated and thick but she found his smile irresistible. In spite of the minimising effect of his thick spectacles, she knew that Paul had attractive brown eyes which now glittered with excitement. She noticed that Paul was several inches shorter than Erik, making him look like a midget in comparison but Emma was still shorter than Paul. It was just that Erik was so very tall. Emma was delighted and excited. She couldn't wait to find out what was hidden in that mysterious space. Paul seemed pleased as well but reluctantly so. His smile was hesitant and didn't reach his eyes.

When they didn't say anything Erik continued. "At least this way we may get to an answer without having to risk damaging the old building. I think this is a very good solution for everyone!"

Paul was unconvinced: "I suppose the only draw-back would be if we didn't find anything immediately obvious and the artefact was hidden in a place where the

camera wasn't able to reach. All I'm saying is that we might miss something but I guess you're right; it is a good compromise."

They were all quiet for a little less than a minute, each in their own thoughts. Emma could not help thinking about Tutankhamun's curse and whether drilling a hole into the secret space would upset angry spirits or eject some form of poisonous old chemical but she knew of course she was being silly. It was just that being there in the middle of nowhere with the never-ending woods and fields all around, the mystical deep dark lake, and with that old stone building lurking there as an abandoned ghost house she could understand why locals became superstitious. She appreciated Paul was probably right in their assumption that the curse had been laboriously circulated to drive out unwanted intruders. Part of her wondered whether they would find anything. Maybe all they would recover would be a skeleton of a young girl who had died six hundred years ago. She was angry with herself for doubting Paul and for being so negative. She decided it was better to believe in it and be on Paul's side than to share her negativity with the others. In any event, she was extremely relieved that they were finally getting somewhere. They might be on their way to the discovery of a lifetime, she thought to herself.

"Why don't we celebrate by taking a long walk and I will show you something I think you'll like!" Erik suggested.

"That's the strangest way of celebrating I've ever heard but it sounds like a good idea", Emma laughed.

Paul agreed: "Yes, it would be nice to take a walk to clear the mind and let the news sink in. We might be on our way to a great discovery people! Hopefully in two days time we will know whether we are right!" At that moment Emma looked at Paul and once again thought about the antagonising romantic feelings she had had for him. It was probably because of his enthusiasm for his work, his optimism and ability to drive through his ideas and make things happen, she decided. Emma was ten years his junior but in her mind this was barely noticeable. Sometimes whilst lecturing he was like a child; animated about his topic and almost jumping for joy if someone happened to ask him a particularly interesting question. She was flattered that he had decided to make her his confidant about his passion to decipher Linear A and his belief in her ability to help him. She was hoping that he would come out of this whole tablet-affair with his academic reputation still intact. As a young professor at a respected university he still had to work very hard to keep on top of his game. By stating that he was sure that the space in the wall was hiding something of interest he had put his reputation on the line. What if they were wrong – would it be her fault? She was the one who had come up with the idea to search for the tablet in the first place.

During these few days they had spent a little bit of time walking in the surrounding area, which was full of mapped out walks as well as stunning unexplored paths through the woods or next to one of the many lakes. Emma was looking forward to another revitalising stroll. They all quickly put on their shoes and went out into the glorious August sunshine. The sweet and fresh scent of pine trees filled her nostrils as they entered the woods. She was glad that she had had the foresight of wearing shorts and a short sleeved top. Although she was aware that it wasn't particularly stylish, it didn't matter anyway; there was no one

around other than them. It was very warm outside and the sun was stronger than it had been the day before. She noticed that Paul seemed to be struggling in jeans and black T-shirt, whilst Erik, who wore trendy khaki trousers and a white cotton shirt which accentuated his well formed upper body, appeared perfectly ventilated. Erik led the way onto a well trodden path appearing to steer away from the two lakes and into the deep woods. As they got deeper, the sunshine struggled to get through the tall thick trees and the heat of a moment earlier started to ease. It was almost chilly and so dark that it felt like early evening rather than late morning. Emma nevertheless enjoyed the walk, breathing in the smell of trees mixed with mushrooms and fresh moss and avoiding the odd stone or branch along the way. None of them said anything for a while. Birds seemed to be all around, communicating enthusiastically in their own incomprehensible tongue. Once in a while Erik stopped and pointed out giant ant nests or trees he had used to play in as a child. He also seemed accident prone, often not noticing branches or tree roots interrupting the trail. Emma laughed to herself thinking that she had never met a more unobservant person in all her life. This was strange because it was so at odds with his confident appearance but she found it endearing. When they first met in London, she had found him uninteresting bordering on boring. But Erik had grown on her since then. He had a pleasant personality after all.

“Where are you taking us then, Erik?” she enquired.

“You will see—and you will both love it, I’m sure. We still have a little bit further to go”.

That turned out to be a major understatement. They had been walking at a good pace for nearly an hour when Erik finally stopped and looked excited. Emma could not figure out what he could possibly want to show them in the middle of this deep forest. They were now literally standing in the middle of nowhere. Paul seemed relieved, probably because he was hot and in need of a break. Drops of sweat were running down the side of his face.

“If you want we can stop for a drink first. There is a stream not far from here which has clean water.”

Paul and Emma thankfully agreed, Paul whispering to Emma: “I wonder if they serve pints.” Emma laughed. When Erik, not entirely unpredictably, managed to step into the shallow stream, making one of his trainers soaking wet, they both laughed even harder. The water rushed past them on its way to the nearby lake, producing a wonderful sound which took her back to her childhood summers spent in the English Lake District. She enjoyed drinking directly from this natural water source. Doubting whether this would be possible anywhere in England she cherished it even more. It tasted better than any bottled water she had ever had. At that moment Emma felt strangely contented. She wasn’t sure whether she had ever felt happier and more liberated, more relaxed. All her life she had ambitiously been working to get the top grades, achieve outstanding results, learn more languages and prove herself in the eyes of others, without stopping to reflect on why she was doing it and what she was trying to achieve and for who. For herself? She was never unwilling to go the extra mile to get things done properly. She felt that she owed it to her parents to do well. They had supported her through good schools and through University in spite of their lack of wealth. They were both teachers in central London and not likely to make a fortune. She had never let

them down, always achieving the best grades, easily exceeding expectations. She suspected that her ambition had often made her appear cold and heartless. In the process of striving to be the best she had missed out on friendships, love, laughter and fun. For a long time she had been wearing a defensive shield; too eager to impress to realise that she was actually pushing others away. She was grateful to her parents for having continuously encouraged her but at this particular moment she felt as if she had been living her entire life in an ants nest, working hard to please others in a stressful environment where only the fittest were destined to survive. This peaceful little part of the world seemed far removed from her normal existence. But she tried to convince herself that if she had not felt contented with her life as it was, she would never have carried on the way she had, striving to discover new things and to feed her thirst for knowledge. She liked the hustle and bustle after all, she decided.

“It’s better in spring time”, Erik added as they started to walk back to the spot where they had stopped previously. His wet shoe was making a squishing sound. Emma and Paul looked at each other, smiling.

Erik certainly managed to surprise them. A few meters from the path, hidden behind trees, was a meadow, in the middle of which was a small hill, only just discernible. On the hill stood a three meter tall stone, ten centimetres thick and shaped almost into a half circle at the top. It was covered in runes. Although Emma had first thought the stone had certain glyphs resembling Linear A, she quickly realised that this was a much later script. Both Paul and Emma recognised it as a Viking Rune Stone. Erik explained that this stone was from the Viking era, in around the 7th century and that these stones could be found everywhere in Sweden. Paul, who not surprisingly knew something of it, agreed and noted that the runes were actually the Elder Futhark, the earliest form of the Viking Runes. The inscription was neatly carved and covered the entire stone.

“As far as I know, this particular text has largely been translated by local historians. It apparently talks about the life of a man who lived in the area”, Erik said, sounding surprised that he actually had something to contribute to a conversation about scripts, even if it wasn’t much.

Emma found this extremely interesting. She herself had not previously studied runes and was intrigued by the prospect of viewing a script which had been in frequent use in Scandinavia a millennium ago. She could immediately see that it was influenced by the Latin alphabet, at least partly.

Whilst Emma had been fascinated by the stone and had been satisfied after a ten minute look, Paul had been transfixed. Just as Paul fetched his pocket PC from his jeans pocket and started to make notes, Erik’s mobile phone rang again. It sounded almost outlandish in the tranquil surroundings but Paul didn’t even raise an eyebrow. He continued to study the text.

“I’m sorry, I have to go back to the house”, Erik said as he put his phone back in his pocket. “That was work. I need to go to Gothenburg now unfortunately. I will return this evening. Will you find your way to the house?”

“Sure”, Paul said without taking his eyes or his finger off the runes. Emma felt fairly confident as well. They had followed the same path most of the way.

It was strange to suddenly be alone with Paul, Emma thought. She never knew exactly how to behave around him. They had exchanged many encouraging looks

of something resembling admiration but he had never given her any reason to think that he had any feelings for her. At this time, he didn't even seem to notice that she was there, being so engulfed in copying down various runes. Viking runes were something she had never looked at previously and she had no intention of starting now. She thought to herself that she may have a selective mindset but she just didn't feel that these runes were ancient enough; and they had already been deciphered. What would be the point of looking at them now?

"I'm sorry", Paul said after almost half an hour in which Emma had gone to the stream and come back twice. "I just can't help myself when it comes to scripts. They have this awesome power over me." Whilst studying the stone he had taken off his glasses and he was still not wearing them when he stood up and turned to look in the direction of where Emma was standing. Having spent more time in the sun than he would normally do, he looked uncharacteristically tanned and he seemed transformed without his glasses. His black shirt and dark wild hair made him look almost attractive. She wasn't sure what her facial expression had told him and if he could even see her but he took two steps towards her, hesitated and then slowly took her head between his hands and kissed her gently. Her body met his for a brief moment and she felt a wave of excitement running through her as his hand touched her bare leg. She was so surprised by her own reaction that she pulled away almost immediately. He was a good kisser; she had never expected it. He took her abrupt retraction the wrong way.

"I'm so sorry", he said as he stepped away from her. "I didn't mean to offend you in any way. I know it's against university regulations for me to have a relationship with a student." He started to walk back in the direction they had come from. Emma rushed after him.

"No need to apologise Paul. I wanted it too." He stopped and turned around. She took the initiative to kiss him this time and he was the one who reluctantly pulled away. "No, it's wrong of me to do this to you", he said. "We don't want to raise any eyebrows unnecessarily. It wouldn't be helpful for either of our careers." Emma felt a sting of disappointment. There was nothing she could say. He was right. Their respective careers were more important than this; whatever 'this' was.

They started to walk back to the house. After less than a ten minute walk Paul stopped again, looking straight at her. "By the way, there's something I've been meaning to ask you." He said it in a light hearted manner, making a special effort to sound breezy. They sat down on two nearby rocks on Paul's request. Emma's heart was pounding hard. She hoped that Paul didn't notice it. "I was just wondering whether you would want to accompany me and two other students to Crete on a research trip in January." She didn't know what she had expected but this came as a complete surprise. Paul quickly continued: "It would be very helpful for your dissertation and you would have an opportunity to study some of the Linear A finds. My colleague over there says they have a whole load of items which urgently need the attention of someone who knows Linear B values. I immediately thought of you."

Emma accepted the offer without hesitation. "Sounds great! Of course I'll join you!" She reasoned that this would not only allow her to work with real life Linear A remains, it would also enable her to view the actual broken Torpa tablet. So far, she had only seen pictures of the half tablet. It had been transferred to Heraklion

museum in the 1970s, more than a century after the initial transfer from Sweden to London. She refused to accept that spending more time with Paul was an aspect of the trip which made her shiver with anticipation. The expedition was now less than six months away and she thought to herself that a lot could happen in that time.

They managed to find their way back to Torpa without any incidents. Paul had immediately resumed his normal cool response towards her but the kiss was clearly at the forefront of his mind; and hers. She had never felt this way before. She was twenty three but still a virgin. In fact, sadly this had been her first proper kiss. She once again reflected over her lonely existence and her approach to life to date, devoid of any significant relationships other than with her books. It had been a lovely day and maybe they had both been overtaken by the romantic surroundings, the news about the tablet and the rune-stone. In any event, she felt some level of triumph that her reluctant feelings for Paul were not completely unanswered. And his reaction to pull back must mean that he genuinely valued her intellect, she thought to herself.

As soon as they entered the house, Erik's mother came towards them, wearing red high heels and a white trouser suit, smiling widely and smelling strongly of perfume, her blond hair tied back in a knot. She was still a good looking woman. Life had been kind to her, it seemed.

"There you are, you two! What do you say about a nice three course dinner here tonight to celebrate that permission has been given to use cameras inside the wall?" she said looking only at Paul. When she finally turned to look at Emma it was with an obvious dislike of Emma's fashion sense. Her facial expression seemed to ask: 'What were you thinking?' God knows why she would care about appearances out there, Emma thought.

"Sounds lovely to me", Paul said and Emma nodded in agreement.

"Let's hope Erik is back for seven."

* * * * *

As it turned out, Erik arrived just as they were about to start eating. As he came in the room, Emma was amazed by the fact that they had already had two whole bottles of wine between them. She was starting to feel the effects, not used to drinking this much alcohol. They were all sitting down at the four meter long table in the grandiose dining room conversing. Erik took a seat at the end of the table, with his father and mother on either side. Emma was sitting next to his father and Paul next to his mother. Emma had no doubt that Erik's mother was an experienced hostess and had carefully arranged their seating and the menu for the evening. She had already informed them that they could expect a genuine Swedish ensemble. According to Erik's father the main course dish was their house keeper's specialty and the only reason to why he agreed to stay in the house once in a while. Even so, Emma was feeling apprehensive about that one. Although Erik's father was perfectly charming to sit next to, Emma was uncomfortable by what was going on at the other side of the table. Erik's mother appeared to be almost flirting with Paul. Emma found this highly inappropriate, not only because her husband was sitting opposite her but also because Paul was merely a few

years older than her son. She decided to ignore her manners towards Paul, concluding that this might be the way she normally approached people.

Emma had made a special effort that evening to look smart, not wanting to repeat the earlier degrading stare from Erik's mother. She was wearing a light blue summery dress, accentuating her figure, which she had got from a university friend who had wanted to get rid of it after having lost too much weight, together with a matching necklace she had bought in Camden market. Having brought the dress not expecting to wear it during her brief stay in Sweden, she was now glad she had. Not only did it seem to satisfy Erik's mother, it had also attracted some approving glances from Paul. She felt herself almost blushing every time he looked her way. She couldn't help thinking about their earlier kiss. This had to stop, she thought. She tried to focus on Erik and his father. She had to admit that she had a good time. They were both funny in a laid back sort of way, making her laugh repeatedly. This was somewhat at odds with her character; normally when she was out she would get stuck in a corner with some nerd talking politics. Her university friends had even remarked how boring she was and that she should let herself go more, have a drink and 'stop being so uptight'. She had been insulted at the time but now she knew they were right.

Their topic of conversation turned to superstition. Emma shared with them that Britt-Marie had almost panicked when Emma had put the back door key on the kitchen table earlier that day.

"Yes, I would never put keys on the table, that's for sure", Erik's father said. "But there are some stupid superstitions out there. The worst one I have heard was a man who refused to leave his house without wearing a specific hat. The funny thing was that the hat was actually more of a woman's hat, with flowers and all. But even so, he refused to leave the house without it... I suppose that may have been more craziness than superstition" he added as an afterthought. "No actually I'm sure it was mainly superstition, he seemed like a normal guy...except for the hat." They all laughed.

"Dad, you make it sound like this place is full of mad people. That's not true, although I suppose there is the odd exception, like in any other place in the world". Erik seemed genuinely concerned not to give Emma the impression that Sweden was full of weird people.

Emma chuckled: "Well, you should see Covent Garden at weekends, no actually every night. It's crammed full of eccentrics, showing off their strange skills.

Except for the fact that Mrs Stenbock had occupied Paul all evening, Emma had a lovely time. The food was excellent and the company outstanding. She thanked everyone before going upstairs to bed. She was surprised to see that it was nearly midnight. As she walked up the stairs she felt dizzy. She had had too much wine. She could hear footsteps behind her. It was Paul rushing to catch up with her. At the top of the stairs he grabbed her shoulder and turned her around, carefully pushing her a bit further away from the stairs. She could see in his eyes that he too had had a lot to drink and that he was probably not feeling his normal self.

"I'm sorry for having ignored you all evening", he said with a strange slurry voice which she didn't recognise. "I knew that if I had kept looking at you in your pretty blue dress, I wouldn't have been able to contain myself. As you know, I also had to do my duty and entertain Mrs Stenbock".

“But you are looking at me now”, Emma said as she moved towards him. Paul thrust his body against hers and kissed her much more deeply than he had earlier that day in the woods. After only a brief moment, Emma heard someone coming up the stairs and this brought her out of the daze. She gently pushed Paul away and started to walk in the direction of her room. He seemed a bit surprised and disappointed at first but when he saw Mrs Stenbock coming up the stairs he looked at Emma and winked. Not sure what he had meant by the wink, Emma went into her bedroom and locked the door. She wondered whether he would knock on the door later. Part of her almost hoped that he would but her sensible portion knew that him staying away would be preferable. Why complicate things unnecessarily.

After half an hour she realised he wasn't going to come. This was probably a good thing as lying on the bed she felt light headed. At one point she was almost afraid she would be sick. She walked over to the window and opened it to get some fresh air. Although the sun had gone down fully, it still left a smidgen of light. Her bedroom window on the second floor was on the side of old Torpa. In her precarious state she noted that the enormous old white stone building looked majestic in the pale light of the moon, still mirrored in the dark lake behind it. It came across almost magical with its grand entrance but also a bit frightening with three or four floors of rows of dark windows, potentially hiding something within its walls. As Emma stood there looking out over the eerie courtyard and old walls she noticed the moat which circled the building. She followed it around with her eyes until her heart froze and she stopped breathing.

In the corner of her eye she had seen something. She wasn't sure whether it was the moonlight reflecting in one of the windows or an actual light inside one of the rooms of the deserted house. She rubbed her eyes and looked again. No, the light was still there. She figured it could have been her eyes playing tricks on her. The wine might have made her start hallucinating. She decided it must be the latter. She looked again. The light was still there but she noticed with alarm that there was something else. Someone was standing in the lit up window. In the split second she had seen it she noticed it was a white apparition. The shock was overwhelming and fear gripped her. She had to walk away from the window and quickly close the curtain. Whatever it was had moved in the wind by the window. If she had to describe it she would have said it was a person, utterly ghostlike. This could not be, she thought. Her imagination and the impact of the wine clearly had a bad influence on her sanity.

As she went back into bed she was still significantly shaken and frightened but more than anything she was ashamed that she had let herself drink so much wine to become this freak which right at that moment was hiding underneath the covers of her bed, wishing that any ghosts lurking around would go away.

Chapter 5

It was the day of the grand opening; or rather the day of the drilling of a tiny hole in the wall which would let technicians insert a small camera into it and for them to have a first peak inside the 'space in the wall'.

Erik had woken up with a feeling of anticipation and excitement. He was also nervous. Although he didn't have anything to lose, he felt obliged towards Paul and Emma and hoped that this day would be one of promise and discovery rather than disappointment and regret. It certainly was thrilling. In just a couple of hours they would start drilling and by the end of the day they would hopefully have a clear picture of what was hidden in there more than six hundred years ago. Whether it was the skeleton of a young girl, a treasure of valuables from the middle ages or the stone tablet, Erik knew that the local press would have a field day and have a lot to say either way. The only alternative which he seriously dreaded was if they found absolutely nothing. He started to doubt the whole venture but was immediately overwhelmed by a feeling that Anna was in the room with him, making him believe in a magnificent discovery. He could almost hear how she was trying to convince him. 'Blocking up a door for no apparent reason just didn't seem like a feasible thing to do. There simply must have been a reason for why a new wall had been raised.' Just before she died, Anna had told him that she had been able to work out what was hidden in there. So he knew for definite that she knew something or at least had a theory. But how? Had she read something in the journals? He would never know, unless it became obvious when the contents of the mysterious space was revealed. He knew he couldn't possibly be communicating with his deceased wife, not even subconsciously. She was dead. She would never come back. No, Erik decided, he was letting his imagination run riot. Even so, the Torpa owner in question simply must have wanted to hide something. He knew it.

As he came down to the breakfast room, both Paul, Emma, his parents and Britt-Marie were already there, enjoying the fresh buns baked by the housekeeper that morning, with accompanying treats and hot chocolate.

"Good morning Erik", his father said. "You will know this better than me. Emma was asking whether anyone had ever seen the supposed ghost of the girl who was buried alive in the wall."

Erik responded with an amused smile: "Well, that is a matter of debate but the legend must have started somehow and several people over the years have claimed to have seen someone wandering the halls of the old house like a lost spirit and some say they have heard her cry."

Erik's mother who had grown up in the house continued: "Folklore also tells of other ghosts. Apparently, just before the owner of Torpa dies, they will see four beautiful white horses pulling a magnificent carriage decorated in the family's colours. This could of course never be proven as by the time they would see it they would be as good as dead. But there were reports of owners who had seen actual white horses and thought they had taken their last breath. The amount of misunderstandings this legend has caused over the years is amusing. There is also talk of a ghost referred to as the 'grey lady'. You know, Torpa had a dungeon in its basement where prisoners used to be housed hundreds of years ago. Apparently, a daughter fell in love with one of the prisoners and when he was decapitated, she was overtaken by grief to such an extent that she fell ill and died.

She is supposed to have been haunting the house ever since. I was sure I saw her once when I was a child. I refused to go near the house for at least a week.”

For some reason Emma seemed less amused by the stories than the rest: “Has anyone else you know ever seen anything?” she asked.

“Well, even if they had they probably wouldn’t admit it”, Erik’s mother said laughing, giving Emma a jokingly mysterious look. Emma smiled back but Erik detected an element of hesitation in her forced grin. She glanced up through the large windows of the breakfast room at the imposing building next door, as if she was looking for something. Could it be, Erik thought, that Emma could somehow have been affected by the mysterious ambiance and secluded setting of Torpa. He was amused at the thought, although surprised as he had rarely met a more down to earth person than her. As he looked at her that morning he had to admit that she had grown on him. His first impression of her was that she was rather boring; plain looks and dry manners. With new colour in her face she was pretty in a natural sort of way; her eyes clear and her lips redder than normal, her dark blond hair streaked by the sun and tied back in a pony tail. A few days away from the hustle and bustle and in the sun had done her good. She also had a good sense of humour; most of the time. Other times he just didn’t understand her.

“Some people have claimed to see a young man walking the grounds”, Erik’s father added. He paused for effect. “I have reassured them that it is Erik sleepwalking again!” He laughed a thundery laugh at his own joke and they all joined in. Erik could tell Emma’s laugh was genuine and that it came from the heart. This pleased him.

It had been agreed that the technicians would join them at around 11am. Therefore, following breakfast they all rushed to get ready and agreed to meet outside the entrance to the old house at half past ten. It was another sunny day with temperatures reaching twenty five degrees in the shade. When Erik stepped outside he was surprised at the number of people who had gathered in front of the house, including locals, tourists and members of the press. A group of four locals appeared to be conducting a small demonstration carrying homemade posters with messages such as ‘leave the Torpa ghost alone’. He noticed that the press-presence was wider than it had been previously, with at least two national newspapers there, evident from their marked cars. He was sure that this was his mother’s doing. She was already in the midst of a group of journalists answering questions in her fake Stockholm accent. Sometimes he really could not stand her. She was such a selfish person, only interested in raising her own and her business’ profile. Erik didn’t have any inclination to answer any questions and deliberately stayed in the background, waiting for Paul and Emma to appear. They did only minutes later, both surprised that the events of the day had been made public.

“I will ensure that none other than us and the technicians will be allowed to enter the house. This is outrageous. Fruktansvärt,” Erik said with distain.

“Yes, god help us if we don’t find anything and equally god help us if we do! The press will eat us alive.” Paul was concerned but Erik laughed at the thought of the local or even national press being bullish.

“Luckily enough the press here is not as persistent as they are in England. Here they might slaughter us before they eat us!” Erik said jokingly and as they all

glanced in the direction of the small group of local journalists questioning his mother they all laughed at the evident exaggeration. Only three now remained listening to what Mrs Stenbock had to say. One of them had wandered off in another direction taking pictures of the old house and another was busy on his mobile phone a few meters away. Very eager members of the press indeed...

It was nearly 11.15 by the time a van arrived with the technicians and their equipment. Erik laughed to himself as they stepped out looking serious and self important, carrying aluminium boxes and meters of wire. For some reason he got the Mission Impossible tune in his head. Their behaviour would have suited a part in the TV series very well. He hoped that their mission wasn't impossible.

For the first time that morning, Erik's mother went up to the Torpa entrance and unlocked the massive doors. Standing on the stairs looking out over the twenty or so people populating the drive-way, she said with a loud voice, again in her adopted Stockholm accent: "I'm afraid you will all have to stay out here whilst the work is being done. We would advise you to go home. I suspect it will take the best part of the day. We will announce any findings in due course. The house will be closed for visitors all day."

Erik was glad his mother had agreed with him in this matter. The two of them agreeing on anything was a rare event. She took the lead into the house, closely followed by Paul, Emma and the five technicians. Erik's father would join them later in the afternoon. Erik went in last, locking the door behind them. Erik had always avoided the house as a child, feeling ill at ease inside it. He had the same feeling now, particularly bearing in mind his more recent nightmare. Its walls were bare and much of its former glory had been washed away by the hundreds of years which had gone by. It was still an impressive building but it didn't invite modern habitation. The rooms were surprisingly dark in spite of the sunny day and the large number of windows all around the house. Erik was about to suggest that they light some of the gas lamps attached to the wall, when one of the technicians made a comment about powering the florescent lighting which they had brought. Due to its bare stone floors and walls, the rooms were colder than outside. One of the funny things with this house was that although it was completely rectangular in shape, except for the front tower, one could easily get lost in its maze of rooms. Its construction wasn't very logical, probably as a consequence of the many additions to the original building over the years. There were also many secret passages of stairs which had been used by servants and as escape routes. Adding to the chilling experience, the prison in the basement was still intact and some of the passage ways led there.

They all ventured upstairs to the first floor and then to the second, where the 'wall' was in full view just opposite the landing. The stairs were narrow and the landing was not large but not as cramped as they had been in his dream. Erik wondered how on earth the technicians would be able to fit all their equipment in the small space in front of where they would drill the hole.

They all had a quiet moment in front of the wall, each contemplating their own individual issues. Erik's thoughts turned to Anna. She would have loved to be there, waiting for her theories to be confirmed or dismissed. Somehow, he knew that although she wasn't there in person, she was in spirit, at least in his own mind. Once again his thoughts wandered over to Thailand and that unfortunate

morning. If only he had been there next to her on the patio, he could have helped her to find a safe place, to swim to safety. But he knew from the stories told in the counselling group which he had joined shortly after the event back in Sweden, that even if he had been there, he would have been unlikely to have been able to do anything to save her. He would probably have added to the statistics of missing persons himself. Given the location of their hut—right on the beach—they probably would have been the first to die. The fact that Anna’s body had never been recovered still bothered him. Even now, over eight months on, his heart jumped every time he saw anyone looking remotely like her. Emma was a good example. Her eyes got Erik’s heart beating faster. Erik glanced over at her. She was standing next to Paul looking a little bit cold. She seemed excited but kept glancing over her shoulder as if she was expecting one of the Torpa ghosts to appear. Erik laughed to himself and took a few steps towards them. Emma suggested that maybe they should wait outside for everything to be properly set up and leave the technicians more space. They all agreed and started to walk out.

“But please ensure that you let us know when you start drilling”, Paul said to one of the technicians before leaving the room. As they came outside they noticed that most of the small crowd had left. There were only three persistent reporters left, still with their cameras at the ready, as if there might be an amazing photo opportunity at any time. One of them actually photographed them as they were leaving the old house.

His mother had briefed the technicians well. She had given them all the measurements in advance and Erik’s initial concern about the limited space turned out to be unfounded. Everything they had brought had been fitted to the size of the room. Despite this it took them a very long time to set it all up. Erik and the others had already had lunch and afternoon coffee by the time it was ready and the technicians had had their delayed lunch break.

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The excitement was mounting. They were standing on the landing next to the wall a safe but short distance away from the action. The unfortunate technician who had the unenviable task of drilling the hole in the more than six hundred year old wall was already kitted out in a protective suit and face shield, with the drill at the ready in a tight grip in his hand. All that remained now was for him to start drilling. Emma was sure she could detect an expression of fear in the technician’s face. She guessed he was worried about the ancient myth which dictated that he would die the instant the drill entered the surface. Although somehow she didn’t think so; he was probably merely concerned that the wall would crack and crumble down in front of them. Or was he not the only one who was in danger of the curse; could they all be in peril? She didn’t believe in the folklore about the deaths of those who had tried to break the wall; there was no feasible explanation for such an event to occur, even assuming that a similar thing as the disputed Tutankhamen’s curse would have effected this remote Swedish wall. It was a ridiculous thought. She thought back at her sighting the other evening. She was sure she had seen something but the memory had faded in significance over the past few days. She had felt foolish asking all those questions that morning but she needed to know whether there was any way that what she had seen may have

been something other than the hallucinations of a person intoxicated by wine. The fact that her sighting had been in the window in the room next to where they were standing now sent shivers down her spine. Had the weeping girl made a chilling appearance to prevent them from opening the wall? It had happened the same day they had got the planning permission. 'Don't be silly', she thought to herself. She was supposed to be a sensible person, unaffected by mere village scare tactics. She had really allowed it to get to her, she thought with regret. She looked around the room and noticed that the expression on everyone's faces was a mixture of anticipation and something resembling fear, for varying reasons she assumed. Erik's mother was the exception. She was extremely relaxed, calmly gazing at the scene in front of them with a light smile touching her lips.

The second he turned on the drill, everyone seemed to hold their breath in anticipation and to avoid breathing in the dust which quickly filled the whole room from the resulting air stream. The noise was ear-splitting and Emma wished that they, like the technicians, had been allocated some ear protection. He had survived. The whole drilling exercise had been over in just under a minute but they were struggling to see the result due to the dust cloud which had penetrated every inch of the constricted space. Emma thought she had heard something and looked behind her. Where was Erik? He had been standing immediately behind her. She followed the stairs down and was shocked to see Erik lying at the bottom of the stone stairs, bleeding from his head. He didn't move. Emma shouted "Help!" at the top of her lungs.

Erik was soon surrounded by the whole group. One of the technicians started to check if he was unconscious, checking his eyes and feeling his pulse but Erik began to move and tried to get up. He was dazed and more than a little confused by what had happened so the technician with a first aid kit recommended they move him somewhere more comfortable and call a doctor to have a proper look. Seemingly from nowhere, the technician presented a stretcher like sheet that they all helped to get Erik onto. Erik's mother acted quickly, making the way out clear and opening all the doors. They carried him across the bridge and courtyard towards the house. The persistent journalist who had remained outside rapidly got to his feet and started to frantically photograph the unexpected scene. One could almost imagine that he was already making up headlines: 'The Torpa curse steals its last victim' or 'Always listen to the voices of legend'.

As it turned out, although Erik had had a bad fall down the stairs, he was fine, except for a sprained wrist. The doctor, who had arrived quickly, had told him to rest and to count himself lucky; someone more fragile may have been less fortunate under the circumstances.

"I don't know what happened", Erik said to Emma when they were talking in the library shortly after. "I couldn't see and then took a step back, not realising how close I was to the stairs. The next thing I remember is being at the bottom and you all around me."

"I can't say I'm surprised", Emma laughed. "You're proving to be the most unobservant person I've ever met".

"I know, I think it's because I'm so tall." He moved to the edge of his chair as if he was about to get up. "Anyway, no time to stay around here. We have things to do! A vacuum to check!"

“Are you sure you’re up to it? How are you feeling?” She leaned over and carefully touched his forehead.

“Fine, except for my pounding head and my wrist. It really hurts but I’m sure I’ll be fine. Let’s go.” He stood up and swallowed a headache tablet on the go. They went to the courtyard where everyone was standing, the remaining journalist photographing him frantically once again. “Let’s do it! Let’s have a look in that space!” Everyone looked up, surprised to see him up on his feet so quickly. They were all happy to get going, Paul in particular.

Everything was set up. Three screens displayed images from the camera as it was inserted into the newly drilled hole in the wall. Emma noticed that the wall was only about twenty centimetres thick, unlike the walls of the rest of the house. She could see Paul’s pulse pounding hard on the side of his neck. He was nervous. She felt oddly calm, only excited and relieved after the excitement just passed. For some reason she felt obliged to reach for Erik’s hand. Unfortunately she reached for his injured wrist and she could hear a muffled ‘ouch’ as he pulled it away.

“Sorry”, she whispered in his direction without taking her eyes off the screens. The initial images were unexciting. It was too dark to see anything at first. It was only when one of them turned on the camera light that they started to make out the room beyond.

Chapter 6

Paul had his nose up to the screen and was mumbling something about the recording being clear enough for later investigation. He had insisted that everything be recorded so they could provide evidence of whatever they found. Emma was equally transfixed. The number of spiders’ webs was truly staggering. The camera had to break through the mass of webs before it could see anything else. The initial images were uninspiring and Erik started to get worried that his worst fear would be true and the space would be empty. It was smaller than he had expected, only about half a meter deep and about a meter and a half wide. The walls were a drab grey and it was impossible to tell if there had ever been any colour due to the layers of dust that covered every square inch. As the camera panned the room, Paul suddenly jumped:

“Stop the camera! Just there! No, back a bit, I saw something.” The camera moved out and back slightly to take in more of the room. Paul was right. There in the middle of the room towards the back was a mouldy corner of a large piece of grey cloth. Erik’s first thought was of clothes hanging off a skeleton but they quickly realised that the cloth was in fact some sort of sheet covering something else, a box of some kind. The technician manoeuvred the camera around and down. The box seemed fairly large, well over a meter long, perhaps seventy centimetres wide and about seventy centimetres tall. They could all see what Paul was thinking: ‘certainly large enough to house the half tablet’. His face was elated.

“I think we now know that the space in the wall does hide something after all; it’s a chest,” Paul said confidently, barely able to keep the grin further across his

face. "Go down to the bottom. I think you can just see the rusty hinges." There was a hint of triumph in his voice now. "From its appearance and the state of the cloth, I think we can safely say that this is a very old ensemble. I suppose we know for certain that it must be at least six hundred years old, unless someone has opened this wall more recently. I say this is the chest this wall was built to hide. We still don't know what it contains but whatever it is I'm sure it's valuable." Paul's excitement was endearing. He was almost drooling from exhilaration, like a dog expecting a nice juicy bone any minute.

They spent another hour searching every inch of the space but other than spiders' webs they didn't find anything further. It was difficult to get an idea of what the chest looked like because of the cloth which covered it but they were all satisfied that their find would be enough to grant them planning permission to open the wall and look at it properly, in particular to see what was inside it.

The sun was on its way down and the hallway outside the void had got darker. Content that they had achieved good results the technicians started to pack up. Erik almost had to drag Emma and Paul out of there. His mother stayed and oversaw the packing. Erik knew her well enough to understand that her motive for doing so was to keep an eye on her prize; to ensure that there were no attempts to open the wall. After all they probably had the necessary equipment. Erik thought that his mother's mistrust towards the technicians was wholly unfounded; they had proved nothing but hard working, good humoured and diligent all throughout the day. She was also the one who locked up for the evening, adding an extra couple of locks. This had been Paul's suggestion as he knew that with the publicity and the find the house would soon be a prime target for burglars.

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They had all been filled with hope and excitement after the discovery of the chest. Emma had not been surprised to see an article on the front page of the local paper the next morning. She laughed when she saw the large picture accompanying the article; of Erik being carried out of the old house on the stretcher-sheet. The article which followed exaggerated the whole incident and proclaimed that:

'The Torpa heir was lucky to be alive following the dramatic events in the old house yesterday. Some speculate that his fall down some stairs was caused by the attempts to disturb the blocked up wall which according to legend houses the skeleton of a girl who had been cruelly buried alive behind the wall after having caught the plague in the 15th century. According to folklore, anyone who has attempted to open the wall has died. The fall happened during attempts to drill a hole in the wall...'

It went on with a detailed description of the fall and Erik's condition and continued at the very end:

'Scientists were yesterday able to examine the space where the girl was supposed to have been buried and although they could not find any visible human remains, they found a chest believed to be from the 15th century. The

contents of the chest remains unknown pending the granting of planning permission to open the wall fully. Whether the chest, as claimed by Oxford professor Dr Paul Simmons, contains an ancient Egyptian tablet which may be the key to deciphering the ancient script of the Minoans on Crete, Linear A, remains to be seen...'

This was followed by two disappointments that day. Firstly, it was clear that planning permission to open the wall fully would not be granted immediately as they had all hoped. In fact, it was far from clear whether permission would be granted at all. The local authorities still had their reservations and needed to subject the matter to proper review and consultation. Paul had been openly annoyed, pacing up and down the library for a full hour before coming to terms with it. Emma had been equally aggravated at the news, asking how they could even contemplate letting the discovery of a six hundred year old chest pass them by. Secondly, Paul had had a phone call from Oxford. He was needed there urgently for his lectures. This came as no surprise. Paul had always known that he had to go back to Oxford around this time. What he found disappointing was that they still didn't know whether they had found the tablet. Paul informed them that he would have to leave that very day, a few days earlier than they had previously agreed. He had already booked a flight back to Heathrow.

Emma was disappointed. It would be strange to stay on without Paul. Their relationship had got no further forward since the day of the kiss. In fact, he had done a sterling job of avoiding being alone with her, which suited Emma fine. Even though she had feelings for him, it was more infatuation than love, she reasoned. Paul's taxi arrived later that afternoon. He said goodbye to everyone and then he was gone. It felt strange without him there. After all they had been there for nearly two weeks and in each other's company almost constantly, except for at night. She certainly had got to know Paul much better during their stay in Sweden and they got on well. She suspected it was going to be strange seeing him back in Oxford later.

That evening Emma did not feel well and had gone to bed early, missing a party for the neighbours arranged by Erik's mother. She woke up when it was still dark outside. She felt ill and rushed into the bathroom. After a while she decided she needed fresh air. Standing half asleep in her bedroom window looking out over the old white stone building she was absent-mindedly following a mosquito with her eyes when she again spotted a light in one of the rooms on the second floor of the old house. She was suddenly wide awake. As last time, she was sure she could see a woman standing in the window, with long almost grey hair wearing a white night gown which seemed to move in the wind. This time she wasn't scared by the sight but decided to stay in the window and take a proper look. Moments after Emma had taken this brave decision, the woman in the window seemed to slowly turn her head in Emma's direction. She imagined seeing a couple of bright eyes staring right at her, although she knew this was an impossibility given the distance between them. Her heart started to beat at record speed and her head was spinning but she forced herself to remain standing. Moments later the light in the room where the supposed ghost was standing went out and she could no longer see anything; just the old house in the calm summer's night with the sound of

crickets all around. It was as if the whole sighting had been a dream. She must have been hallucinating due to illness, she thought before she went back to sleep.

* * * * *

It was almost ten by the time Erik finally got up the next morning. It had been a good evening although the alcohol consumption had been above average for some of the people there. His mother had at one point appeared to withstand the drinking remarkably well but it was only when he caught her reminiscing about her mother and how she had ruined her daughter's happiness that he understood that she too was feeling the effects. His father was in the background as always, completely unaffected by the drinking and his wife's complaining, quietly observing the goings on around him. Erik had managed to stay as good as sober, having been advised by the doctor not to drink any alcohol with the painkillers, although this morning he was suffering from a throbbing headache and pain in his wrist, all caused by his fall down the stairs.

As soon as he was out of bed he realised that something was wrong. He could hear upset voices from downstairs and a look out the window revealed a police car on the driveway, together with an ambulance. His first thought was of Emma but he was fairly certain that although she had been under the weather the night before it was nothing serious. His next thought was of his mother; could she have done something stupid? He doubted it. Oh no, he thought, please don't let it be a break-in; could someone have stolen the chest? But why on earth would there be an ambulance there if that was it? He quickly got dressed and went downstairs.

Everyone had gathered in the breakfast room. Emma was not yet up. His mother was sitting on a chair at the table crying. His father stood behind her, trying to comfort her by massaging her shoulders. He didn't seem bothered by a ray of sunshine illuminating his face. A young ambitious-looking police officer stared at them, helplessly wondering what to do next.

As Erik came into view, his father turned towards him and said with feeling, glancing quickly at the police officer as he said it: "Grandmother was found dead this morning..."

Erik remained quiet. He wasn't sure how to react. His grandmother had never been anything other than grief and unhappiness all his life but he still felt a sting of sadness, mainly because she had died without saying goodbye. Partly due to the fact she could not walk, she was constantly shouting orders and trying to ruin everyone else's lives, just because she was discontented with hers. Despite this he felt sorry for her. He assumed that she had died of natural causes. The next statement of the police officer therefore surprised him: "She may have been murdered, or else she was accidentally scared to death by the intruder".

Erik looked at him with disbelief. This could not be. Who would want to kill an old woman? Had there been an intruder at their house? It was with cold realisation that he remembered that his mother had spent part of her evening the night before complaining and telling everyone how much she hated her own mother. No, she was probably not the most loving of characters but she wouldn't do something like that. Yes, she hated her enough and she had been in a right state but why now—why after all these years? It would not make any sense—and sense was something that his mother had in abundance. Even so, her behaviour

the night before could be testified by a number of neighbours and would sound incriminating.

“She was found dead on the second floor of the old house”, the policeman continued.

This surprised Erik even further. Who would have bothered to carry her there and why? “What do you know? Who brought her there? Have you started to question the people who were at the party last night?” Erik asked in quick succession.

“We think she took the burglar by surprise; the person who broke into the wall and stole the chest that is. The doctor has estimated the time of death to around three am.”

Erik could not believe it. He stared at the police officer as if he was stupid to propose such a thing. This could not be true. Not only had his grandmother died, someone had broken into the old house and stolen the chest. He was dumbfounded, wondering who would do such a thing. He thought of his mother adding the extra locks to the front door of the castle; apparently an insufficient precaution.

“She may have had a heart attack and we are quiet certain that it happened there, in the house”.

“But how did she get to the old house. She couldn’t walk!”

“That’s news to me”, the police officer said. I have examined the crime scene myself and she clearly had done lots of walking recently, likely barefoot at that. She wasn’t wearing any shoes. The soles of her feet were dirty. This woman could walk, there’s no question about it”.

Erik’s mother looked up from over at the kitchen table, eyes red and nose runny. “I wanted to tell you, Erik but she wouldn’t let us. She told us to keep it a secret that she could walk. She just preferred it that way—don’t ask me why. Britt-Marie knew as well”, she added as if that would make it less of an unfair concealment. All his life, or at least as far back as Erik could remember, his grandmother had not been able to walk. He had always thought this was why she was so grumpy and disgruntled. In spite of her inexcusable behaviour Erik had always tolerated her because she was a cripple. He felt he knew his grandmother even less now than he ever had. She certainly had been a sad character. He had hated her as a child. He blamed her for having separated his family. All this time, she had been able to walk but had probably been too indolent to do anything herself. Or could there have been another reason? Erik certainly could not think of any.

“Your grandmother may have had some psychological problems which the doctors had never picked up on. The fact that she had wandered over to the old house on many occasions speaks for itself, don’t you think?” his mother said with abhorrence in her voice. “I was never aware of this behaviour in her”, she added as if the police officer would blame her in any way.

“It is our guess”, the police officer continued, “that she had wandered up to the house, unlocked one of the doors and unintentionally paved the way for the robber or robbers. We also guess that she was in the house on the second floor when the robbers arrived and that they were surprised by her presence there.”

“Is there anything you actually know, rather than guess?” Erik’s mother asked impatiently.

“Well, my officers are currently in the old house examining evidence. It is still very early days but I can assure you that we will have a list of suspects drawn up shortly and to answer your earlier question Erik, the guests at last night’s party will certainly all be on that list, including the three of you”, he said and looked at them seriously. He continued: “One or possibly two very serious crimes were committed here last night and we intend to do everything in our power to find out who did it”.

“And to find the chest with all its contents!” Erik added. “As I’m sure you know that chest may contain something of great historical importance.” While Erik was saying this, Emma entered the room, looking worse for wear. Not even her layers of make-up could hide her pale complexion this morning. He had never seen her in such a state, clearly seriously hung over. She paused at the door, taking in the scene.

“What did I miss?” she asked. As Erik explained, he could see the alarm and then disappointment in her face as the news sank in.

“I’m so sorry about the loss of your grandmother, Erik. It’s all a bit strange, don’t you think?” She had an odd look on her face, as if she knew something but felt reluctant to share it. The police officer had noticed this too and asked her if there was something she wanted to tell them. Emma hesitated but clearly decided against it.

“No, I just found it a bit odd since the woman couldn’t walk?”

“Apparently she could after all”, Erik added quickly.

“I will start to question you all in turn. I would like to start with you, Mrs Stenbock, if that’s acceptable. My colleague will join me shortly.”

As they left the room, Emma leaned over towards Erik and said quietly: “I’ll tell you one thing; I’m not going to be the one to tell Paul about the theft. He had high hopes for that chest...and so did I for that matter. He is going to be devastated. This is the worst thing that ever could have happened.” Her eyes were full of accusation.

“Well, don’t blame me, for heaven’s sake!” Erik’s voice was louder than he had anticipated. He turned around briefly to see the police officer still engaged in conversation with his parents behind them. “The theft could not have been prevented by anything I could have done. God knows how my grandmother got hold of the additional keys to open the house ... what do I know? Anyway, the burglars would very likely have been able to open the front door, even if the old woman had not opened it. If they were able to open the wall, a door wouldn’t have been a problem.”

Emma stopped and turned towards him. “I’m not blaming you, and you know it. It’s just that this theft has so completely ruined everything. I suppose I had got my hopes up after we found the chest. Shall we go and have a look at the devastation?”

“We can go and see if it is possible, I suppose.” They went outside, only to find that the entrance to the house had been blocked up and a police officer outside the door said that they would not be able to go in there all day when work was ongoing to thoroughly investigate the site. They stood on the bridge for a moment,

hesitating. It was a warm sunny day. There was no breeze at all and even the birds had stopped twittering due to the heat.

“Let’s take a walk”, Erik suggested.

A dry laugh escaped her. “Sure, as long as we take my favourite route; you know the one next to that other lake.” Erik knew she was referring to the larger lake not far from the house. He agreed and they set off in silence. They had been walking for no more than a couple of minutes when they reached the lake. They stopped to take in the scenery. The surface of the water looked as if it was covered with millions of diamonds glistening in the sunshine. They continued for some time, each deep in their own thoughts, until Erik pointed at a large stone only a couple of metres from the water.

“Fancy a break?” he asked with hesitation in his voice, unsure whether it would be a good idea to stop at all since sitting down would inevitably require some conversation.

She looked flustered and hot. “Alright, that would be nice.”

Whilst resting next to each other on the stone in the sunshine looking out over the lake, Emma started to snivel, apologising profusely:

“I’m so sorry. You’re the one who just lost your grandmother. I feel awful crying over a material thing like this.” She looked at him with sheepish eyes.

“No, this is a huge disappointment for you and I can understand why you’re upset.” He tried to comfort her by holding his arm around her. In a way he thought it was nice to see that she could be vulnerable, letting down her defences. Normally she was hard as steel, never showing her feelings. In fact, she had always seemed a bit too uptight for his liking. He was secretly glad that she could relax enough in his company to show her true self. He felt they both needed cheering up.

“How about a swim?” he suggested looking out at the lake before them. Emma looked almost shocked but at the same time amused.

“A swim? But, we’d have to go and get our swim suits”, she said as she was drying her eyes.

“If you prefer. Or we could do it ‘au naturale’. I don’t have to look when you enter the water. There is absolutely no one around here. No one will see. Swimming costumes would be superfluous.” Emma paused for only a minute and then reluctantly agreed, although she drew the line at taking off her underwear.

“Only if you promise not to look. Promise!”

“Yes, I promise.” He dutifully held his hand over his eyes, looking away while she was getting undressed and tiptoed into the lake.

“It’s surprisingly warm actually”, Emma shouted from out in the water. “I’m all in now, you can look”. Erik didn’t feel at all ashamed to show himself naked. He took his clothes off, including his underwear, and noticed that Emma was looking at him. He almost detected a smile. This had a surprisingly erotic effect on him so he ran into the water.

“What’s Swedish for ‘naked’?” Emma asked laughing.

“Naken”, Erik responded whilst Emma imitated him with a perfect Swedish pronunciation.

The sun was hot. Swimming in the lukewarm water felt liberating. Erik was very aware of Emma’s presence and although he had never been attracted to her before

he came to the conclusion that he no longer saw her as the boring spotty mouse she had been when they first met. The combination of the situation, her smiley face and months of summer sun had transformed her. Her complexion was clear, her hair lighter and he was sure she had lost weight. Her eyes had never been more luminous. He wanted to grab her in his arms, pull her close to him and kiss her like he would have done if she had been Anna. He decided against it as he knew she would not appreciate any such behaviour. Instead, he suggested that they swim across to the other side of the lake, like he had used to do as a child. She laughed happily but stopped when she realised he wasn't joking but then reluctantly agreed to do it. It felt longer than it looked to get to the other side and it was enough to keep them entertained for a while. It also worked to keep her state of undress out of his mind. It got increasingly colder the further out they went. Emma looked relieved when they reached the shore. At that point Emma seemed to have lost some of her initial shyness and suggested that they sit on the stone for a bit to dry off. Her flowery underwear didn't leave much to his imagination. He decided to start a conversation.

"When is it you are going to Crete then?" he asked. Emma had told him about the trip the previous day.

"Oh, in January. We will have three weeks there. The weather could vary at this time of year but early spring is supposed to be lovely on Crete. Although I will probably spend most of my time indoors translating old texts..." She tried to fake a sad face but it was evident from her poorly concealed smile that she was looking forward to it. "It will be great for my dissertation," she added almost as if she had been able to read his thoughts.

He continued his questioning, simultaneously noting that they were now almost dry. "Who else is going?"

"I'm not entirely sure yet but I think there will be at least two more students. I'm sure it will be Ball, a Japanese PhD student. He's in the UK at Oxford studying the effects of floods. Apparently there was a large Tsunamilike event hundreds of years ago on the west coast of England. In Japan he has also studied the Krakataoa Volcanic eruption and now he wants to see for himself the effects of the Thera eruption on Santorini several millennia ago. He is supposed to be very good at what he does, firmly on his way to becoming a doctor in his field. I have only met him once but he seemed nice, typically Japanese in a way. I guess he will spend most of his time on Santorini though."

They sat quietly for a little while. Emma broke the silence with a short laugh.

"What was that for?" Erik asked with a smirk, looking at her briefly, careful to keep his eyes at her eye level.

"No, nothing."

"Come on, tell me."

"Well, I was just thinking that you should feel honoured. You are the first man to have seen me in this state of undress", Emma said blushing and turning to look at him.

"Oh, I do feel honoured", Erik whispered, having temporarily lost his voice. They looked at each other smiling. Their eyes met for a few seconds. Emma looked as if she was about to say something but could not remember what it was. Erik had stopped breathing. He wanted to stare into her eyes forever, as a way of getting

Anna back or at least to hold her once more. He suddenly recalled what it had been like to feel Anna's skin under his fingertips, to stroke her hair, to kiss her lips... As he subconsciously moved his face closer to Emma's he came to his senses and decided it was time to get dressed. He turned around to help her down.

"This was wonderful, Erik", she said as they started to walk back to the house after they had put their clothes back on. He put his arm around her as they strolled over a field which occasionally held cows but was presently empty. She continued: "This is such a wonderfully peaceful part of the world. I hope it always stays that way." He steered her away from some cow dung.

"Remember you can stay for as long as you like. I'm working on Monday but you're welcome to stay for a while to work on your dissertation here." Erik said, hoping she would take him up on the offer. They walked through some foliage and could glimpse Torpa in the distance.

"Thank you, I would love to but unfortunately I need to get back to Oxford. With the wall opened there's no reason for me to stay on. I'll try to book flights for Monday", she said and he could see that she genuinely meant that she would have liked to stay, although he understood that it would feel strange for her to do so with the police officers around and his parents 'grieving' over the death of his grandmother. The funeral would probably take place soon and it would not be a pleasant time to be there.

Entering the estate they were abruptly brought back to reality and the regrettable events during the night. Erik anticipated that it would take a long time before things got back to normal at Torpa...

Chapter 7

Crete, January 2006

The sky was cloudy as the plane touched down at Heraklion airport and the captain announced that it was a pleasant eighteen degrees in the shade; still much nicer than the unpredictable Swedish winter weather. It had been agreed that Erik would join Emma and Paul on Crete for a week. Paul had asked him to come and stay in their rented villa in Heraklion, suggesting that this would give Erik an opportunity to see the Torpa tablet in real life, though Erik suspected that Paul's reason for inviting him was to have easy access to any potential news about the chest and the burglary and to keep badgering him for information. Erik couldn't care less about seeing the tablet in the museum in Heraklion. He had agreed to come for two reasons: He was scared of losing contact with Emma; his only living reminder of his deceased wife. For some strange reason which only his broken psyche could explain, he missed looking into Emma's eyes, seeing Anna in them and to pretend that she was still alive. Thinking about his brief moment with Emma by the lake in August filled him with something which he had trouble comprehending. Never to see her again would be like indirectly losing Anna once more. He knew that he was vulnerable and unable to survive another loss. Also, he

was in desperate need of a break from work. Having managed to convince his boss that he needed a week off at short notice he had promised to take his Blackberry with him, not intending to use it. He had also hesitantly promised to meet up with a prospective client in Athens. Partner promotion required some sacrifices, he reasoned.

Five months had passed since the unfortunate events in August. It had been a gruesome five months, there was no doubt about it. Although Erik was glad that the police were doing their job, the questioning had been almost unbearable. For some reason they were taking the view that everyone was guilty until proven innocent and they wouldn't rest until they had firmly excluded everyone on their list. They had even gone to Oxford to question Paul, even though he had not been in the country when the burglary took place.

Paul had not taken the news of the burglary well. Erik had phoned him on the afternoon of the day it happened. The silence at the other end of the line was telling. There was nothing he could say. His reaction had been in line with what Erik had expected. He expressed serious disappointment and thanked Erik for letting him know. He also asked for Erik to keep him up to date with any developments in the police investigation. If they had any success, he would like to be the first to know. This proved to be difficult as the investigation seemed to be conducted under wraps. Erik and his parents rarely got any updates and in spite of several requests they had only had limited progress reports. His father had suggested that the reason for this was probably that they didn't get anywhere in their search and so there was nothing to report but Paul kept pressing for more information. It was all very frustrating and disappointing that after nearly five months they had still not been able to find the perpetrator or the chest.

His grandmother's funeral had been a painful experience. Although the church had been full of people, not many seemed to cry or show any feelings. Erik was no exception. He could not feel any grief. She had had a long privileged life, selfishly using other people to serve her own interests and living by old-fashioned rules, ruining his childhood and his parent's happiness. There had been a small gathering of family members after the church ceremony and this had been followed by the reading of the will. Most of the estate's assets were to pass to his mother but Erik had been given the old Torpa stone house. This was a peculiar request since Erik would in any event be entitled to the entire estate at some point in the future. What was more bizarre was the next statement, read out by the lawyer executing the will:

"To Anna Ahlquist, fiancée of my grandson Erik Stenbock, I leave my annotated copy of the Holy Bible."

Seeing the horrified look on everyone's faces, the lawyer had quickly understood that Anna was no longer part of the family. He had explained that the will had been written and witnessed nearly two years ago and because her death had been sudden no amended will had been drawn up.

Erik wondered why his grandmother had decided to give Anna her bible copy. He could only see two possibilities. Either this was an attempt by her to send a message of moral standards from her grave. This had been a common occurrence

when she was alive. He had lost count long ago of the number of times she had preached about the importance of virtues and taking a moral high ground. Therefore, he saw this possibility as the more likely, although he had never got the impression that his grandmother took offence to Anna. In fact, she had been one of only a handful of people the old woman had actually accepted, or at least not bullied. The second possibility was that his grandmother would have expected that her particular copy of the holy bible actually meant something to Anna and that they had discussed it at some point. It was possible that Anna had had conversations with the old woman while he was not there. Erik was intrigued as this would have revealed a side to his grandmother that he had never seen. Anna, like himself, had not been in the least bit religious but a common interest here could not be seen as a complete impossibility given her interest in ancient history, of which the bible was one 'source', and his grandmother's fascination or perhaps obsession with preaching the 'word' of god. She had been a regular churchgoer before the 'demise' which confined her to her bed. Unfortunately, he thought, he would probably never know the reasons behind the gift. Both were dead, never to return...

The captain turned off the seatbelt sign and Erik made his way out. It felt like an eternity before he had collected his suitcase and rushed through passport control. He then went straight outside to the taxi rank where he got into the first taxi he laid eyes on. After only a short journey through town and on a country road by the sea, the taxi slowed down and turned onto a small lane. The villa was conveniently located, only a stone's throw from the sea and about twenty minutes from Heraklion. The house looked contemporary from the outside, clad in white render which complemented its boxy shape. After he had paid and got out of the car he knocked on the front door. No one came to open so he stepped inside. The house had an open plan layout and a large kitchen with modern appliances. He could not have chosen better himself. He heard excited voices outside on the patio area. He went through some sliding doors by the sofa and as he came outside he saw four people sitting at a plastic patio table unnecessarily shielded from the cloud-weakened sun by a large parasol. There was even a small swimming pool. The patio was enclosed by a low fence which didn't block out the view of the surrounding open fields, a couple of bungalows further down and the sea in the distance. They all stood up to greet him. Emma walked up to him, giving him a friendly hug. He noticed that her complexion had deteriorated and that she was as pale as when they had first met in London but that she looked well nevertheless, albeit very unlike Anna.

"Lovely to see you Erik!" she beamed.

"And you," he responded with mixture of sincerity and doubt about his decision to join them.

Paul gave him a light clap on the back, almost as if they were best friends. "Good to see you man," he said before he sat down again.

Emma introduced Ball, the Japanese PhD student and Laura, a post graduate student of history at Oxford. What Ball was wearing was somewhat at odds with his general appearance: a T-shirt displaying the 1980's rock band Guns 'n Roses but other than that he was very much like Erik had pictured him from Emma's previous description; extremely polite and with typically Japanese features,

although remarkably tall for a Japanese man and somewhat older than he had envisaged, perhaps in his early thirties. Erik guessed that Laura was a couple of years older than Emma. He noticed that she had a very pretty well-groomed face and fair skin but her thick ill-suited glasses seemed to hide most of her potential beauty and her long dark brown hair was messily arranged in a knot which threatened to untie itself. She was very slim and a few centimetres taller than Emma. His first impression of her was that she was a fairly reserved sort of person, who preferred reading to socialising. Paul looked thinner than the last time they had met and he appeared perhaps a little more absent minded as well, as if he had a lot on his mind but otherwise he was the same energetic person Erik remembered.

“Laura is writing her dissertation on the Crete/Santorini-Atlantis theory, or, I believe, critically analysing it,” Paul said looking encouragingly at Laura when speaking. “Am I right in saying that you are here to disprove the theory that Crete could have been Plato’s Atlantis?” Paul added with a smile.

“I suppose you could say that”, Laura agreed with an extremely posh English accent, at odds with her presently untidy appearance. “Although I would prefer to reserve judgment until I have considered all the facts. Being here may well prove me wrong. As you say, I have yet to view the ruins at Knossos and the Heraklion museum collection.” Erik thought he could sense that this was the back-end of a previous discussion between the two of them on the subject. In any event, Paul seemed extremely pleased with her choice of topic. Laura joining them on Crete must have been a rather late arrangement as Emma had said nothing about her previously; just indicating that she did not know for sure who was going to join them other than Ball.

“I understand you’re here to study the effects of the Thera volcanic eruption on Santorini”, Erik enquired in Ball’s direction. A chilly wind blew from the sea causing the parasol to move violently just as Erik sat down on the one remaining white plastic chair.

“Yes, this is my intention,” Ball said in response with a slight accent. “But I will first study the effects on Crete of the tsunami which hit this island as a result of the eruption. This was one of the most powerful and largest volcanic eruptions on record and in my view the eruption *must* have caused a severe tsunami, just like it did in Krakatoa. The Thera eruption dwarfs Krakatoa, that’s for sure. After Krakatoa there were tidal waves up to 36 meters high destroying several hundred towns and villages. Thera was five or six times greater still!”

Erik could immediately sense that this was a person wholly dedicated to his topic. His face lit up at the chance of talking about it. “Sounds like the Thera eruption must have had a devastating impact on the Mediterranean.” Feeling obliged to say something further Erik continued: “I have firsthand experience of a tsunami. I was in Thailand on Boxing Day 2004. Although I suppose that tsunami would have been nothing compared to that caused by the Thera volcanic eruption.”

He regretted bringing that up. This could only lead to comments about Anna, something he really wanted to avoid. Ball seemed delighted to continue the conversation in an area where he had the upper hand. He started to ask questions about Erik’s exact location when the Indian Ocean Tsunami had struck, how he

had escaped, what he had seen and the effects but without giving him a reason to mention the death of his wife. He was moved to see from Emma's tense face that she too was hoping that Anna would not be mentioned, out of sympathy for him, he assumed.

"We should really have some lunch now, I'm starving", she said interrupting the conversation. "I suggest we make it easy for ourselves and have readymade pizza." As none of them felt like cooking, they all agreed.

"I understand you met Paul and Emma through an ancient Egyptian tablet", Ball said and Erik laughed at how absurd that sounded. It was true, he supposed, that they had met because of the link the tablet had to his childhood home. Ball continued: "Paul mentioned to me that this tablet could possibly contain an ancient description of the effects in Egypt of the Thera eruption."

"Yes, it certainly sounds like some sort of natural disaster to me", Erik said looking at Paul.

Paul responded: "Certainly, but we should remember that this is not the only ancient Egyptian text from this time which seems to describe the Thera eruption." Paul paused and looked at them in turn as if he was checking to see if they were interested. "The Tempest Stele of Ahmose seems to convey a similar message. There is no consensus on this point but in my opinion given the timing and the lack of alternative descriptions of this cataclysmic event, I would say that its account of the Thera eruption is very feasible, almost beyond doubt in fact." Paul stood up and went to his bedroom to get a photocopy of the half tablet and a translation.

Erik was amused. He should have expected this when he had agreed to stay in a villa with an Oxford professor, a PhD student and two post-graduate students. His idea of a relaxing holiday in the sun would only be realised if he moved to a nearby hotel. Whilst staying in the villa he could expect discussions like this every day. He found it interesting though, in particular as it concerned the tablet.

As Paul came back downstairs he said mid step as he sat back down: "Obviously this probably portrays the eruption from Egypt, nearly 650 miles from it. He showed Ball the picture of the tablet and read out the first part of the text which talked about the calamity:

"...of water which swept in over the land with godly force. Smoke was clouding the sky. By day, the darkness was persisting with no [torch] being lit and by night a pillar of fire could be seen in the [west]. With his council, His Majesty descended in his boat to observe the devastation of the victors... coloured white."

Ball was quiet in contemplation for a moment and then started a lengthy deliberation about the consequences of a volcanic eruption. Erik was only half listening but caught fragments like "Tambora eruption in 1816... a year without summer... continual rains... clouds of ash blotted out the sun... dark periods... Mount St Helens... hail... brimstone... widespread violent storms... emission of dust into the atmosphere... low temperatures... tsunami..." Erik started to pay attention at the mention again of the more recent tsunami which he had experienced, when Ball glanced at him.

“...Distant shores, further away from the event than 650 miles, were flooded by the Tsunami. Imagine the impact on the surrounding sea of a volcanic eruption of literally gigantic proportion, with much greater force than the tectonic plate shifting of the Indian Ocean. It’s not difficult to imagine that the Tsunami could easily reach the shores of Egypt and cause several subsequent waves with deadly force destroying temples and other buildings in its way. It’s obviously incomplete but I for one am almost convinced that this description is portraying the effects of a volcanic eruption. The pillar of fire and smoke is also very suggestive of this.”

Having sat quietly for a long while, Laura stirred and joined the conversation, taking off her glasses and rubbing one eye as she started to speak: “I just had a thought. From what I can recall from the Bible”, she put her glasses back on again, “there is also a mention of something like a ‘pillar of cloud’ by day and ‘a pillar of fire’ by night in connection with the Israelites’ pilgrimage through the desert in the Exodus. This is very similar to the text on the tablet. Surely, a ‘pillar of fire’ and indeed a ‘pillar of smoke’ do seem to suggest that the volcanic eruption could actually be seen from Egypt?”

“Well”, Ball said, “I would have doubted very much whether the pillar of fire or smoke could be seen all the way to Egypt. Perhaps the rumour of it though.” Laura nodded absently and they all quietly considered the significance of this.

Emma was the first to voice her thoughts: “Does this mean that it’s possible that the tablet indirectly provides evidence that both the eruption and the Exodus in the bible took place in Ahmose’s reign at the beginning of the new kingdom?”

“What’s your view on the timing of the eruption, Ball?” Paul asked abruptly with his mouth full. Laura glanced at him disapprovingly. Her eyes were nevertheless almost glittering, either from the reflection from the swimming pool next to her or more likely from excitement at the academic ponderings. Ball responded with some more technical facts:

“Well, as you know there’s no consensus on the timing but the eruption is thought to have occurred some time between 1650 BC and 1450 BC. Although the dating of pottery supports a dating in the traditional later time frame, dendro-chronology and radiocarbon dating supports the earlier. I for one would put my bet somewhere in the middle.”

“Ahmose’s reign from around 1550 BC falls right within this conventional dating range”, Paul noted excitedly. “I would say that it’s very likely that Ahmose was pharaoh of Egypt when the eruption took place. Only in his reign have documents which describe a great calamity been found. But whether the Exodus took place in his reign is difficult to say, even though the mention of a pillar of fire in both the bible and on the tablet is a strange coincidence.”

“Well, others have linked the Thera eruption with the ten plagues of Egypt,” Emma noted as she stood up to get some more orange juice from the kitchen. “I recall reading an article about a theory which proves how nearly all the ten plagues can result from a volcanic eruption.” She disappeared and came back within a few seconds with the juice.

“That’s interesting. I like the idea of finding a natural explanation to supernatural or godly events,” Paul added. “I’m a firm believer in science, not so much religion.”

“It does make sense and the tablet can prove to be the missing link,” Laura suggested. “What the tablet conveys is clearly at least three of the ten plagues of Egypt; and this is at roughly the time before the Exodus could have occurred. What if the other half gives the remaining plagues? That would prove almost beyond doubt that the ten plagues of Egypt were caused by a natural disaster; the Thera volcanic eruption!”

“I have to say, my knowledge of the Bible is a bit rusty”, Paul admitted and continued. “There was the plague of ‘hail’ and that of ‘darkness’. That’s two plagues which can most definitely be explained by the eruption. I seem to recall an increase in locusts, insects and flies and death of frogs; and the Nile turning into blood. Can these really be explained by a natural disaster?” He looked at Ball who seemed sceptical.

“I suppose, it has happened that Volcanic activity has caused pollution in lakes and other water sources. My only guess is that coupled with the ash-polluted rain and hail and due to the colour of Nile silt, pollution could have given it a reddish appearance and would have meant that they couldn’t drink the water. It’s not uncommon to see dead frogs after a volcanic eruption. Their death could have been caused by the polluted water. A lack of frogs, or their rotting carcasses and that of dying fish, may have spurred on an increase in the insect population.” The way Ball explained everything, it all sounded perfectly plausible.

“But what about the tenth plague – the killing of the first born son? Surely, that could not be explained by the Thera eruption?” Erik asked almost rhetorically.

“No”, Ball said laughing. “You would have to work that one out for yourself! I can guarantee you that there’s no natural explanation to that, other than human cruelty! I have to admit, I’m not at all religious and would never have thought to look in the Bible for a description of the Thera eruption but it would seem that at least to a certain extent it fits.”

They all fell silent for a moment. Erik almost jumped when Laura then stirred and voiced another thought in Ball’s direction: “Hm, I wonder if there’s a possibility that the story of the parting of the Red Sea could’ve been recorded in people’s memory from what was a Tsunami caused by the eruption.”

Ball who may not have known about the parting of the Red Sea in the bible responded hesitantly: “Well, I suppose the effects of a Tsunami would definitely have appeared as a parting of the sea, with the water first retreating from the shore, revealing the bottom of the sea and then rushing back in with violent force.”

“Sure. It was just a thought,” Laura said. “There’s no evidence for this theory, nor do I think it would be possible to find such evidence. After all, it’s only a story.”

“I agree”, Paul said in his most pompous professor voice. “In science we have to seek evidence in order to prove our assumptions using different sources and empirical study. On the other hand, we’re all entitled to our own opinion and a theory which sounds perfectly plausible compared to any other alternative does hold some value. Maybe it’s time for us to pay a little bit more attention to the rest of the text on the tablet. Perhaps it reveals something we’ve missed.”

As they sat there, snacking on their pizzas, they all felt that this tablet may actually be more significant than both Paul and Emma had initially expected. It was true that in this respect it didn’t say a whole lot more than the Tempest Stela

but what it did was to provide a second source for the fact that the eruption would have occurred in Ahmose's reign, something which according to Paul was not a universally accepted assumption.

The rest of the afternoon was uneventful. Paul went into Heraklion. The others stayed in the villa enjoying the afternoon sun which eventually sneaked out from behind the clouds. Erik unpacked and later had a refreshing swim in the small but adequate pool. When the sun started setting he was happy to see that both Laura and Ball had left the patio area, leaving Erik alone with Emma to watch the sunset. He looked at Emma who was reading a thick book on Greek myths and when she looked back at him he simply pointed at the display of pastel colours. Her eyes lit up and they spent the next few minutes silently watching the sun go down.

Chapter 8

Erik felt like a seven year old on a school trip for fifteen year olds as they entered the museum in Heraklion. Just as he had all day, Paul was leading the way through the doors and into the air conditioned exhibition rooms, closely followed by Laura and Emma. Ball had decided not to join them. Erik wished he had taken the same decision but he was nevertheless excited to see the half Torpa tablet in real life. It had also been good to get to know Laura. She was wearing contact lenses and he had almost failed to recognise her at breakfast, without her thick glasses. Her hair was much more tidy and he had to admit that she looked rather nice, even in spite of the horrendous hat she had later put on to shield her face from the sun. Not even her posh accent had annoyed him all day.

They had spent the morning seeing the impressive but clumsily restored remains of the Minoan royal palace of Knossos just outside Heraklion, only a short ride in a hired car from their villa. The sheer size of the ruins was mind-boggling. Erik was surprised to find that archaeologists believed it had once had over a thousand rooms spread over several floors. This was certainly impressive for a more than three thousand five hundred years old building. He had been intrigued, or at least tried to be, to learn as well that it was generally accepted that the Minoan culture was a 'matrilineal' society centred on goddess worship. It was believed to be a matriarchy where succession would have been determined by a mother's lineage rather than the father's. Their Greek tour guide, a friend of Paul's who normally worked as an archaeologist, had explained that the worship of goddesses was supported by the fact that no one had as yet found a depiction of a male god from before the late Minoan period on Crete. Women were shown on Cretan frescoes being saluted by people while not one depiction had been found showing women deferring to men. He had informed them that for these and other reasons it was believed that the ruling power on Crete was held mainly by women, which wasn't unusual for Bronze Age cultures. Erik had also found out that the Cretans had fleets of ships and that they were active in trade. This had resulted in

great wealth which had financed massive building projects, art and technological development.

As they walked around in the museum in Heraklion, Erik realised just how advanced the Minoans had been. Some of the items looked as if they were modern. He was particularly impressed with a bull's head, black and gold, crafted exquisitely and with obvious great skill. It fitted in well with the remarkable remains he had seen earlier that day. The obsession with bulls was evident. They were literally everywhere in the museum. But where was the tablet? Erik had expected to be able to see the tablet on one of the shelves in the museum, perhaps equipped with mirrors to enable the viewer to see both sides at the same time but it was simply nowhere to be seen. Emma beat him to asking Paul about it.

"I believe the half tablet can be found in one of the back-rooms. Come with me", he said and started to walk in the direction of a door bearing a sign with the word 'Private'. They all walked after him like a flock of obedient sheep into an office covered in a jumbled mixture of papers and artefacts in boxes.

"You have to remember..." Paul said "...that as excavations are going on new artefacts will keep coming in. For example, there's a backlog of Linear A texts to be looked at". He turned to a typically Greek-looking man sitting behind a large mahogany desk. He appeared to be expecting them. "This is my good friend Athos, the Heraklion museum manager." Paul introduced them, paying special attention to Emma. "Emma is going to help you with Linear A. She has an extraordinary linguistic talent, as I'm sure you'll soon see." Erik saw how Emma blushed, just as she had done several months ago when they had met in London. This made him admire her even more. It was certainly a well deserved comment, Erik thought.

"Well, I know why you're here. Just a second and I will go and get the box with the tablet. On Paul's advice, after the theft in Sweden, we have decided to keep the tablet in our office. You can never be too careful these days," Athos added with a dry smile. Talk about being over cautious, Erik thought. Athos came back only seconds later, carrying a fairly large shallow box made of plastic. He opened it. They all leaned over, Emma looking exceedingly animated. In it lay the half tablet. It was a greyish stone, just like he had expected. It had the Linear A side up. The symbols were crafted with great care and skill, fairly deeply cut but with severe erosion caused by the elements over the millennia since the inscription. The edges at the bottom had been crudely rounded. Despite the damage, the symbols were surprisingly clear. As he had noticed from the picture of the tablet which he had seen in the British museum, each sign was a piece of art in itself, sculpted with such care that one could easily imagine that the artist or scribe had been one of the foremost and most skilled in the field, most likely one employed by royalty. But seeing it in real life, he noticed the breakage point much more clearly and he could appreciate the damage. Where the tablet had split in two, there was an uneven edge. It wasn't hard to come to the conclusion that the tablet had been broken by accident. The stone appeared more fragile than Erik had previously imagined.

"May I touch it?" Emma asked.

Athos smiled, reached into a draw and pulled out a couple of pairs of very thin cotton gloves. "As I said, you cannot be too careful". Emma put one glove on and stroked a light finger over the symbols for only a few seconds, as if she was reading them.

“Can you turn it around please? I would be interested in seeing the Egyptian hieroglyphs.” Athos, now wearing gloves too, carefully lifted the tablet out of its container and turned it over. The other side was equally beautiful.

“It’s so unusual”, Laura noted. Erik glanced over at Paul. He was standing a metre behind them, looking only at Emma, smiling at her reactions.

Erik felt a strange sense of something which must have been jealousy. He had never felt anything like it before, never had any reason to. It came as a shock to him as it was so out of character. Erik had only known Emma for a few months and up until that moment he hadn’t appreciated the depth of his feelings for her. Maybe he was envious of what she shared with Paul; a common interest in an ancient language, a passion to be the first in history to decipher Linear A. He had to admit that in spite of the fact that he was a successful lawyer and that he had proved himself many times over, he felt strangely inadequate around Paul and Emma. That was another first for him. No, he decided, that couldn’t be it either. His own insecurities may have played a part in developing what he felt but he was fairly certain that there was more to it than that. Ever since Emma’s visit to Sweden, he had thought about her eyes a lot. He feared that his messed up grieving brain had created a direct link between Anna and Emma, so that he had started to think of Emma as Anna. Considering how different they were, from their looks to their ways, backgrounds, social life and interests, it was ludicrous to make such a connection but Erik could not help how his mind worked.

Chapter 9

Emma had never seen so many original ancient texts in one place. All of them Linear A. This was her unorthodox idea of heaven. She had been allocated her own office in the annex of the Heraklion museum where she would spend much of the coming two weeks translating Linear A texts into incomprehensible gobbledgook. More specifically, she was going to use the sounds attributed to each symbol shared by the Linear A and B alphabet, established when Linear B was deciphered. Linear B was the script used later, by the Mycenaeans after the Minoan period. It had been deciphered in modern times and shown to produce an ancient form of Greek. It was frustrating though. When applying the values to Linear B texts, the writing could be understood. But when applying the same values to Linear A texts, which largely used the same symbols as its successor Linear B, not a word could be comprehended, other than the occasional place name. It wasn’t concluded whether the unknown language produced in this way was the ancient language of the Minoans. Unfortunately, whatever it said, it was still unintelligible. Some might have said that what she was doing was a waste of time, an unenviable task without reason but Emma was happy to oblige. After all, this would progress her dissertation and allow her to test some of her theories.

Athos had placed a large quantity of white plastic boxes on the shelf next to the desk. Each box contained an item and he had numbered them by priority. Solemnly she chose the first one, made herself comfortable on the desk chair,

turned on the reading light and put on some thin gloves. The item turned out to be a beautiful silver pin found on Knossos, estimated to be from the Neo-palatial Period, corresponding roughly to 1700-1450 BC. She had developed a skill which allowed her to fairly quickly write out the values. The pin had been damaged at the beginning and end and some of the syllables didn't correspond to any known values but she managed to get much of it. The text was not very long:

*“]SI|]SI-SA-NE • DA-[DU]-MI-NE • QA-MI-[]-NA-RA • A-WA-PI • TE-SU-DE-
[SE]-KE-I • A-DA-RA • TI- DI-TE-QA-TI • TA-SA-ZA • TE-TE-I-[]-ZA-RE •]”*

When she had written it all out she read it through to gauge whether there were any familiar words. The last word made her react. Could it be? No, surely not? It was only a coincidence. But she had to admit that it was a strange coincidence. The last word appeared to closely resemble the name ‘Tetisheri’, the Egyptian queen mentioned on the Torpa tablet. As it happened, the pin corresponded well in time with the queen’s existence and it had been found in the most important of the Cretan palaces, Knossos. ‘Could it be’, she asked herself again.

A few hours, a solitary working lunch, fifteen cups of water and three translations later, she felt it was time to give up for the day. She was content with what she had achieved but doubted whether she would be able to do it every day for the next two weeks. ‘We’ll see’, she thought to herself. She had given no promises and was under no obligation to do it—she wasn’t even paid for her efforts, other than through the flight to Crete and accommodation. Some would have said she got a raw deal. Well, it had been an exciting day, she decided.

It was late afternoon by the time she got back. Paul was already in the villa. He was lying on the sofa reading a thick book, wearing ghastly blue shorts and a T-shirt which she could have imagined on a twelve year old. The others were nowhere to be seen. She could not wait to tell him about the silver pin and the mention of what could have been ‘Tetisheri’. He sat up when he noticed her arrival, placing the book on the coffee table.

“Emma! Good to see you. How was your day?”

“Alright. I got quite a bit done. And...” She sat down on the sofa next to him. “...I think I may have found a reference to queen Tetisheri on a Minoan silver pin!” She showed him her scribbles. His excitement exceeded even her bolstered expectations.

“You know I think you might be right. It certainly looks like it! If it is, on the one hand it might confirm that the Minoans had close trade connections with the Egyptian royals, which we already know they did. On the other hand, it could confirm that the relationship between the Egyptians and Minoans was a lot stronger than that, just before and after the Thera eruption. The latter is, as you know, what I think.”

“Could Tetisheri have been a Minoan queen as well as queen of Egypt?” Emma asked as Erik entered the house shouting hello. He joined them in the living room.

“What are you two so excited about?” he asked laughing mildly.

“I will go and get a copy of a translation of the half tablet”, Paul said completely ignoring Erik’s question. Whilst waiting for Paul to get back, Emma updated Erik on her find for the day. Paul started speaking even as he came down the stairs.

“Look, the mention of Tetisheri on the tablet is a bit strange. It says ‘*The descendants of the great Tetisheri*’, followed by titles of both priestess and queen, ‘*were orphaned and without possessions/ [clothes]*’. This reference is strange for two reasons. Firstly, her titles indicate that she was both queen and priestess. This is very odd given that her granddaughter Ahmose Nefertari was the first Egyptian queen to hold the title ‘God’s wife of Amun’ or ‘Priestess of Amun’. Secondly, it says that her descendants were orphaned and without possessions. Why would they be? Her descendants included Ahmose Nefertari, a future queen of Egypt, and pharaoh Ahmose, who had just taken over the rule of both Upper and Lower Egypt by defeating the Hyksos. The suggestion that they would have been ‘without possessions’ does not make any sense at all.”

“Well”, Emma said excitedly. “Compare this with the Donation Stela. It talks about the donation by Ahmose to his new queen Ahmose Nefertari of the office of the ‘Priesthood of Amun’ together with a number of other gifts consisting of gold, silver, copper and so on. From memory, that also mentions something about Ahmose Nefertari being ‘without possessions’. In that respect the stela and the tablet correspond.”

“Yes, that’s true...” Paul fell silent as if in contemplation. When he continued it was with a strange expression in his face, as if he was trying not to get ahead of himself. “What if both the tablet and the Donation stela were talking about Tetisheri’s descendants—not in Egypt but in Crete? What I mean to say is; what if Tetisheri was in fact a Minoan queen or priestess who somehow became the queen of Egypt? The reference to her descendants would then have been to the Minoans who would most definitely have been without possessions after the massive volcanic eruption. They would literally have lost everything in the big blast. The Egyptians, on the other hand, would have been badly affected by the eruption, as we saw from the tablet, but in a much more peripheral sense.”

Chapter 10

The sun was already fairly advanced when Erik awoke the next morning, stretching his muscles and yawning widely. It was his last day of relaxation before he had to go to Athens. He hoped one day there would be sufficient but his assistant had booked flights expecting him to stay two. As he could not hear any other sound than the distant rhythmical movements of the sea and the odd squeaking bird he concluded that the others had left already. He had not had a very good night’s sleep. Judging by Emma and Paul’s excited voices the night before, which could be heard from downstairs until nearly three am, there must have been a lot more to the mention of an old Egyptian queen on a pin than he could see. On his way downstairs he passed the well-stocked half height bookshelf on the upstairs landing where some of the temporarily unused books of his four house-mates were stored for safe keeping. He had also added some titles with less academic content. Their individual rooms were not big enough to house their own book-shelves. One book in particular was sticking out further than the others and

caught Erik's eye. It was almost as if it had been deliberately singled out. The title read <In Ahmose's Reign>. He had seen Paul reading it over the last two days so decided that after breakfast he would have a browse and lay by the poolside.

With legs stretched out, sunglasses on his nose and sipping a refreshing strawberry smoothie, Erik opened the book to enter the world of Ahmose. The book was Paul's and the reason to why he had brought it to Crete quickly became apparent; to read up on the pharaoh mentioned on the other half of the Torpa tablet. Paul's name was written with a neat hand on the inside cover. As Erik flicked through the pages he noticed that the whole book was in fact full of Paul's notes. His scribbles could be found on almost every page in some of the chapters. Erik decided to start from the beginning.

The first chapter was full of question marks added by Paul but Erik had to ignore those for the time being. He found that Ahmose was the first ruler of the 'New Kingdom' of Egypt in the 16th century BC. Ahmose had taken over the rule after a series of short lived pharaohs. At that time, Egypt was split into two. For almost two hundred years Lower Egypt in the north including the Nile delta had been ruled by the so called 'Hyksos', meaning 'rulers of foreign lands'. Their capital in the Nile delta was called Avaris. Only Upper Egypt in the south by Thebes, today's Luxor, was ruled by Ahmose's family. Ahmose had then managed to conquer the Hyksos, take over Avaris and unite upper and lower Egypt. That was the start of what was to become the extremely rich and powerful new kingdom.

It was in the chapter about Ahmose's Tempest Stele that Erik could no longer ignore Paul's notes. Emma and Paul had been right. The text of the Tempest Stele was remarkably similar to the Torpa tablet in certain parts. One passage of the stele said: "*His Majesty set about to strengthen the two lands, to cause the water to evacuate without the aid of his men, to provide them with silver, with gold, with copper, with oil, with clothing, with all the products they desired; after which his Majesty rested in the palace—life, health, strength.*" Next to this passage Paul had written in uncharacteristic capital letters: "**THE TREASURE IS IN ATHENS!**"

Erik had no idea what he meant by this or what treasure in Athens he was referring to. It sounded as if Paul had somehow worked out that the gold, silver and copper mentioned in the Tempest Stele was hidden in Athens but it didn't reveal how or more specifically where in Athens. He was by now fully aware of Paul's general theory—that there was some sort of important link between the Minoans on Crete and the Egyptians. This was also in line with what he had just read in the book about Ahmose and although it was not generally accepted it was certainly not far-fetched: Following Ahmose's conquest of Avaris, he had built a palace there full of Minoan frescoes. His mother, Queen Ahhotep, had even been buried with distinctly Minoan artefacts bearing Ahmose's name. However, this didn't explain Paul's note about an ancient treasure in Athens.

For a brief moment Erik speculated that Paul perhaps instead could be talking about the Torpa treasure; the chest housing the other half of the tablet but he quickly decided that didn't make any sense either. Finally he gave up trying to understand and just read for the pleasure of it.

* * * * *

Paul was the first one to come back that afternoon. Erik had spent a wonderful day by the pool, swimming occasionally in the cool water and reading the book about Ahmose. He had only just got off the phone to get the final arrangements for his client meeting in Athens when Paul came in, smiling widely and appearing to be excited by something. By then Erik had put the book back on the shelf just as he had found it.

“I assume you’ve had a good day by the look on your face”, Erik said as Paul walked past him.

Paul hesitated as if not wishing to give anything away. “Er yes. One of my colleagues called this afternoon, a professor at Athens University. She wants me to come over to Athens to discuss a small object with almost undecipherable Linear B writing that was found in Mycenae this week. It sounds too interesting to miss in my view—and besides, she is always a good laugh. I will only be away for a couple of days”.

Erik didn’t know what to say. The story about the Linear B item was blatantly a lie, Erik decided. He felt childish even thinking the thought but his intuition told him that Paul was going there to try to locate the treasure which he, according to the note in the book, supposed was hidden there. The story of the Linear B item could have been a cover up to conceal his real reason for the trip. Erik wondered whether Paul had told Emma about his suspicion about the ‘treasure’. He decided to ask her later that evening, or at least see whether it appeared as if she knew.

“Sounds great. As you know, I’m flying over there tomorrow so I guess we can keep each other company.” He could see from Paul’s poorly disguised look of horror that he had forgotten about Erik’s meeting. “Athens is actually one of the few European capitals where I’ve never been”, he managed to say with what he hoped was a straight face. “I presume you will be flying as well, rather than going by boat?”

“Oh yes, it’s so much quicker but nowhere near as nice of course!” What followed was a conversation about sailing, a passion which they both appeared to share. Erik turned on the television and they watched football until Emma showed up an hour later. They were focussed on the game and didn’t even look up when Emma sat down on the sofa.

“You both look extremely excited to see me”, Emma said with not a little sarcasm. “You almost managed to say hello!” She sat down.

“Well, it’s near the end of the game, only three minutes to go,” Paul uttered, still staring at the screen. Erik didn’t really care about the game but thought it best to keep watching anyway out of courtesy so that his disinterest wouldn’t be revealed to Paul. When it had ended Paul turned the telly off and turned towards Emma, grinning, waiting for her to say something.

“Now that we can finally speak, how was your day?” she asked.

“Well, Paul has some news”, Erik said quickly, waiting for Paul to explain.

“Yes, I had some good news today. It looks like there might be an early Linear B text to look at from Mycenae. They’re having some problems with the translation and I’m going to Athens for a couple of days.” Emma looked puzzled and a little disappointed but mumbled a “Sounds great. So you’ll both be going to Athens...”

Unusually, Paul went to bed early that night and Erik got a chance to spend some time alone with Emma. They sat on the sofa, watching some Greek

programme about whales which Erik didn't understand a word of. Laura and Ball had gone to Santorini, due to return to Crete soon.

"So, how was your day?" Erik asked to break the ice, as he realised that she had never got a chance to tell them earlier. She turned down the volume and turned towards him.

"Well, thanks for asking, it was ok." She paused. "I have to admit that it feels like I'm wasting time spending all my days in that office, doing dirty work for free. It is good for my dissertation but I have to say that I'm not getting any closer to deciphering Linear A, as I was hoping. Too bad you're both going away, leaving me here all alone!" She smiled as she said it.

"Why don't you join us? Sounds like you could do with a break." He was hoping she would say yes. His heart jumped at the thought.

"I would have liked to but unfortunately I have promised to continue my pointless translation exercise. I can't let Paul down now. He's made promises on my behalf." Erik tried his hardest not to look too disappointed. He stared at the muted telly as he considered his response. He decided to reveal his thoughts on the matter.

"Why can't he do it himself? Why does he need you to do his legwork?"

"He's an Oxford professor. His research work is far more important than that. Besides, he's right that it's good practice for me and it might raise my profile among other linguists internationally. All the texts which I've translated bear my name after all."

"Well, there's no cause for him to leave you to be his slave while he travels to Athens to catch up with old friends."

"What do you mean? The reason he's going over there is to look at the Linear B object. Although, I have to say that I'm surprised that he's bothering with Linear B, given that it's unlikely to take us any further with Linear A, unless it's from some sort of transitional period, in which case it could be very interesting. I haven't spoken to him about it but I'm sure he has a good reason to go over there. Paul's always very careful not to waste any time."

This response made Erik sure that Emma didn't know about Paul's 'treasure' theory, or whatever it was. He felt stupid to ask her whether he had mentioned anything about it to her. Talking about a treasure sounded so juvenile and Emma was so defensive about Paul that he felt it was not his place to talk behind Paul's back about notes he had made in a book which Erik was probably not meant to read. Still, he was eager to find out what Paul was up to in Athens. Paul's behaviour had been a bit strange ever since they arrived on Crete—he appeared somewhat distracted and kept disappearing, spending a lot of time in Heraklion. He would love to find out more about Paul's intentions and what he knew about the tablet—Erik was sure that he was hiding something.

"By the way, I doubt whether you'd see a lot of Paul while you're there—he's bound to spend most of his time at the University. And I'm sure you would want to walk around and see all the ancient Greek remains, the archaeological museum and everything else after your meeting." Her response had been completely indifferent. She clearly had no feelings for him whatsoever. He felt a sting of disappointment.

“Yes, of course. Maybe I can meet this professor friend of his though. Apparently she was supposed to be a good laugh according to Paul.” He had added the last bit in the hope that it would make her at least a little bit angry with Paul but unfortunately it didn’t have the intended effect.

“Oh, when Paul says someone is a great laugh it’s not in the sense that you or I think—she’s probably one of those professors who loves to debate; just like Paul himself. He’d stay up all night and debate if you let him. That’s his definition of fun!”

For a second Erik considered telling Emma about the book, playing on his ignorance for the topic, but decided against it. She wouldn’t understand, even if there was a treasure hidden in Athens which Paul had set out to find. Or would she? It didn’t matter—he had to go to Athens anyway.

Chapter 11

Athens, February 2006

„I vote for traditional Greek”, Paul proclaimed as they walked down the fashionable shopping street in central Athens. The shops were still open, even though it was past eight. Erik and Paul were accompanied by his colleague, Professor Mary Brown who had spent the last two years at Athens University lecturing on ancient history. She was certainly not the professor type; extremely chatty and bubbly, taller than average, thin, in her early forties. With her curly dark hair and freckles she didn’t look her age. Although she was a respected professor, she looked more like a nanny. For some reason she blushed as Paul presented Erik to her earlier that day, or maybe he had imagined it. She had immediately suggested, contrary to Paul’s plans Erik thought, that he join them for a meal that evening. It had been a long day, flying over to Athens from Crete, checking in at the hotel and preparing for the meeting the next day but Erik was keen to accept the invitation. He would only stay for a couple of days.

“I would love to”, Erik agreed. “Where do you suggest, Professor Brown?”

“Please, call me Mary! I know this place a little bit off the beaten track towards the Parthenon, a bit up the hill. It has excellent Moussaka, one of my favourites in fact”. They all agreed and Erik was glad to find that the walk was only five minutes, as he had had an early lunch and was ravenous. They managed to get a table on the terrace with a lovely view of the surrounding city lights twinkling in the chilly night air. The restaurant wasn’t fancy but it was very cosy with traditional blue and white decoration and glowing candles on all the tables. It was surprisingly busy for a Tuesday night, suggesting that it served good food.

“So I hear that you have a strong connection to the famous Torpa tablet,” Mary asked after they had ordered their food.

“Yes, I’m sure Paul has told you the whole unfortunate story about the break-in”.

“No, he hasn’t! Would you mind filling me in?” Erik was surprised that Paul had neglected to tell her but then again, he wasn’t sure how close they were.

Paul responded: “Yes, I was going to tell you that unfortunately our search for the other half of the tablet ended in disappointment when someone stole the chest in which we suspected the tablet was hidden. Now we don’t know whether the chest in fact housed the tablet or not. The police have had no luck in their investigation so far and who knows whether they ever will.”

“That’s terrible news! I know how badly you wanted to find that half tablet but I got the impression from Professor Palaikastro that you had taken a step further in your deciphering work, that you had discovered something?” Paul hesitated as if he was trying to formulate his answer in his mind before speaking.

“Well, I wouldn’t call it a breakthrough but I did see a connection the other week; something which made me realise that we’re not that far away from discovering which language group Linear A relates to. But I would hate to bore you both with the detail over dinner. I’ll tell you more about it tomorrow Mary but I should warn you that my theory is not fully formulated yet. I’m certainly not going to make my findings public until I’m absolutely sure but I would like to discuss it with you. When I told professor Palaikastro he said you would be a good person to talk to.” Erik got the distinct impression that Paul was hiding something important. Mary seemed to have sensed the same thing and tried to ease the tension:

“That’s understandable but great news though. If you do succeed in deciphering Linear A you’ll most certainly find a place in the history books, and who knows what we’ll find out about the Minoans. That would be exciting indeed!”

“I won’t exactly be the new ‘Champollion’”, Paul laughed, “but it’s certainly been my dream for a number of years to be able to decipher Linear A. I wouldn’t get my hopes up though. Until we find that other half tablet we can’t be sure—and even with the whole tablet it’s bound to be a struggle”.

Erik guessed that Paul was trying his best to change the topic but he took the opportunity to let it hover over the Torpa tablet: “What about the text on the tablet though Paul, have you had any more thoughts on your Crete-Egypt theory?” He asked innocently. Mary seemed surprised.

“Remember we discussed this a few years ago and I always maintained that there was something more to the text of the tablet than we thought but you rightly pointed out its similarity to the Tempest Stele,” she said with an amused tone of voice. “I didn’t know you were interested in the actual contents of the tablet; you were always more focussed on the tablet’s function as a key stone and deciphering Linear A rather than the mention of Tetisheri and the tempest.”

“Well, when one spends a lot of time trying to decipher a text, one can’t help but read the text”, Paul said with a forced smile and then fell abruptly silent, as if he regretted saying it. Erik was stunned. Why would Paul spend a lot of time reading the half tablet—it was useless as a key stone without the other half? For the first time a suspicion formed in Erik’s mind. Paul could have had something to do with the break-in and the theft of the chest. He could have found the tablet and commenced his deciphering work on the basis of the tablet in its entirety. That would explain why he had made progress in his deciphering work; because he had the keystone to hand. It wasn’t out of the question that the other half of the tablet

had also revealed something about a treasure. Erik's mind was racing. But Paul wasn't even in the country when the tablet was stolen. There was no way that Paul could actually have conducted the break-in. But he could have hired someone else. Erik knew that his imagination was running away with him and his general opinion about Paul was possibly tainted by his sudden jealousy of him and Emma but judging by Paul's comments this evening, it sort of made sense.

Mary, who remained unmoved and didn't appear to have had any similar thoughts, said: "I know, I don't know how much time I've spent reading that half tablet and how many times I've concluded that it doesn't say anything new." Erik was glad that he had read up on Ahmose—he now understood more of the conversation.

"Let's exchange theories on the tablet tomorrow when our brains are fresher and not affected by wine", Paul said to Mary without looking in Erik's direction. Erik knew that tomorrow's discussion would not include him. It would likely take place at the University. He suddenly wished he could listen in during that conversation, as he suspected that Paul might want to share his theory about the treasure with her.

"Fair enough. So what are you up to tomorrow, Erik," Mary asked with a big smile. Erik returned her beam.

"I have a client meeting in the morning so I probably shouldn't drink too much tonight," he said with a dry laugh. "And then sightseeing is the plan." What followed was a long conversation on what to see in Athens, which lasted pretty much through the whole of their starters and what turned out to be magnificent Moussaka.

It had been a lovely evening. As they departed, Paul and Erik to separate hotels and Mary to her flat near the University, Mary kissed Erik gently on each cheek and said: "I certainly hope I'll see you again before you leave Athens. Paul, I'm sure you agree that we should all meet up again tomorrow night?"

"Of course, sounds like an excellent idea," Paul said with little conviction.

* * * * *

It was afternoon. Erik had had the client meeting in the morning. It had gone well. Over lunch they had come to an agreement that Erik's firm would help with the legal aspects of the client's impending migration of his computer graphics business from Sweden to Cyprus. It was a reasonably sizeable engagement and Erik was very pleased with himself. After a quick gratifying phone call to his boss, he decided to do some sightseeing. As he walked around among impressive outdoor displays of ancient Greek wonders, the sun was shining and he whistled happily. He wanted to see as much of central Athens as possible in the limited amount of time he had at his disposal. He browsed the main sights around the Acropolis and the Parthenon in a few hours without entering any of the enclosed areas. By the time he reached the archaeological museum entrance, his feet were sore from blisters and it was already half past four. Knowing that the recommended time to explore the museum was two days, he realised that he would not do it justice by rushing but he nevertheless decided to enter just to be able to say he had been there. He had only got to the second room, perusing some glass-encased Mycenaean jewellery, when he heard familiar voices from a few

shelves down. To his surprise, it was Paul and Mary. They were admiring the so called 'Mask of Agamemnon'. Erik could even hear what they were saying. Rather than going up to them to say hello, he decided to take this 'fly-on-the-wall' opportunity and remain an anonymous bystander, pretending to take an interest in some nearby signet rings. Why on earth were they there, he wondered.

"I see what you mean", Mary said to Paul. "The timing is certainly right, around 1600-1550 BC. Everyone knows that the 'mask of Agamemnon' is not actually connected to the legendary Mycenaean leader Agamemnon who was around much later, in around about the 1200s BC. Your theory does make sense. How else would the Mycenaeans have been able to get hold of all this gold, silver and bronze at this time—they were simply not advanced enough then, as far as we know."

"Yes, and look at this one here," Paul said as they walked over to another display unit. Erik had to do a quick diversionary manoeuvre to avoid being seen. He knew that he was easy to spot in a crowd, with his height and blonde hair. Paul continued:

"You can clearly see that these goods originate from both Egypt and Crete—their style is unmistakable. It's also easy to see that the Mycenaeans themselves must have melted down some of the gold to make these new, less sophisticated, objects." He signalled in the direction of the gold mask and some jewellery nearby. "The description of 'gold, silver, and bronze' seems to fit and with the timing and everything else, it does make sense."

Could it be? Erik thought. '*THE TREASURE IS IN ATHENS*'. The treasure which Paul had been referring to in the book must have been this museum collection. He was hit by mild disappointment, having imagined a secret buried treasure. He vaguely remembered reading on the posters at the entrance that the collection was the so called Mycenaean shaft graves. And yes, he recalled, they were from the 16th century BC, discovered on mainland Greece, in Mycenae. Of course, he recalled, the Mycenaeans had only really started their quest to conquer parts of the Mediterranean two hundred years later, making the lavish and rich graves a bit of a mystery, as it contained items which could only have been crafted by a much more advanced civilisation. Scientists or historians had not managed to find an explanation to why all that gold had been hidden in forgotten graves on mainland Greece, which at that time was far from civilised. That was obviously the question which Paul's theory appeared to have an answer to but Erik guessed that it was more to it than that.

Erik tried to recap what he knew in his mind: Paul seemed to suggest that the gold, silver and bronze treasures mentioned in the tempest stele were actually there, in the Athens archaeological museum. From Paul's scribbles in the book Erik knew that Paul theorised that this may have been a payment from Ahmose to Egypt's invaders, presumably the Hyksos, to make them leave Avaris and to enable him to unite upper and lower Egypt. Why on Earth would such a gift have ended up in the hands of the Mycenaeans? Erik's head was spinning. At that moment, he temporarily lost his balance and fell into one of the displays, housing small signet rings. Luckily for him, the glass withstood the impact but the noise he made in connection with the fall attracted the attention of people around him, including Paul and Mary, who were surprised to find Erik carefully checking for any damage to the glass.

Erik did his best to act surprised when they came over but unfortunately he was not a very good actor. He was sure they had realised that he had been listening in on their conversation and felt a little bit awkward.

“What are you two doing here?” He asked with a pretend surprised voice. “I thought you would have been here millions of times before? What brings you here today?” Paul responded with simulated aloofness:

“Strange that we should bump into you! Just checking something—I seemed to remember that the Linear B artefact that I went to Athens to look at had a ‘twin’ here in the museum. We thought we’d just come over and check.” As Paul said this, Mary looked over at him with a puzzled expression on her face. Erik knew that Paul must be lying.

“Oh, which one? Is it around here?” he asked innocently.

“No it’s further in there”, Paul said and pointed in the direction of another room. “Have you enjoyed your day so far? Have you seen the Parthenon yet?”

The topic of conversation expertly changed, Erik noted. Erik briefly summarised his day and that was the end of that conversation. Paul made some excuses and they agreed to meet up later. Erik decided to spend some more time with the Mycenaean gold collection before browsing the rest of the impressive exhibition at record speed. All he wanted to do now was to get back to the hotel, maybe try out the selection of herbal bath oils in his room, have a drink at the rooftop bar and sleep before they were to meet up for dinner later that evening. That was exactly what he did.

* * * * *

Erik continued his deliberations all through getting dressed and hailing a cab. Paul had been acting so strangely. Erik was sure he was hiding something but the way he had acted almost invited suspicion, at least in Erik’s view. If he was right about Paul’s involvement in the break-in he found it surprising that Paul could be that stupid about it all. If he really was the ‘Torpa break-in mastermind’ he had managed to keep it secret for a very long time. He had managed to fool the police, him, Emma and everyone else. It was odd to think that he would start acting carelessly now, unless he was too close to a breakthrough on Linear A to care. Cutting his deliberations short, Erik decided that the answer might be that he had imagined Paul’s strange behaviour; that he only saw what he wanted to see and read too much into what Paul said.

As he arrived at the restaurant, he made the decision to give Paul the benefit of the doubt. What proof did he really have? Nothing. Some loose comments which could be interpreted in many ways. They didn’t mean anything and certainly didn’t implicate Paul’s involvement. His recent progress in deciphering Linear A may well have been the fruit of intensive work on his side, without the keystone.

Paul and Mary had already been shown to the table as Erik joined them. The restaurant was trendy and this time with a more Italian, rather than Greek, feel to the food.

“So, did you find what you were looking for in the museum today?” Erik asked after they had ordered. Paul hesitated before answering:

“Yes, it was still where I remembered it but I’m afraid it wasn’t the right one—it wasn’t the twin of the Linear B text which I went to Athens to see. I was wrong on that one unfortunately. But it doesn’t really matter.”

Erik didn’t want to pursue that conversation any further, instead he asked: “So, any more thoughts on the text of the Torpa tablet? You were going to discuss it?”

This time Mary responded: “No, not really. We haven’t come up with anything new”.

Erik found this strange, given their conversation about the ‘treasure’ and the Mycenaean gold collection. He found it strange that they didn’t want to share this with him. Wanting the conversation to stay on the tablet he said: “Well, I’m intrigued by the whole thing, especially the link between the Torpa tablet and the ten plagues of Egypt. Mary, do you think there could be a connection there?”

“I assume you’re referring to the description of the floods, darkness, hail and smoke in the tablet?” Erik nodded so Mary continued. “Well, in my opinion it’s fairly obvious that these are describing the effects of a volcanic eruption; being the Thera eruption of course. If you’re asking me whether this was the event which gave rise to the story of the ten plagues in the bible, I’m afraid you’re asking the wrong person, although I wouldn’t deny that there might be some truth in it.” Just as Mary had said this, Paul’s mobile phone started ringing.

“You’ll have to excuse me for a minute, I need to take this unfortunately”, Paul said as he left the table heading for the door. When he was gone, Mary turned to Erik. She leaned closer. He could smell her perfume.

Looking serious, she whispered: “I have sensed your suspicion these last couple of days.”

Erik was startled by the change in her behaviour and by what she was saying. “What are you saying? Suspicion of what?”

“Of Paul.” She looked around before she continued. “I probably shouldn’t tell you this but I feel you have the right to know. What he’s told me leads me to believe that he has a source which knows more about the Torpa tablet than he would like us to believe. I know one thing for certain: he didn’t come to Athens primarily to see me; or a troublesome Linear B text, or whatever he’s told you.” Erik saw Paul coming back in and alerted Mary to change the topic. She reacted quickly, pretending that they had been talking about the bible connection all along:

“...Some argue that Ahmose and Moses was the same person. Personally, I cannot see how that could be. Ahmose was an Egyptian pharaoh who conquered the Hyksos invaders. Moses, albeit raised by the daughter of a pharaoh, was the self-proclaimed leader of the Israelites who *left* Egypt. Ahmose clearly *stayed* in Egypt.”

Paul was immediately keen to join the conversation as he sat down: “Yes, some believe the Hyksos were in fact the Israelites, or at least from that general region, so following that logic, how could Ahmose have led the Hyksos out of Egypt? But one thing is interesting; nearly all the children in the royal family of Ahmose were called ‘Ahmose’, both the girls and the boys, and Moses grew up as a member of the royal family so the name angle is certainly worthy of note. Personally, I’m inclined to believe that the Hyksos were the predecessors to the Phoenicians, which obviously does not preclude anything in terms of their origin but which

firmly puts their eventual place of settlement near the Mediterranean east coast in today's Lebanon, Syria or Israel."

After Mary's revelation earlier, Erik found it difficult to relax and enjoy the company of Paul. All he wanted to do was to get back to the hotel and get ready to fly back to Crete the next morning. But first he felt that he needed to be alone with Mary again, for her to explain what her suspicion was and fill him in on what Paul had told her. Unfortunately he never got a chance to. Even his attempt to suggest that they could share a taxi, as his hotel was in the general direction of the university, failed. She was seeing a friend in a bar before heading home. There was no invitation for him to join her in the bar, so Erik took a taxi back to his hotel alone—once again full of thoughts. Before they departed, he had asked for Mary's contact details. She gave him her mobile number, which according to her was the best way to get hold of her.

Chapter 12

Crete, February 2006

Emma could not take any more Linear A texts. She was up to her ears with the small office where she spent most of her time, away from the relaxation and sea. She had made good progress though. She had gone through almost a third of the whole stock of 'untranslated' Linear A texts in only a week. She was sure that if she stopped now, everyone would be content and happy with what she had achieved.

As soon as she had made the decision to request to stop her translation exercise on Monday she felt much better. Her mood improved even further when she saw Erik's shoes by the front door. He had come back from Athens! As she entered the house, she found him in the sun-lounger next to the pool—sleeping with a copy of the Economist on his chest. He was wearing a pair of shorts and nothing else, which seemed very optimistic considering the weather. The wind made the parasol wobble and the sun was hidden behind an enormous black cloud. Looking at him sleeping, she was once again stricken by his attractiveness, his magnetism, perfectly proportioned face and his muscular body; almost too perfect in a godlike sort of way. In addition, he was kind and a gentleman. She could not deny that she was attracted to him. Most women must be, she thought. But other than such fleeting feelings of what could only be described as physical attraction towards Erik, she knew that Paul was the man for her. That was certainly never going to change.

She was startled when he suddenly woke up.

"Hiya! You're back! I just got in!" She hoped that he had not noticed that she had been watching him sleep for almost a minute.

"Hi! Yes, I had my meeting and saw a bit of Athens." He stood up and gave her a quick hug. The smell of his cologne filled her nose and seemed to linger around

her. She could see him shiver from the cold. They went into the living room. Erik put on a jumper.

“Did you have a good time? Did you see anything of Paul at all while you were there?”

“Yes, I had a great time and I actually saw a lot of both Paul and his colleague Mary. Athens certainly is an exciting place. How was your last couple of days?”

Emma was too bored with it even to talk about it, so after a quick comment about her progress she suggested that they cook something nice and share a bottle of wine. Erik was no star in the kitchen and neither was she. They managed to produce some over-cooked pasta and a somewhat runny Carbonara sauce.

“This sauce tastes exceptionally good with the wine”, Erik commented with a silly smile from the opposite side of the kitchen table. Emma laughed hysterically at the fact that he really seemed to enjoy the food. He had even managed to get some of it around his mouth, making him look like a naughty little boy. How she liked his company.

A bottle and a half later, plates and glasses empty, she was annoyed to find herself unsteady and dizzy. Erik, on the other hand, seemed largely unaffected, chatting away about his visit to Athens. She even lost her concentration at one stage and forgot to pay attention to what he was saying.

“...And for that matter, I certainly had my suspicions before she told me but I was surprised to have it confirmed.”

“I’m sorry, what suspicion did you get confirmed?” She felt guilty for having lost the plot.

Erik sounded a little bit annoyed: “That Paul is hiding something. That he potentially had something to do with the theft of the tablet!”

Emma was utterly confused. This talk about suspecting Paul of the break-in; it was absurd. “Are you saying that this woman, his colleague, Mary, has confirmed to you that Paul stole the chest?”

“Well, not exactly. She said that Paul cannot be trusted and that he may have a source who knows more about the Torpa tablet than he has told us”.

“And how can she know that, may I ask? Maybe she had an ulterior motive to try to get you to think ill of Paul, or maybe you read more into what she said than you were meant to. You might even have imagined it, for all I know. I for one can’t believe any rubbish accusation like that; you and she clearly don’t know Paul at all! He’s been nothing but a friend to you. How can you dismiss him so easily? He wasn’t even in the country when the break-in happened!”

Erik looked annoyed but Emma would not take him insulting Paul after all he’d done for him. With that she stood up and left the room. For a second she wondered where she would storm off to. With the open plan living space there was no opportunity to storm out dramatically behind a slamming door, other than to go outside. In a flash, or at least after what she thought was less than a seconds’ hesitation, she decided to go upstairs and go straight to bed. She slammed the door to her bedroom but by then it had sort of lost its effect, especially when she went straight back out again, realising that the bathroom was down the hall. She hoped that at least with her display of disgust at his accusation she had made her point; that she wasn’t prepared to distrust Paul, at least not without any hard evidence. From what she had heard from Erik, the finger pointing was based on

loose theories and assumptions. And who did this Mary think she was; she had never heard of any Mary.

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Waking up the next morning was not a pleasant experience. It was Saturday, which was nice but in addition to a banging headache and acute thirst, Emma felt awful about her behaviour towards Erik the night before. She was still convinced that any accusation in Paul's direction was wholly unfounded—there must have been some sort of misunderstanding. She knew him too well; he would never do anything to risk his untarnished reputation and respected position as an Oxford professor. It would be so completely out of character that she felt she would need extremely strong evidence to the contrary to believe any of the accusations against him. She put on a dressing gown and went downstairs.

Paul, Ball and Laura were not expected back until that afternoon so Emma was hoping she might have the kitchen to herself for a while to ponder her thoughts. Unfortunately for her, Erik was already up and having breakfast at the kitchen table, reading a Swedish newspaper. She silently wondered how he had got hold of a Swedish paper in a remote villa on Crete but she didn't voice her question. Instead she decided to apologise for her behaviour the night before, blaming the wine which seemed to have gone straight to her head.

"Well," he said, "I know how you feel about Paul and I probably shouldn't have blurted everything out the way I did. I could have given Paul the benefit of doubt but with Mary confirming my suspicion I thought you might agree with me."

This annoyed Emma once again. "Excuse me, I've never met Mary! In fact, I didn't even know of her existence until a few of days ago. For all I know, you could have made her up." She got the desired reaction from Erik; he was irritated with this response.

"Hold on a second. Mary is a respected professor of ancient history. She even used to be a lecturer at Oxford before she transferred temporarily over to Athens two years ago."

"I've been at Oxford for nearly four years and I've certainly never heard of a professor called Mary. What's her surname?"

"Brown. Ring any bells? Professor Brown?"

"No actually. Well, I might not know everyone then, if you're sure she was at Oxford." Erik didn't answer. Instead he walked outside to the pool with his Swedish paper, grabbing a towel on the way, taking off his T-shirt and sinking into the deck chair without uttering another word. It was once again far too cold for sunbathing but he didn't seem to mind.

It suddenly occurred to Emma that Erik might have tried to make her angry with Paul for some reason. Although she could not understand it, she had seen indications that Erik might have feelings for her. A couple of times she had noticed it. In stark contrast with her, he was one of those popular beautiful people who could get anything they wanted. Why on earth he would even consider forming some sort of liking towards her was, for her, completely incomprehensible. Some sort of strange misdirected jealousy could have made him imagine odd things about Paul, or, even worse, he could have fabricated lies about Paul. Her general opinion of Erik was only positive but of course she didn't know him as well as she

knew Paul. Erik had always been very genuine and a real gentleman. She found it hard to believe that he would do anything maliciously. But people could change for all she knew, especially in the face of jealousy.

Emma and Erik didn't speak all day after that. It was strange to see him so gloomy. He was normally always cheery, not far away from laughing, often at his own shortcomings and mistakes. Emma very much liked that streak in him, as it made her laugh as well. She wasn't pleased with their falling out. By reason of the uncomfortable silence, Emma felt an enormous relief when she heard a car approaching the house late afternoon. A few moments later, Laura and Ball entered, shouting hello. Erik immediately got up to greet them, without looking at Emma as he did so. Emma followed him. In Laura and Ball's presence they both pretended as if their quarrel had never happened. The four of them sat down on the sofas to share experiences.

"Having seen the remains of the lost Minoan city on Santorini, I'm getting more and more convinced by the Crete-Atlantis theory," Laura proclaimed excitedly. "This is after all the most accepted Atlantis theory in modern times. There are obviously still points which don't add up but I now feel that it's at least not an outlandish assumption to make; that Plato used the forgotten civilisation on Thera and Crete as inspiration for his story about Atlantis."

"What makes you think so?" Emma asked with interest.

"Mainly the fact that parts of the Island disappeared, which ties in well with the statement in Plato's writings that Atlantis was 'submerged by the waves'. Other than that, just things like the hot and cold water and the general description of the place. I do have a few doubts though, I should add."

"What's your main objection?" Erik asked.

"The Atlanteans are described as a warlike people. They conquered large parts of the Mediterranean and were focussed on warfare. This doesn't tie in at all with the understanding we have of the Minoans. Also, the location of it. Atlantis was supposed to have been located near the Pillars of Hercules, in the Atlantic Ocean. Not in the eastern Mediterranean. But that doesn't exclude the possibility that the Minoans were in some way related to the Atlanteans..." She fell silent as if in deep thought.

As it turned out, Ball had also had a good time. First and foremost he had been involved in some work with a group of scientists who had measured the magnitude of the eruption by mapping debris of lava scattered in the area surrounding the island.

"I've made up my mind to do another thesis on the Thera eruption. It intrigues me and it seems to me that far from all measurements have been taken. The much more recent eruption of Krakatoa is obviously better documented and easier to study but I still think that not everything that can be done has been done on Thera. I mean, we're talking about one of the biggest volcanic eruptions of all times, as far as we've been able to tell so far. I'm going to spend the next week studying the coastal areas of Crete."

It was all very encouraging for them. Emma and Erik didn't mention anything about their argument, or Erik's suspicions about Paul. Emma decided to tell them that she was going to ask to finish off her translation work on Monday, so that she could concentrate on writing her thesis. They all sympathised with her decision.

“When is Paul coming back?” Laura asked as the sun had started to go down later that day. “I thought he was coming back today as well.”

“Yes, he is”, Emma confirmed, although she suddenly felt unsure as she seemed to remember that his plane was due in at five in the afternoon. It was then already nine o’clock. Was the plane really four hours delayed? It would take no time at all for Paul to go from Heraklion airport to the house so there could be no delays there. “Does anyone know when he was supposed to arrive? I thought it was five o’clock?”

“Yes it was”, Erik confirmed as he had asked Paul about it a couple of days ago. They all got concerned. Paul should have arrived. A quick look on the internet confirmed that there were no delays or events that might have caused him problems. In fact, the plane which Paul should have been on had landed on time.

“I suppose he could have missed the plane or gone somewhere on Crete; maybe he had someone to see”, Laura suggested and they all agreed that was more likely. There were plenty of possibilities and there was no reason to think that Paul was in any danger.

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Paul had still not arrived when they got up the next morning. By then, Emma was worried. He had not answered his mobile phone—she had tried three times and left messages. It went straight to answer phone. How could he be so careless as to not let them know where he was? She was concerned that something may have happened to him. Her fall-out with Erik didn’t help either. She knew that under normal circumstances he would have been a great comfort, telling her not to worry and keeping her sane. Now he was ignoring her, directing anything he said to either Ball or Laura, only occasionally addressing her when it seemed necessary in order not to reveal their quarrel to the others. It was silly really. She didn’t want to be angry with him but every time she thought about his ludicrous accusations against Paul, she saw red. Paul had been nothing but nice to Erik. It disturbed her that he could mistrust him in this way, although she had to admit that it was odd that he had still not returned.

It was one o’clock in the afternoon and Emma was just about to try to call Paul again when the front door opened and Paul entered, looking worse for wear and tired. His hair was a mess, almost standing up, and he was wearing an old thick woolly jumper which seemed out of place in the lovely spring sunshine. Emma could not help herself. She ran up to him and threw herself in his arms, kissing him hard on the mouth. He didn’t return the kiss but Emma knew that was only because they were not alone.

“Where have you been?! We’ve been worried sick!” she blurted out.

“I’m sorry if you were worried about me but I couldn’t get a signal on my mobile to let you know I’d be later than you expected.” he said. He looked tired but happy and smiled as he said “...and I have a surprise!” They were intrigued to find out what he had been up to, why he was late, why he looked the way he did and above all what this ‘surprise’ was all about. Paul was exhausted. Emma led him to the sofa and they sat down around him. She got him a glass of juice and after he had finished it in one gulp he finally seemed to have the strength to speak.

"I've travelled for several hours. I wanted to get here as quickly as possible but I encountered some problems on the way. My 'surprise' is moored in the harbour down there." He signalled in the direction of the sea. "It seemed like a good idea at the time but now I'm not so sure."

"Did you sail here alone from mainland Greece?" Erik enquired with an astonished expression.

"Well, almost. I borrowed a fast yacht! Unfortunately I ran out of petrol and had to hail a passing ferry. It was all a bit of a nightmare but I got here eventually, with the boat and all. It was a little bit further than I thought."

They all had a moment contemplating what he had said. Emma thought the whole thing was a bit bizarre.

Erik evidently had the same thoughts and asked: "Am I missing something? Why did you borrow a boat to get here; why not simply fly? I'm sure there would have been boats to rent here on Crete if you wanted to take us all out for a ride."

"Professor Palaikastro convinced me to borrow his yacht. He said it would be more pleasant than flying and that Greeks would never dream of flying from Athens to Crete. I believed him. And Crete is not my end destination. There have been some new very interesting Minoan finds in Alalakh on the Mediterranean Lebanese coast. Professor Palaikastro informed me yesterday and I decided that I had to go there to see for myself. Apparently, what they've found could confirm that the Minoans had taken over the city for a brief period of time just around the 1600s BC. I promised Palaikastro that I would deliver his yacht to Rhodes on my way to Lebanon and fly from there tomorrow evening. As I said, it seemed like a brilliant idea at the time..." He fell silent for a moment and then continued: "It'd be great if you could join me in Lebanon, Emma", he said looking at her with anticipation. And you too if you want to come for a laugh", he added as an afterthought to all of them.

"Why do you need me to come?" Emma asked, secretly hoping that he wanted to be alone with her, travelling romantically by boat.

"Your expertise on Linear A is becoming unsurpassed—I could really do with your help. I've heard some very encouraging feedback from Athos at the museum about you".

The offer seemed very tempting. She needed to work on her dissertation but how could she refuse a trip to Lebanon with Paul? He was her professor anyhow—he could not really complain about her dissertation not being finished when he had kept her constantly occupied. She hoped that the others would decide not to come so she could have Paul to herself.

"What about the political situation in Lebanon and Syria at the moment?" Erik asked. "I know it's much better than it has been but the place is still full of religious and political tension. It might not be safe".

"Rubbish", Paul said. "I was in Beirut only three months ago. The city is literally heaving with tourists, westerners, prosperity, trade; it's becoming a beautiful modern metropolis; not the war-ridden, bombed place we all remember from the past. Sure, there are still traces from that period to be seen but it has really progressed in recent years and a fortune has been spent to transform it; a job well done in my view. Take my word for it."

“I would love to come actually,” Laura said. “Alalakh is one of those places I’ve wanted to visit. I had a theory a while back that Alalakh was named after Atala—the place mentioned in the old Hindu script Vishnu Purana and other later Hindu myths and with certain similarities to Atlantis”.

Emma looked at her with poorly disguised disappointment. Laura clearly had not grasped that there might be something between her and Paul—or maybe she had? She could have set out to prevent her and Paul’s relationship for some reason. No, she decided, looking at Laura. She genuinely had not spotted their attachment and she clearly wanted to go to Beirut. Was there an attachment? Emma was suddenly unsure. For several months Paul had done nothing to suggest that he had feelings for her, not since Sweden. Spots of memories flashed before her eyes – the kiss just then which he had not returned, professional behaviour towards her, avoiding her after lectures. Maybe she was imagining that he still had feelings for her—he could have changed his mind or thought the better of it. Maybe it was all in her mind. Maybe he really only wanted her to join him because of her Linear A skills. She felt a perverse sting of disappointment at that realisation.

Erik, who had not intended to come, seemed to ‘wake up’ at Laura’s words. He hesitated for a moment and then said: “Sounds like an adventure. Maybe I could join you too if I could get another couple of days off?”

“Great”, Paul exclaimed. “Ball, would you like to come as well? There’s definitely room for one more.”

“No, I will have to pass. I have lots of work to do here on Crete, as you know. Sounds like fun though.”

“Yes! It’ll be great! We’re leaving early tomorrow morning!”

Chapter 13

The Mediterranean Sea, February 2006

Erik didn’t trust Paul, whatever Emma said. He was concerned that he hadn’t been able to get hold of Mary since Athens, that the phone numbers she had given him didn’t work and that he hadn’t managed to get hold of a professor by the name Mary Brown upon calling Athens University switchboard. He trusted his own instinct and by that logic he knew that Paul was up to something. The fact that he couldn’t get hold of Mary made him even more apprehensive—who was she? He had not wanted to ask Paul about her—to avoid having to reveal that he suspected him of something. He had even been worried that Paul might abduct them after having lured them into his motor boat or that he would suddenly go berserk. He had volunteered to join them on this mad journey to Lebanon for the sole reason of protecting Emma and Laura from Paul but nothing untoward had happened so far.

Apart from his strong, surprising sickly feelings of what he must admit was jealousy of Paul and Emma he had enjoyed the boat ride to that point. The

weather had been perfect all day, not too much wind and sunny. Thick jumpers and jackets were nevertheless required for outdoor navigation but it was far from unbearable. The boat was amazing; much larger than Erik had imagined. He had no idea that Greek professors earned that much money, as from what he knew of boats, this would have cost as much as a family home. The cabin was roomy with a built in table and sofas which converted to beds, and cockpit for navigating at the front. It even had a small but well equipped kitchen and next to it was a tiny bathroom. It only had bed-space for two people, but that wasn't an issue given that they were hoping to get to Rhodes that same evening and then fly straight to Beirut from there. On the roof was another cockpit exposed to the elements, where Paul had spent most of his time. Erik and Laura had found it too cold up there when the boat was moving and had decided to stay in the cabin with some warming beer bottles. Emma had alternated between the cabin and the upstairs cockpit, informing them at one point that Paul was nearly starting to grow icicles in his hair.

They were now more than half way to Rhodes and so far the four of them had got on remarkably well, all things considered. He had a silent agreement with Emma not to mention their quarrel and he had no choice but to simply ignore his wariness about Paul – for now. As soon as he had some sort of proof he would contact the police and tell them about his suspicions. Until then, he would be on the lookout—constantly.

For the last couple of hours Erik had been waiting for a good moment to speak to Laura about 'the treasure in Athens' episode and his concerns about Paul's sincerity. He wasn't sure where to begin and how to approach it, eager to avoid a reaction similar to that of Emma's a few days ago. He had decided to start with Paul's theory, something which he felt a need to at least share with someone more knowledgeable than himself. The theory seemed important. He was still confused by the fragments of information he had gleaned from Paul about Ahmose and the Hyksos conquest and tried to get his head around whether this was in any way connected to the Torpa tablet. When Emma once again went upstairs to Paul he seized the opportunity. Laura sat next to him on the sofa. He turned towards her. The boat rocked like a baby's cradle, making him feel drunk even though he wasn't. He composed himself but Laura spoke first.

"You know you're probably the most attractive man I've ever met!" This took Erik by surprise. It was so unlike her he almost had to laugh. He didn't know what to say.

"Oh, thank you..." he chuckled. There was an awkward moment of silence. "Paul seems to think that the Mycenaean gold at Athens archaeological museum was a payment from Egypt to Greece," he said watching Laura's eyes widen. He felt silly bringing it up like that. She was surprised at his sudden change of topic and to hear something about ancient Egypt from him.

"What did you say?" she managed to utter just as the boat wobbled violently. Laura's beer bottle on the table fell over. She went to get some paper to wipe it up. He repeated what he had said. "Since when are you interested in ancient history?" she laughed as she cleaned up the mess. When he remained serious she went to get another beer, sat back down and asked him to continue, giving him a look as if he had acquired new appeal beyond his good looks. She removed her hair band,

put it on her wrist and let her long dark hair out. She took her glasses off and put them on the table.

“Well, the Mycenaean gold collection was found in graves on mainland Greece from the exact time when Ahmose managed to expel the Hyksos rulers from Egypt.” He took a sip of his beer and gazed at her, waiting for her to respond.

Laura stared out at the sea through the window considering what he had said and then asked deep in thought: “But what was it a payment for? Surely, that must be the next question.”

“Assuming I’ve understood it correctly, Paul thinks that this was a payment from the Egyptians to the shaft grave warriors for their involvement in expelling the Hyksos from Egypt.”

Laura coughed on her drink. She was not easily impressed. “That’s absurd. The Greeks were not powerful enough to do that! Their power came at least a couple of hundred years later.”

Erik had already thought of that. “Yes but I think, and I believe this is Paul’s theory, that the Minoans, who basically controlled mainland Greece at that time, provided the Egyptians with a navy and manned it with people from the islands and the mainland.” He gazed out the window as if to check to see if he could see one of the islands or perhaps a Minoan ship. He couldn’t of course. There was only water as far as the eye could see. “I understand from what I’ve read that it’s thought that at that time, the Egyptian rulers of Upper Egypt didn’t have a fleet—at least not a significant one. They basically struck a deal with the Minoans to use theirs—for a price.”

Laura was now sitting on the edge of her seat, displaying an increasing degree of interest. “So the shaft grave princes and princesses from mainland Greece got paid handsomely in the form of gold, silver and bronze... But what did the Minoans get? If some Mycenaeans got gold, what did the Minoan rulers get?” Laura looked at him, sunlight through the window reflecting her hair.

Erik knew the answer; at least the answer that he thought Paul would have given. “I’m not sure but I think they would have got something much more powerful than gold; something of immense importance.”

“What do you have in mind?” Laura asked intrigued.

Erik paused for effect. He knew that this next contention was highly controversial. “The rule of Egypt... I believe the Minoans effectively got the rule of Egypt.”

They were both silent for a moment, Laura contemplating his assertion. She finished her drink. It didn’t suit her to drink from a beer bottle, Erik noticed. “That’s impossible,” she said finally. “Ahmose ruled both Upper and Lower Egypt after he’d conquered the Hyksos. There was never any talk of another ruler.”

“Yes, I know. But I believe the theory is that Ahmose himself was of Minoan origin.”

A brief laugh of surprise and scepticism escaped her. “What do you base that claim on, may I ask?”

“Well, you probably know who Ahmose’s mother was.”

“Of course, Ahhotep I”, Laura responded without a moment’s hesitation. A few days ago he himself would never have known the answer to that question but then again he wasn’t a student of ancient history at Oxford.

“From what I have read, she had a title of ‘Mistress of the Haunebut’”, Erik added.

“That’s right, she did.” Laura was suddenly excited. “But no one knows where ‘Haunebut’ was, although the most common theory is that this indeed refers to Greece.”

“Yes.”

“But that doesn’t make any sense.” Laura objected. “How could Ahhotep have been queen there? Ahhotep’s mother was Tetisheri, an Egyptian queen.” She paused to think and then added enthusiastically, answering her own question: “Unless... queen Tetisheri was of Minoan origin!”

“Exactly! I have to confess I overheard Paul and Emma talk about this possibility after Emma had found a silver-pin. So this is not actually my theory—it’s theirs. I just put two and two together from what they said.”

“Whoever came up with it, it does make perfect sense! Tetisheri was a commoner, apparently of non royal birth who married a weak and short lived Egyptian pharaoh and then became one of the most powerful queens of ancient Egypt. This has always been a mystery. But according to this theory instead of a ‘commoner’ she was actually Minoan royalty. Very interesting!” she said just as the door to the stairs rattled and Emma entered.

She froze at the door when she thought she might be interrupting something but immediately saw that it was alright. “What’s interesting?” she asked. She then smiled as if something had happened which she tried to cover up.

“Oh, nothing,” Erik said quickly. “How’s Paul? Is he alright up there?”

“Sure, he’s wearing about five woolly jumpers so I think he’s ok. The view’s wonderful if you’d like to come up.”

They agreed and put their jackets on, following Emma up the few narrow steps.

“Hey you two, come over here!” Paul shouted cheerfully when he saw them. “We have everything under control. Look, there it is!” he pointed at a tiny dot in the horizon. “Not far to go now. We should be there in the next hour or so.”

“I wouldn’t get your hopes up too much though,” Emma laughed. “He’s been saying that for at least two hours. Every time we see an island or even a stone he thinks it’s Rhodes. Are you sure you know exactly where we are Paul?”

“Yes, of course! This time I’m sure.” Paul didn’t take his eyes off the island in the distance. They all waited eagerly for it to get closer so they could see whether he was right. The three of them sat down on the seat, covering their legs with two blankets.

Half an hour later it was clear that Paul had once again misjudged their location. As they got nearer they could see that the island was small, with only a couple of houses. Erik started to get worried they were lost. The sun was already on its way down and their flight from Rhodes would leave in three hours.

The only upside was the spectacular sunset that was bathing the whole place in a pink-orange glow. Paul turned off the engine and they stood there in silence taking in the scenery. The island was already far behind them but another one had started to appear. It looked promisingly large. They stood up to take it all in. Erik put his arm around Laura’s shoulders. He could see she was cold. He suspected that it was only twelve or so degrees. The water was unusually still. All they could hear was the squeaking of some seagulls and the sound of water

moving. It was a magical moment but Erik couldn't stop worrying about Paul's next move. He half expected that he would turn on the engine again with force and cause them all to fall off. He certainly didn't feel like swimming in cold water.

Laura broke the silence: "Is the plan to find a hotel in Beirut tonight when we get there, or what's the score?" she asked looking at Paul.

"Yes, I think that'd be sensible, although I suggest we get up fairly early tomorrow to travel to Byblos..." He turned the engine on and set off. Laura, Emma and Erik simultaneously fell back in their seat and exchanged looks of alarm.

"Byblos!" They all said in one voice. "I thought we were heading to Alalakh, that's what you said?" Erik finished. His heart started to beat faster and he got a sudden pain in his stomach. Paul had misled them after all.

"I should have told you, my apologies," Paul said. "We *will* be going to Alalakh to view the Minoan remains but I had a call from another colleague in Byblos yesterday. He wants us to travel there first. Apparently, there's an interesting inscription in Cuneiform which he'd like me to look at. I simply couldn't refuse. You can join me if you like—Byblos is very interesting. A must see for anyone travelling to Lebanon."

Erik felt ill. They were stuck in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea with a mad person! He glanced at Emma. He gave her a stare which proclaimed 'I told you he was up to something fishy'. She returned his gaze for only a moment as if to say 'Yes, I agree this is strange but I reserve judgment'. She remained quiet. He guessed she was lost for words. Erik hoped that she was finally able to see that Paul was acting bizarrely. He glanced at Laura. She looked worried but didn't say anything either. Just as Erik was about to lose his nerve and start yelling at him, Paul proclaimed:

"There it is; we have arrived! Rhodes, here we come!"

Chapter 14

Byblos, February 2006

Paul and Emma had disappeared off to look at the Cuneiform tablet, leaving Erik and Laura to browse the archaeological excavations of Byblos. Erik was standing on a large stone block, supposedly the remains of an ancient building, looking out over a field of old ruins. The sky was scattered with a few clouds. Erik had put his jacket on as it was not particularly warm. Laura stood next to him, reading from her Byblos guidebook, completely engulfed in what she was reading. Erik could not feel the same excitement. He was thinking about work, hoping that the team in Sweden had sent the engagement letter to the client he had met in Athens and that his London project was progressing in his absence. Thinking about work seemed far better than mulling over dark thoughts about Emma and Paul, although he wasn't sure what had actually happened between them, if anything. Emma had been strangely quiet and a bit distant since the yacht and Erik felt worried about her. He had not spoken to her about it though—they were

still not on proper speaking terms after he had expressed his suspicions about Paul. These suspicions had not gone away. When Paul had announced his decision to change their plans and go to Byblos instead, he had felt even more certain that Paul was up to something. But after that, everything had gone smoothly. They had made their flight in Rhodes, arrived in Beirut, spent the night in a hotel there and travelled to Byblos the next morning. On arrival in Byblos an hour ago Paul's colleague had made it absolutely clear that he had begged Paul to come over to Byblos and look at a Cuneiform text. So far his reasons for changing their plans had seemed perfectly legitimate.

He and Laura had been ambling among the old remains for some time when Laura suddenly stopped. She was reading the Byblos guidebook.

"You know that the identity of the Hyksos who invaded Egypt in the 17th Century BC is unknown but they are generally referred to as Asiatics?"

Erik responded hesitantly: "Er... yes."

She showed him a passage in the guidebook. "Look, it says here that the Hyksos invaded Byblos in the 18th century BC. This means that the Hyksos ruled Lebanon, Syria and Israel before they invaded Egypt a hundred years later." Erik was perplexed. He had no idea what Laura was getting at. She continued: "Well, there is a bible connection here as well. Joseph in the bible, who was Hebrew, is thought to have been a vizier of Egypt, basically prime minister, during the Hyksos rule. There's no doubt that the Hyksos had strong ties with people from Asia Minor. This is because they had conquered this part of the world but it doesn't necessarily mean that they ultimately *originated* from Asia Minor." Laura looked at Erik almost as if she wanted him to reaffirm her thoughts. He was still in the dark about what she was trying to say and remained quiet, trying hard not to look like a giant question mark. "Let's have a quick look in the bible," she suggested after a moment's silence.

"Well, unfortunately I used to fall asleep at church as a child—and during religious studies at school," he said with a smile.

"But you're still carrying that Bible from your grandmother aren't you? I saw it in your rucksack earlier when I fetched the guidebook." She pointed at his bag.

"Oh yes, I forgot about that! I didn't want to leave it in the hotel room in Beirut just in case my suitcase was stolen," said Erik as he had a quick look through his bag. "But it's in Swedish."

"That's fine. You just have to translate." They decided to go to a café in the harbour. Erik didn't want to expose it to the elements. As soon as they found a table, he rummaged through his bag again and immediately found the old book.

"Isn't it fitting that we're sitting here in Byblos reading the bible—the name Byblos is the Greek name which means 'papyrus' and it was from this that the word Bible was derived!" Laura said with a laugh.

"Very fitting", Erik said sarcastically. He was nervous about opening the old book, scared of what he might find. He had not had the need or the urge to read it at all since his grandmother's funeral. He knew that it was full of scribbles but from what he had seen from a previous quick scan, they were all religious notes about the text, mainly to facilitate preaching in church. He didn't recognise the handwriting. He guessed that it had once belonged to a priest. The pages were thin and fragile. It had that old book smell.

Erik had only just opened the bible and was about to ask Laura where she wanted him to look when he spotted a familiar handwriting in the margin. It was unmistakably his grandmother's confident and old fashioned swirly lines. The note was clearly distinguishable from the other religious ramblings written by someone else. It was a brief statement in the margin of Genesis. He was surprised that he had even seen it.

"What's the matter?" Laura said after a few seconds of silence but seemed to second guess what the problem was. "Please tell me if you prefer that we use another copy. I'm sure we can find another bible to use."

"No, it's not that", he managed to say. "Look in Genesis. My grandmother has made a note."

Laura leaned over and had a quick look. "What does it say?"

Erik explained. It was only a short statement. *'Du har rätt. Väggen gömmer vad du letar efter. Stör henne inte'* meaning: *'You are right. The wall is hiding what you are looking for. Do not disturb her.'* That was all it said. Despite the non-informative and brief nature of the message he knew instinctively that it had been intended for Anna and that it had been the reason for the old woman's strange and unexpected gift of inheritance. Anna had spent a lot of time searching through the Torpa journals, obsessing about the legend of the girl buried alive in the wall so many hundreds of years ago. She had told him in Thailand that she had discovered something which suggested that a thing of importance was hidden in there. He still didn't know what and it wasn't clear how his grandmother could possibly have known about it and whether she had an awareness of the whereabouts of the tablet. If it wasn't the tablet that was hidden in the space in the wall, what could it have been? Erik speculated that it may have been a secret passed down from generation to generation. The message indicated that the young girl in the legend, the ghost story, was hidden behind that wall but they knew that this had not been the case when the wall was opened the year before, unless the girl was hidden inside the chest. He was still none the wiser as to the reason why his grandmother had decided to convey the message in the first place and what she possibly could have had to gain from it.

"You're shaking, what's the matter?" Laura whispered, looking worried.

"No, nothing." Erik took a deep breath. "It's just that my grandmother's note is so perplexing and it's strange to think that she's now dead," he said briefly. He had no intention to explain it all to her.

"I'm sorry. Let's go and try to find Emma and Paul." Erik was grateful that Laura had not pushed him on the meaning of what his grandmother had written. It was all too strange.

Two women, now both dead were talking to him from beyond the grave. First Anna's last words to him in Thailand and now his grandmother's message. Erik felt a chill.

* * * * *

Paul looked at her with peculiar avid eyes. The sun was still shining through the material of the large white tent where they sat, surrounded by busy archaeologists, students and other members of the excavation team. An oversized photograph of the Cuneiform tablet they had been asked to look at was placed on

the table in front of them. Next to Emma was her own well used notebook. After several hours of staring at the tablet, she saw the lines carefully inscribed on its surface had suddenly started to dance around, coming alive and at the same time losing their meaning. The tablet was in exceptionally poor condition and the task of translating it had been much more cumbersome than they had imagined. It had taken them many hours to work out only a fraction of the text, so long that certain members of the team had decided to attempt to help them. This had annoyed Paul so much that he had left the tent temporarily, threatening not to continue unless his colleague asked that they were left alone. All in all, it had been a dismal day. The only statement of interest, at least judging from Paul's reaction, had been the mention of Gades, the ancient Phoenician city in Southern Spain, today's Cadiz. At this, Paul had started to act strangely, completely at odds with his earlier outburst, appearing to struggle not to smile, without explaining his sudden surge in happiness. This strange mood swing soon passed as they resumed their work. Emma was left in the dark about any potential discovery and felt that yet another day had been wasted over a useless ancient text of little interest. She was tired and as the straight Cuneiform lines started to wiggle she suggested they call it a day. Paul reluctantly agreed, looking less than pleased but gave her another look which to her surprise appeared full of suppressed feelings of tenderness.

"I hate to leave things unfinished. Would you mind if I continued alone?" Paul asked. Emma could not believe him. How dedicated could one person get?

"Sure, I'll try to find Erik and Laura. But what about going back to Beirut? The last bus is in less than an hour, remember?"

He didn't respond, already with his finger on the text. She left without saying goodbye. She had to admit that Paul had been acting strangely these last couple of days... or had he? She thought back on the boat ride. They had spent many hours alone in the outdoor cockpit, mainly discussing things like suffixes, prefixes, cases, grammatical structure and ideograms. They enjoyed each other's company and the time had flown despite the cold, noise and wind when the yacht skipped over the water. She found him irresistible. Perhaps he had seen the yearning in her eyes. They were on open sea when he suddenly grabbed her jacket and pulled her towards him, just like he had done in Sweden. She found herself once again making out with her professor. She had wanted it for some time. But just like last time he stopped fairly quickly.

"I'm sorry, Emma. This could never be. You and me..." he said, still with his hands on her shoulders. To her he sounded like a broken record.

"Why?" she begged to know. "We could make it work".

"No, it would ruin us both. Dating a student is simply not ethical and I wouldn't like to do anything which could make anyone doubt your brilliance. You have a gift, Emma. A gift with languages. That's more important than you and me."

That had been it but she was determined not to give up on him. At least he was a gentleman. A selfish gentleman with poor navigation skills, lousy communication abilities and a bad temper.

* * * * *

Erik and Laura had spent most of the day sightseeing, which turned out to be an exhausting thing to do. Erik's tiredness was increased by the excitement of

finding his grandmother's notes and he struggled to keep his eyes open. He was happy to see Emma walking alone towards them near the Crusader Castle. He was even more pleased when she told them about her day. Not because he wanted her to have a bad day but because of the way she had described Paul's obsessive behaviour. Erik's mood improved even further when Laura had announced that she wanted to go shopping in the harbour area, leaving Erik and Emma alone; both too exhausted to join her. They were sitting on an uncomfortable stone bench which may or may not have been of ancient origin. To Erik its rough surface was as close to heaven as he could possibly get, with Emma next to him, suddenly leaning her head on his arm.

"I'm sorry for what I said on Crete", she said without looking at him. "I have missed our conversations".

Erik smiled, grateful that the ice was broken between them. "Don't worry, I shouldn't have said what I said about Paul, so I'm sorry too." Erik took a chance and put his arm around her shoulder, supporting her head. He added: "I've missed you too". He almost immediately regretted admitting that but Emma didn't seem to react. She continued to stare out over the ancient site below them, as if deep in thought. Almost five minutes had passed before she spoke again.

"You know, I think you were right to warn me about Paul. I still don't think he had anything to do with the break-in and the death of your grandmother but there's something strange about him. He's changed somehow. His mood swings... It's not the Paul I know."

Erik didn't ask her to expand.

* * * * *

It was late evening when Paul finally finished his work, delivering a completed translation of all visible lines of the Cuneiform disc. By then, it was too late to go back on the bus to Beirut and they were all forced to stay over in a small hotel near the port in Byblos and catch the first bus the next day. In the hotel lobby, as they all bid goodnight and departed to go to their separate rooms, Laura asked Erik to wait, pulling him to one side, moving closer to him to whisper something in his ear. In the corner of his eye, Erik saw Emma briefly glancing at them before she started to climb the stairs.

"How could I be so thick? It is so obvious! How could I not have spotted it straight away!" she hissed excitedly.

"What are you talking about?" Erik was puzzled.

"Atlantis—I think we have found the Atlanteans!"

"Hang on, go back. You will have to explain that one!" Erik was even more perplexed.

"It's so obvious!" Laura repeated.

"What do you mean?"

"I will explain it tomorrow as soon as we get back to the hotel in Beirut where I have my papers. I can't explain it without showing you certain passages in Plato's dialogues *Timaeus* and *Critias*, which are the source of the Atlantis story. I also want to check something before I relay my theory. I promise, I'll explain it tomorrow!" Laura was very excited. He suspected that what she had found could be a breakthrough for her dissertation, which discussed the Crete-Atlantis theory.

But if she really had worked out who the Atlanteans were, then that would certainly be a discovery of great proportion. Erik recalled the sheer number of Atlantis theories over the last millennia—many people had devoted their lives to finding Atlantis! Erik didn't know enough about Plato's writings to second guess her thoughts.

"You had better!" he said before heading upstairs.

That night Erik had a strange dream, a nightmare. It had started rather comically. He was riding a golden calf with a sun disc between its horns. The calf stopped in front of a temple with gold pillars containing rows and rows of incomprehensible writing. He could see the temple clearly; it was nothing like he had ever seen before, made entirely of gold. Suddenly he saw Paul in the distance looking the other way but slowly turning his head to see him. Just as Erik was about to shout Paul's name, a group of people, looking aggravated, came running at high speed towards him. Paul had seen him but pretended not to. Erik didn't have time to react and the second the mob reached him he found himself awake in bed; screaming. He had once read that if you dream that you die, you are dead. He was grateful that he had at least woken up but in his delirious state of mind he was sure that if he had not woken up, the angry mob would have killed him. Their enraged faces were still etched on his inner eye, leaving him sweaty and shaking.

"Don't be silly", he said out loud in Swedish to himself before drifting back into sleep.

Chapter 15

Beirut, February 2006

It was only just past eleven in the morning when the bus came to a halt at the Charles Helou bus station near the harbour in central Beirut. Given the hour, Erik had imagined that they would have avoided the worst of the rush hour so that the streets of Beirut would be relatively quiet. However, he was gravely mistaken. It was Monday but the bus station was sprawling with people streaming out of busses, mainly young men.

"What's going on?" he asked in the direction of no one in particular, feeling ill at ease, anxiously staring out of the bus window as they stood up to exit. The others were equally perplexed by the scenes around the bus. They all stepped out, feeling as if they were trespassing on forbidden property. Erik was glad to have survived the unnerving bus ride, although in comparison to the scenes greeting them outside of the bus, the dangers of driving suddenly seemed trivial. Erik wished they were back on the bus, away from the threatening tension of the crowded square in front of them.

At that moment his mobile phone, which had found a sliver of coverage, came to life. It was his mother. She got straight to the point, without small talk, with some exciting news. But only a few seconds into the conversation on a crackly line, he suddenly felt his phone slip out of his hand. He looked around and saw a man,

with seemingly astounding athletic ability, running away from them through the assembly, carrying Erik's phone, leaving no time for any of them to react.

"Now, that's just great..." was all he managed to say. "Our only communication device with the rest of the world, gone with the wind!"

"We'll find another one!" Emma said, sounding less than convincing and looking around as if she expected another attack. "Who was that on the phone by the way? You sounded excited."

"It was my mum. The Swedish police have found the person who committed the break in and caused my grandmother's death! It's believed he's a contract burglar. She didn't have time to say much unfortunately."

"That's great news!" Emma said.

"Does that mean that they have also found the chest with its contents?" Paul said, sounding oddly blasé, especially for someone who had spent more than a little time on the whole 'opening of the wall' campaign.

"Unfortunately not yet, as far as I could tell. Maybe he's unwilling to speak."

Following this, Paul seemed invigorated and proclaimed that they had no time to lose, that they needed to get out of there. A drop of sweat trickled down his cheek from the temple.

"We'll never find a taxi here", Emma added.

"No, I was thinking we should walk. Hopefully we'll find someone who could tell us what's going on! It looks like some sort of demonstration." Paul was worried about their safety. "I've never seen anything like this. I don't like it. Not at all. Let's get out of here and find somewhere to have lunch. Or maybe not. Maybe we should find the British Embassy, quickly." They all knew that it made sense. He paused and continued after they had left the main station area. "I know where it is—not far from here. From memory, I think it's near the Place D'Etoile. Come on, this way."

They tried to take side streets, to avoid the masses of demonstrators. Since they didn't know exactly where the embassy was, they ventured in the direction of Place D'Etoile. Unfortunately, this seemed to be where the demonstrators were heading too.

The area where they were walking had been restored following the civil war. The architecture was striking, with a mix of French and Ottoman style buildings, together with modern glass and steel office blocks. There were several cafés, restaurants and expensive shops to be seen. Despite this, Erik didn't get a warm feeling from peeking through shop windows—the faces staring back at him were grave, disapproving, and not all shops were occupied, leaving an impression of fairly recent neglect. In the distance they spotted the long line of demonstrators, now carrying green flags and shouting loudly in Arabic. If Emma or Paul could hear what they were shouting, they didn't bother to tell him, although he noticed that Paul was becoming increasingly edgy. From their tone, it was not a friendly demonstration. Most of the demonstrators seemed to be young men, some even teenagers.

"Let's have some lunch. I think we'll be safer off the streets", Paul suggested and they all thankfully agreed.

"Yes, I'm starving," Laura admitted. The first potentially suitable place they saw was a modern looking Italian restaurant. Venturing inside, away from the loud

shouting and hostility, was a great relief but it didn't last long. Despite Paul's polite greeting in Arabic and the fact that the place was empty, save for a small bold man reading the paper in the corner, the waiter pointed at the door with an angry face and ordered them to leave immediately.

"What was that all about?" Paul said as they were making their way back onto the street. "I've never been refused entry, especially not in this part of Beirut." They tried another couple of less western looking restaurants but the result was the same—they were refused entry. By now, Paul was almost jumping up and down from anger and confusion.

Emma was edgy, eyes roving. "What is going on here? I feel we're missing something. I think it was a mistake to venture into Beirut without watching the news or reading a paper first."

"I agree. I haven't caught up with the latest news since Crete," Erik said as he spotted another green flag a few streets down. Paul had also caught a glimpse of the banner.

"The message on the flag says 'God is great' in Arabic," he explained.

Emma had suddenly gone white and Erik understood that they were now near enough and she had heard what they were shouting. She stopped and they all followed her example. "I believe we are all in danger—especially you Erik!" she said, grabbing his shoulders. "Paul, did you hear what they said?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so. We need to get to safety." His gaze flickered as if he was planning a hasty escape but didn't know where to turn.

"Can you please tell me what's going on here?" Erik almost shouted as he started to feel ill and faint. He wished that they had been able to get a bite to eat. The hunger and thirst increased the surrealistic tinge to the situation.

Paul obliged: "What I have heard chanting is something like 'Death to the Danish'; 'Long live Islam! We are Muslims! We don't let anyone insult our prophet!' I think we all know what this is about and they are clearly out for the Danes. We are in great danger. They are unlikely to distinguish Danes from anyone looking remotely Scandinavian. We need to get to the British Embassy now!" He started to walk again, pulling the others along.

Erik was incredulous. He had of course heard the noises over the past few months about the unfortunate cartoons printed in a local Danish newspaper, *Jyllands Posten*, back in September, depicting the Muslim prophet Muhammad. But, he had never suspected that the whole thing could have escalated into such a situation so many months later! What none of them knew was that papers in France, Germany, Italy and Spain had reprinted the cartoons only a few days earlier in the name of free speech, fuelling the debate even further.

A few moments later they were at a loss as to where to go. They were trapped in a street which appeared surrounded by demonstrators, unable to enter any of the shops or restaurants. Erik now assumed that rather than hatred towards them in particular, the restaurateurs were probably unwilling to risk allowing any westerners to eat there as this would reflect badly on them in the eyes of the demonstrators, putting their livelihood at risk. He sympathised with this but thought it unfortunate and disappointing given that they were in grave danger on the street.

“I would say we would be in less danger if we covered up”, Laura suggested. “I have a scarf in my rucksack and someone can use this cardigan.” Everyone except Paul, who decided that he was not at risk, was soon wearing the garments. Erik could not help laughing in the middle of it all, as he felt enormously silly wearing Laura’s pink cardigan on his head. Emma and Laura joined him in a brief moment of hilarity before Paul pulled them along in the direction of Place D’Etoile.

“I know that as soon as I see the square I’ll know where the Embassy is. It shouldn’t be far from there.”

“Wouldn’t it be better to try to avoid the square?” Erik suggested but Paul simply stared back at him and ventured off at high speed, looking alarmed.

“Come on, we need to hurry!” Erik soon saw what had triggered this reaction. They had been spotted by some demonstrators on the other side. They were now walking towards them. They were all running side by side when Erik saw that Emma had lost her scarf covering her hair. He realised that she would be in grave danger as soon as they reached the square. Without hesitating he took off his pink cardigan and gave it to her. He would rather die himself than see her come to any harm.

“What about you?” She managed to squeak before Paul increased the speed and dragged them along. They were running along the side streets, still chased by a group of demonstrators. The moment they reached the square, the air was filled with smoke. It came from a few streets down, black and thick. The previously peaceful demonstration appeared now to have developed into rioting violent mess. Sirens could be heard in the distance. Young demonstrators were running around chanting and waving their banners, filling the square. There was no way they could cross the square but their brief pause had let the demonstrators behind them catch up. Paul didn’t hesitate. He ventured out in the crowd without looking back. Erik urged Emma and Laura to follow him. At least they were covered up. But Erik could not simply go forth into the crowd exposing his distinct Scandinavian looks. That would be close to suicidal. Instead he stopped for a second to take off his jumper to use it to put on his head. Suddenly he was back in his dream. The scene was almost identical to where he now found himself, apart from the absence of the calf with the sun disc which he had been riding in his dream and the golden temple. The angry mob behind him was getting closer. It was almost as if things were happening in slow motion. Fear gripped him with deadly force. For a moment he looked out in the direction of Emma and Laura. Paul had suddenly stopped and slowly turned his head in Erik’s direction. He grabbed Laura and Emma, who were now looking back at Erik considering whether to go back. But Paul pulled them along with force, pretending not to have seen Erik’s predicament. A second later Erik was attacked. He felt something hard on his head and his consciousness faded in an instant. The last thing he remembered was his own pathetic scream as his face hit the pavement.

Chapter 16

Emma suffered from emotions fluctuating between relief that they were safe and guilt that Erik wasn't, that they had left him behind. For all they knew he could be dead, his corpse lying on that distant corner of the square where they had selfishly left him to fend for himself only fifteen minutes earlier. He had saved her life and risked his own by giving her his head-scarf. She tried to tell herself that she had not had a choice. Paul had been adamant that they continue, to save themselves. He had even dragged them along. As soon as they had managed to find the British Embassy, Paul had ventured out again, to try to find Erik. Both she and Laura had offered to go with him but he had refused point blank. Instead, they had entered the Embassy building and had already been equipped with a mug of strong Earl Grey tea, sandwiches and a blanket each, together with confirmation that their assumptions of what was going on were correct. The smoke they had seen was coming from the Danish Embassy which had been attacked. Laura was crying on the sofa opposite her.

"We have got to... go... back out there!" she heaved between sobs. Emma knew exactly how she felt. She could not help sensing a great hole in her own heart, numbness, emptiness, sadness combined into a lump in her stomach.

"Well, I'm sure that Erik and Paul wouldn't have liked to risk their lives for us only to find that we then went and got killed looking for them. Let's take Paul's advice and stay here. I'm sure they'll be back soon." At that moment they were interrupted by a clerk, a young man, wanting to take their details; names, ages, travel itinerary, their reason for being in Beirut, who they were travelling with and a multitude of questions about Erik and Paul. The list went on. Emma was grateful for the interruption. It helped to divert her wondering mind. She was appreciative when the clerk promised, on Emma's request, that they would file Erik and Paul as missing persons at the local hospital, police station and on the Embassy website.

"This can't be good news. They should be back by now," Laura said with an almost squeaky voice after they had eaten. They called their parents and tried without much success to get some sleep. "What can possibly be taking so long?!"

The clerk entered the room, looking serious and edgy. Emma could no longer hold back the tears, suspecting the worst.

"The Maronite Catholic church near the Danish consulate has also been attacked," he said and continued: "I believe order was restored but I have just heard reports that a counter-demonstration of Christian protesters has gathered there, so it seems it's not over yet." He fell silent, as if in two minds about whether to continue. Emma could see Laura holding her breath, almost as if she was waiting for a death sentence.

"I'm afraid we need to ask you a few more questions about Paul." This was not what they had expected and Laura demonstrably released her suspended breath.

"Why? What's happened to him? Is he alright?" Emma asked quickly.

"We don't know where he is but something has come to our attention which the ambassador needs to ask you about. Please come with me." He took them to a nearby office with a pompous desk in the middle of the grand room and exquisite oil paintings decorating the walls. Emma dried her tears with her sleeve, feeling small and helpless. Behind the desk was a middle aged woman impeccably

dressed and her dark hair neatly arranged in a knot. As they entered, she stood up and greeted them by shaking their hands, introducing herself.

“Please sit down”, she offered, pointing at a couple of chairs in front of her desk. They obliged. “How do you know Paul Simmons?” She asked.

“I’m sorry but I believe we have already answered these questions”, Laura replied shortly as she turned to leave.

“Wait. I know but I’m afraid we need to know more. How well do you know him and has he been acting strangely at all?”

“Paul is a respected Oxford Professor and he has been my tutor for the past four years. We are very close. He’s not been acting strangely,” Emma said, feeling more and more annoyed. “Where’s this leading? I’m afraid you’ll have to explain! Paul is missing. We have no way of contacting him. He went out to search for our *Scandinavian* friend and as far as we know they could both be dead!” Emma could not help getting increasingly upset.

“Well, if it helps, we have had no reported deaths.” She seemed to resist adding ‘so far’. “I will explain but I should warn you that what I have to tell you may be upsetting.” She paused for a few seconds and continued. “We have had a call from the Swedish police. They have released a warrant for the arrest of Mr Simmons, for his involvement in a break-in and consequential manslaughter in Sweden.”

“What, that’s rubbish! Paul was not even in the country when the break in happened. And besides, I thought they had already caught the perpetrator?” Emma was shaken by the accusations. “How do you know this?”

“The Swedish police have good grounds for the warrant. They have indeed managed to catch the perpetrator, a professional burglar, and he has named Paul Simmons, Professor at Oxford University, as his employer.”

The ambassador might as well have stabbed her in the chest and left her to bleed to death. Emma felt as if she had been caught by a chilly wind which pulled her away from the real world and into a surreal nightmare.

“He’s lying! The Paul I know would never do something like that! Someone has set him up!” As soon as she had said it, Erik’s words of warning started to ring in her ears. Erik had suspected Paul. He had sensed that Paul was up to something. She had not believed him, just as she had not believed these very real accusations from the Swedish police just now. Yet a small niggling doubt started to form in her mind. She feared she may have been wrong about Paul, blinded by her love for him. She admitted to herself that she had been foolish. As she thought about it for a moment, she wondered whether Paul may even deliberately have led them into this mess. She needed to be alone with her thoughts but the questioning continued for another half hour before the ambassador was interrupted by a written message delivered personally by the clerk. She read it and looked at them, hesitating but apparently making a decision to tell them something.

“This message concerns you, or more specifically your friend Erik.” Emma’s heart jumped at the mention of Erik. She had no idea what could have happened to him, whether he was alive, injured or where he was. She could see Laura’s eyes light up. The ambassador continued: “The good news is that he’s alive. He was found injured but has been taken to hospital and is being treated for a concussion. The note does not give any details of the severity of the injury. When

things have calmed down, perhaps tomorrow, you can go to the hospital to find out more.”

It had been a long day. Both Emma and Laura were exhausted. They had been offered a room at the Embassy, an offer which they gladly accepted even though they still had their hotel room from a couple of days ago in another part of Beirut. The beds turned out to be uncomfortable but they were both grateful for the hospitality. It was simply not yet safe for westerners to wander the streets. Despite this, they were the only night-guests at the Embassy. The violence around the central district of Beirut had continued and they had not had another update. The Embassy had released a recommendation to all British nationals to leave Beirut. Emma had discussed this with Laura and they had agreed that they would both remain in the city until Erik was well enough to travel. At that point they didn't have an idea of how long that was likely to take.

As soon as Emma's head hit the pillow, her thoughts went to Paul. She did not have a clue where he could have escaped to. Having heard the whole story she suspected that the most likely answer was that he had left the country. Thinking back, Emma had slowly started to realise how strange Paul's behaviour had been, in particular after Erik's phone call with the news of the capture of the Torpa burglar earlier that day. The way he had led them straight into the danger zone was a bit peculiar but he may genuinely have been unaware of what was going on and where the riots were likely to take place. They had all been in the dark at that point and it was not unreasonable to believe that Paul had also been so. Emma pictured him, crossing the Mediterranean Sea, being chased by Swedish police officers. Europol may even have become involved to aid a European-wide search. She had no idea where he was likely to go; the UK was not an option. She speculated that he may have gone back to Crete or Athens but immediately dismissed that possibility on the basis that it would be too obvious if he knew that they were on to him. She simply could not believe he had done it; it made no sense and was very unlike him... A few minutes later, Emma fell asleep.

Chapter 17

What do you mean 'he has not yet woken up'?" Laura was close to tears again. "Are you saying that he's in a coma?"

"All I'm saying is that it could be another day or so until he recovers enough to gain consciousness. We see no reason why he won't make a full recovery. It should be fairly rapid once he wakes up but that could take a little while". The words from the doctor, in flawless English, were comforting.

"Thank you. That's a relief." Maybe because of the anticipation of their hospital visit, the relief upon finding out that Erik would recover fully or simply the stress of the previous day, Laura broke down in violent tears as soon as they left the hospital building.

"I... am... sorry, I just need a minute", she said between snivels. Emma put her arm around her and led her to the hospital entrance stairs where they sat down.

As an extra precaution, they both wore headscarves, both fairly modern looking. Emma's was white with gold stripes and Laura's a light green. The British Embassy clerk had bought them especially, a gesture which they had both been touched by. The street in front of them had a steady stream of traffic and the pavement was full of people of all ages. As they sat there on the stairs, protecting their identity for fear of attack, Emma realised how much she missed England, Paul, and their innocent existence in Oxford. She would have done anything to go back in time to before all this had happened. Maybe she should not have gone looking for the tablet. Perhaps that had been the first step in a series of events culminating in a chain reaction forcing Paul to commit a crime. No, she could not blame herself for what he had done. At that moment Emma suddenly came to a realisation, one which she should have reached much sooner.

"What's the matter", Laura asked, "You stirred".

"Nothing, just hungry I guess. My stomach's growling." She had never been very close to Laura and it didn't seem right to discuss Paul with her but her genuine look of concern, mixed with her teary eyes made Emma change her mind. She continued: "In fact, I just realised that ever since August last year, for nearly six months, Paul may have known what was in that chest; the Torpa chest which we glimpsed through a camera inside the space in the wall before the break-in! If our theory was right, he could have had the entire Torpa tablet, the other half of the keystone, for the last six months! He could have been working away at deciphering Linear A without telling me! He used me and kept me in the dark about any discovery that he might have made! He lied to my face! He knew how important the deciphering of Linear A was to me, yet he kept it to himself! For all I know, he might even have cracked the code by now! He committed a crime and for what? We would have got that wall opened eventually, I'm sure!" Now it was Emma's turn to be tearful, although she felt silly crying and tried her best to stay calm. She stood up and started walking. Laura followed.

"I believe he used us all," Laura said looking absent-mindedly in the other direction.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that, thinking about it, he may have used me and Erik too. Why did he even ask me to choose Atlantis as the topic of my dissertation? Why did he ask me to come to Crete? The tablet clearly conveys some interesting messages. If Paul actually does possess the Torpa tablet, he would not only have had access to the keystone to decipher Linear A. He would also have been able to read the text of the other side of the tablet! He would have known what the tablet said in its entirety."

"What makes you think that he would've wanted us to think about the story of the tablet?" Emma was confused.

"You probably don't know this, and I certainly didn't realise it until now but Paul seems to have left certain hints for us to follow. It is possible that the tablet revealed something of great interest. Because he had committed a crime to get the tablet in his possession he could of course not reveal the message to anyone. That would basically have incriminated him. Instead, he may have decided to use his students, and Erik as it turned out, to somehow work it out or to conduct research for him." At that stage Laura had dried her tears and was almost back to her normal self. Emma had done the same but she had exchanged her sadness for

anger—at Paul. They were walking slowly down a busy street without paying attention to where they were going.

“What sort of hints?”

“For starters, he left a message in a book and basically displayed it to Erik. It talked about a treasure in Athens. In Athens Erik realised that the treasure which Paul had referred to was actually the Mycenaean Gold collection at the Archaeological Museum in Athens. In the last few weeks, he has also been talking about the links between the Minoans and the Egyptians. You then found the name ‘Tetisheri’, the name of an Egyptian queen, on a Linear A item. At the same time, I was obviously working on my dissertation, reading up on Atlantis. My visit to Santorini, which revealed ancient remains from the period just before the Thera eruption, also helped to familiarise myself with the era when the tablet was likely to have been inscribed, all in line with what Paul had intended. He then made sure that Erik and I were talking and putting our theories together. I have to say, I think he succeeded in his plan—I think I have worked out what Paul wanted us to realise!”

“What are you saying? Have you come up with some sort of theory, something which you think the tablet may have revealed to Paul? Something about Atlantis?”

“Yes, I believe so”. Laura said it with a smile. “But I won’t tell you the whole story until Erik is conscious. He deserves to hear it first.”

For a moment they both seemed to forget that they were openly walking down a street in Beirut only a day after the violent demonstrations directed specifically at Westerners had ripped apart the city. The sun was shining and the streets were bustling with life, the buildings around them were modern and plenty of contemporary shops were open for business. Emma was surprised at the number of business people walking the streets. This was a modern city; not the war-ridden bullet infested place she had seen on television during the many gruelling years of civil war. Sure, there were still many traces of violence scattered around and the signs from the day before were still in full view but for the first time Emma looked at the city with optimism. She hoped that it had a brighter future ahead. She recalled the years of pointless fighting in the nineteen seventies and eighties and the perennial return of violence thereafter. What had it really been about, she asked herself.

They decided to have some lunch in a random modern and friendly looking café. They had only just ordered when something happened outside. The bang was so loud that the windows appeared to shake and a few moments later they heard people screaming and many rushed past them in panic. An older woman was half limping, half crawling by. Her skirt had blood stains and although she didn’t appear injured herself, the limping presumably pre-existing, someone else clearly had been, and badly at that.

“Oh my god, what’s happening? That’s it, I’m getting out of here,” Laura said.

“No wait, it’s dangerous, we should stay here. It’s probably another car-bomb. It’s safer than walking around for the time being.”

“I know, I don’t dispute that. I meant I’m getting out of Beirut, as quickly as I possibly can. I simply can’t stand it anymore. I don’t fancy coming back to England in a coffin, thank you very much! I know we should wait for Erik to wake

up but I'm sure he would prefer to see me alive rather than dead! This is not a good place for us Emma!"

Emma knew she was right. She knew they should follow the recommendations of the UK Government and leave Beirut, leave the risk zone, leave Erik but Emma hesitated for two reasons. She was aware that it was completely irrational but she was still half expecting Paul to come back and proclaim his innocence – and she wanted to be there if he did. She also wanted to be there for Erik when he woke up. She was his friend and he had risked his life for her...

Chapter 18

The small heart-shaped figures were dancing on his right arm, tickling him. They started to annoy him but he tolerated them as they were smiling happily at him as they were doing their routine. When they started to move towards his face, he had had enough and with a stern voice he ordered them to leave. He tried to shake them off but to Erik's alarm he could not move his arm. At that moment he realised that he also was not able to move his legs. In fact, he could not move at all. He could hear his own pathetic scream the second he regained consciousness. It was echoing around the room, bouncing up and down the walls, hitting the numerous bystanders surrounding him.

"He is waking up", were the first words he could hear. When he opened his eyes he was surprised to see only two vexed looking individuals next to his bed. There was light coming from the two windows on the opposite side. As his eyes adjusted to the brightness he observed Emma. A nurse adjusted something on his arm. He was lying on a bed in a fairly large room with a number of other occupied beds surrounding them, one with an old strange looking man screaming something apparently abusive in Arabic. It was immediately clear to him that they were still in Beirut. This gave him a strange feeling of relief as he saw that as a sign that he had not been unconscious for too long. The nightmare of the moments before the attack came back to him the second he glanced over at the screaming man. He was wondering what he was screaming about.

"How long have I been unconscious?" His voice was weak and sounded pitiable.

"Three days." Emma said it so matter-of-factly he was almost insulted. He had not expected kisses but at least a hug, or a smile. "I can't tell you how relieved I am that you're alright. We've been worried sick", she said smiling mildly. That was more like it he thought. She sat down on his bed.

"Where are Laura and Paul?" He had suddenly noted their absence and instantly thought the worst.

"Well, Laura flew home two days ago..." She fell silent. "There was a car bomb and..." she hesitated.

"It's ok, I understand. And Paul?"

"Well..." She mumbled something in Arabic and signalled at the nurse to leave them. She leaned closer to him. "You were right."

"What about?"

“About Paul, he’s wanted by the police for the Torpa break-in. The person he apparently hired to do it has finally talked.”

There was silence between them. Erik felt a mixture of satisfaction and regret. He had known Paul was up to something but he knew how much this would be hurting Emma.

“So, are you happy?” Emma asked a little sharply. “You got me. You were right. Paul was a thug after all.” She was suddenly getting upset with him. Erik found this a little annoying. It wasn’t his fault that Paul had done what he’d done!

“I’m not in some sort of competition with you Emma. Yes, I may have been right about Paul but then...” No, he wasn’t going to say it. He had considered telling her that he had only noticed Paul’s strange behaviour because he was blinded by jealousy and that he had feelings for her but he decided against it. It wasn’t the time or the place.

“Yes?”

“..But then I had a lot of spare time to sit around and watch you all on Crete.” He looked into her eyes for a few moments and her facial expression softened. Tears started forming in the corner of her green eye.

“Thank you for saving my life Erik. I must seem so ungrateful, sitting here berating you after you’ve been through so much.”

“I would willingly have thrown myself in front of those thugs to save you if I had had to.”

“Well, that’s basically what you did. If you hadn’t given me your scarf I would never have been able to walk across that square and I would probably not have been sitting here now. I would have been where you are, in a hospital bed, possibly dead.” She leaned over and kissed him on the cheek. After that they fell silent. Emma looked into his eyes. She hesitated and then leaned over almost as if to kiss him again. At that moment her mobile, which she had finally managed to charge while at the embassy, started ringing.

“It’s probably my mum again, pestering me with requests to fly home.” She struggled to find it for what felt like an eternity to Erik’s sore head. “Hello... Oh my god, where are you?... “

* * * * *

Emma was shocked to hear Paul’s crackly voice.

“...You have to help me! I’ve been framed. You have to find the person... did this to me! I will send you something in the post.”

“I will. I believe...” The phone at the other end died. Emma was confused. She knew that his behaviour had been very strange in the last couple of days but if he had been framed... it would mean that Paul may be an innocent victim. She wasn’t sure.

“What did he say? Where is he?” Erik had understood who it was.

“The line was very bad but I think I could make it all out. That he phoned from a pay-phone somewhere was obvious. His location wasn’t clear. He didn’t say where he was. He says he’s been framed and that he wants us to find the person who did it...” Emma deliberately looked at him as if to say ‘So you may not have been right about him after all!’

“You believe him? You believe that he’s innocent?” Erik asked in surprise.

“Of course I do!” she said sounding more convinced than she was. “He wants us to find the person who hired someone to break into your dear old Torpa.” The tone of her voice made Erik sure she had used the Swedish name of the house just to annoy him. “The person who indirectly caused the death of your grandmother and framed Paul, tarnishing his reputation as a respected and highly regarded professor! We need to clear his name, Erik. You need to help me!”

“And if I don’t want to? Maybe I believe it was him?”

“Well, do you? Do you think he would waste our time, asking us to look for his enemy for no reason, knowing that he did it, that there is no other perpetrator?”

“I wouldn’t be surprised...” He looked away.

Emma interrupted him and changed her tone of voice to something which she knew resembled begging. She felt in her heart that if Paul was innocent they would need to act swiftly. She had no intention of not helping Paul now—and she needed Erik on her side. “Erik, you’re my friend and I know I’ve used up all the favours I deserve from you but I need you and I would value your help in this. In fact, I could simply not do it without you. Please.”

“Why on earth does Paul think that you and I could do this? Why does he put his life in our hands? We don’t know anything about his situation. In fact, if he has known anything about this before, he has certainly done a good job keeping us in the dark about it!”

“I know Paul. He was probably just as surprised as you or I when he found out that he was wanted by the police. Conducting a break in would simply not occur to him. Maybe he doesn’t have anyone else he can trust. Or maybe he really thinks that we are best placed to solve this, given that we are the ones who know all about the background to the sad state of affairs, about the break-in, the tablet and everything else. You have to see that we are the obvious people for him to call! Who else could he call? His ageing mother? His suspicious university colleagues?”

“The police!” Erik almost shouted and a couple of people in the hospital room turned their heads.

“I’m sure he’s going to the police as well but what if they don’t believe him?” said Emma quietly. All evidence points to him. The burglar has even named him as the person who arranged the break-in. How can he argue with that without proof to the contrary?”

“I will try to help but don’t expect me to believe him until we find some counter evidence.”

“Of course, thank you Erik. You’re the best!” She gave him a quick peck on his lips and stood up. She was happier than she had been for a while. Paul may not have done it! Paul may not have had the tablet all this time! All her suspicions about his bad intentions may not have been true. Emma had to admit to herself that she still had a sliver of doubt about his sincerity but fundamentally she believed him. “Get some sleep, because we need to get you out of here as quickly as possible!”

* * * * *

It was to take another three days for Erik to recover. After the nurse had stopped giving him drugs his head had started to hurt badly and he had had a brief slant of fever before finally starting to feel better. He was still not entirely fit

but his doctor was happy to let him go. Erik knew his own body well enough to know that he was out of danger. Emma had been a great support, staying by his side. She had even managed to speak to the little man who Erik had mistaken for a mental patient due to his constant shouting which Erik could not understand. Apparently he had been asking for some more water and complaining about the poor service provided by hospital staff.

They were in a car, stuck in traffic, on their way to the airport when Emma's phone rang again. Sure that it was Paul once again, she was surprised to hear the deep voice of a man introducing himself as Inspector Gunnar Holmqvist from the Swedish police. He had a strong Swedish accent.

"We have heard that you perhaps have been contacted by Professor Paul Simmons in the last few days. Is that correct?" Emma hesitated for a moment but decided to tell the truth.

"Yes, he called two or three days ago but I only spoke to him very briefly. He said he was innocent and that someone had framed him". The police officer was quiet for a moment.

"Is that all he said?"

"Yes." Emma considered whether to mention that he had asked them to find the perpetrator but decided not to.

"It is my duty to inform you that the yacht which Paul Simmons was last seen in, belonging to his friend Athos Palaikastro, has been found abandoned near the place where he was last seen, on the Spanish south coast near Cadiz. There's no sign that there were any passengers when the boat went to the shore and according to the Spanish Authorities it appears that Mr Simmons perhaps has fallen overboard during the night. All the life vests were still onboard and there didn't appear to be any attempt to moor the vessel. A search of the surrounding area has already been conducted and there are no signs of a body but the currents around that area can be very strong. If Mr Simmons did fall overboard the chances of his survival are slim. I'm sorry." Emma fell silent. Her face was expressionless like a stone. She was in shock, unable to cry, unable to speak, unable to believe.

"I don't believe you. Paul is an excellent swimmer and diver. He would not drown. He simply wouldn't drown. You have to keep searching for him. He's not dead and he's innocent! He was on his way to the police. He will show up at your doorstep soon."

"We will continue our search for him. You may well be right. We'll keep you informed... and please contact us if you should hear from him."

Chapter 19

Oxford, February 2006

Emma was desperate to find a package, letter or message from Paul. After all, he had promised to send her something in the post when they had last spoken. She was pinning all her hopes on this message. Without it they had very little to go

on and no evidence that could prove whether Paul had something to do with the break in. Following a brief stop at Emma's parent's house in Islington in central London, a modest mid-terrace council house, Emma and Erik travelled to Oxford in a rental car. Erik had refused to borrow Emma's parents' old Volvo even though they had offered more than once in the hour they were there. Not because he had anything against old cars or Volvos but because he suspected it was their only car. In spite of the fact that Emma's family was far from wealthy, Erik was jealous of her for growing up with loving parents and two brothers. He had never been short of money but had never felt loved by his absent parents. He had no brothers or sisters and had had a lonely depressing childhood in a big empty house. His gloomy reflections about his life were not helped by the fact that he had trouble with work. They kept calling him, requesting that he return. He had only booked a week off initially, had managed to get another week and now he had been away for over three, mainly due to his serious concussion. When he had called his boss to ask to have another week it had been on the understanding that he would return at the end, provided he was well enough, and attend an important client meeting. In fact, he was meant to have gone straight to Sweden from Beirut, via a three hour stopover in London. When Emma had had the news about Paul's disappearance, Erik had decided that Emma needed him and that she wouldn't rest until they had at least attempted to find the person who supposedly had framed Paul. Erik had to admit that he still believed Paul was guilty. In any event, he had found the decision to stay with Emma an easy one. Work had to come second where such bewildering events had occurred and he was still not entirely recovered. But his boss had not been understanding and had made threats about postponing his promotion to partner by at least another year unless he returned that week. This had put him in a difficult position. He had agreed to make some calls from London and to meet up with a UK based client whilst he was there already the next day and then return to Sweden as soon as he possibly could.

As they arrived in Oxford Emma parked outside the blocks of flats of her student residence. Erik got out of the passenger seat and was just about to open the boot when he saw a familiar face in the distance, walking across the road. He froze. He thought he had seen Mary Brown from Athens, wearing a thick winter jacket and a woolly hat but no, he decided, it couldn't be. He must have been mistaken, but the resemblance was uncanny, at least from where he was standing. Her being in England would also explain her absence from Athens.

"What's the matter?" Emma asked. You look as if you've seen a ghost."

"Oh, nothing. I thought I saw someone but..." He didn't say anything further. His head was spinning. He didn't want to start running after this person only to find that she was a complete stranger. But what if it was her; what would she be doing there? Emma had taken her large suitcase out of the car and struggled with it. "I'll take it," he offered. They went inside the house and up three flights of stairs.

"I really hope Paul's sent me something. He said he would, didn't he?"

Erik thought for a while and then said: "Yes, he did."

They stopped outside her door on the third floor while Emma searched for her keys. He didn't know what he had expected from Emma's flat but he was shocked by the chaos that met his eyes. It was a small studio flat with only one room

housing a bed, a kitchen and living room area with a two-seater sofa and a coffee table. It had two fairly large windows and high ceiling making the room swim in natural light. The state of decoration could have been vastly improved, with walls painted in a dark green colour, disturbing for its minimising effect. The kitchen was so small that it might as well have been portable. The furniture was generally old but not antique. Erik guessed that Emma had bought it all in a flea-market or perhaps she had been paid to take it on. Thin white curtains surrounded both windows and Erik noticed that wooden blinds had been installed recently, as the dust from the drilling was still on the window sill. His overall impression of the place was tainted by the disarray surrounding them. Clothes littered the floor, the drawers of the desk and the wardrobe were open and the bed was unmade leaving the sheets in a jumble.

“Oh my God!” was all Emma managed to say.

Erik was stunned and speculated: “There must have been a break in. Someone was looking for something. They’ve been through everything!”

“Yes, look! Someone’s searched my desk too. I never leave the draws open.”

“They’ve also searched through your clothes and bed.”

Emma was quiet for a moment and slow blush reached her cheeks. She reluctantly admitted: “Well, they may not have done that. I was in a bit of a rush when I left for the airport. But someone has definitely been in here and searched my desk!” She marched out and knocked on the door of the next door neighbour, someone called Kate. Erik followed. Kate was home. She was a short dark haired girl who, according to Emma’s brief introduction, studied maths. Erik was relieved that she was able to give them an explanation.

“The police were here. It was about a week ago now. I didn’t see what they did and they weren’t in there for very long. I stayed in my flat, not wanting to get in their way. I’ve been worried about you Emma.”

“I’m fine but Professor Simmons may not be. He’s been reported missing; in Spain. They found the yacht he was on abandoned and...” She paused, still upset by it all.

Erik helped her out. “The police think he may have drowned.” Seeing Emma’s face, he continued. “But we don’t think so”.

“I heard rumours about it but I couldn’t believe it. They said he’s wanted in connection with some sort of burglary where someone died”.

“That’s right”, Emma said. “But Erik and I believe he’s innocent and we’re trying to find the person who framed him.”

“Well I hope you succeed. I know he’s your favourite professor,” Kate said with a crooked smile before they said goodbye.

Erik helped Emma tidying up the flat. It felt awkward making someone else’s unwashed bed but he did it nevertheless. “How can you be so sure Paul’s innocent?” he asked, voicing what he had been thinking the whole journey there.

“Well obviously someone’s conspiring against him” she pointed out. “All evidence appears to point to him as guilty but as Paul said when he called, someone has set him up and mixed up the evidence. The burglar has named him as the person who hired him for the break-in, which is strange in itself. What employer of criminals would give their own name? Would Paul really be that stupid? I don’t think so.”

“If we then start with the assumption that Paul is alive and that he’s innocent,” Erik suggested soberly, “why would someone want to nail Paul? Who would have anything to gain by it, or have something against him?”

“That’s what Paul wants us to figure out. It’s a shame that if Paul had sent something to me here the police probably have it now...” she said and he could see she was close to tears. Erik wanted to shout that it was probably for the best and that if Paul was alive he should immediately go to the police, but he didn’t want to upset her. He was just about to say something about Paul’s innocence when he spotted a brown package, the size of a book, in the corner next to the front door under the shoe-stand. There was also a letter from the university.

“Look there!” he said. “It must’ve been dropped through the letter box after the police were here. It probably moved when we opened the door!” In the mess they hadn’t spotted it immediately. Emma dropped the jumper she was folding and grabbed the package off the floor. It took her no more than a few seconds to rip open the packaging to reveal a book. She looked at it for a moment, standing still without saying a word then suddenly started to cry. Erik didn’t know what to say but he guessed that the book, which looked like a ‘dummies guide’ to something, was from Paul. He walked over to her, putting his arms around her as she started to shake.

“Come, sit down”. He led her to the bed and made her sit. With his arm still around her, he let her cry on his chest. The book fell on the floor. It was not the first time he had seen her cry in the last couple of days but she normally recovered quickly. Unusually this time it made her seem vulnerable. Despite everything it made him like her even more. He resisted the urge to kiss her. He knew it wouldn’t be right. The reason for her tears was another man who may or may not be alive and who she still had strong feelings for. But why had Paul sent her this book and why had it prompted such a reaction from her? Erik was puzzled. He picked up the book from the floor. It was the ‘Dummies guide to computers’ and he noticed that it was a library book. He was none the wiser. Emma eventually dried her face with the bottom end of the bed covers and broke the silence.

“I gave this to Paul some time ago to tease him. He’s surprisingly computer illiterate. Paul didn’t appreciate it at the time.” she laughed. “I also had to pay a hefty fee to the library for it as I didn’t want to remind him to return it to me.”

“Surely, a library fee couldn’t be the reason for him sending you this book in the post at such a distressing time, could it?”

“No, I suspect not,” she laughed again drying her tears with her sleeve. “He must have left a message somewhere in here.” Erik was relieved to see that she quickly cheered up and started to feel excitement at the prospect that Paul may have communicated something to them. He was also intrigued that they were about to find something out.

“Yes, let’s have a proper look through.” He started to flick the pages from the start but Emma asked him to go straight to page thirteen.

“May I ask why?”

“Number thirteen is Paul’s favourite number. He’s always been fascinated by why number thirteen is seen as unlucky. There’re obviously plenty of fairly ‘modern’ explanations, such as that Judas was the thirteenth apostle to sit down

at the last supper before he went on to betray Jesus or Friday the thirteenth being the day that the Knights Templar were slaughtered.”

“Those are modern explanations?”

“Well, it depends on how you see it. Paul’s fascinated by the fact that already in 1800 BC the Mesopotamian Code of Hammurabi leaves out number thirteen in its numbered list of laws, perhaps suggesting that number thirteen was unlucky for some reason or event happening in pre-historic times.” Erik flicked to page thirteen and Emma shouted immediately: “Look! I was right!” In the inner margin on page thirteen was some diagonal scribble in what Erik guessed was Linear A or B. The writing appeared to have been hastily noted down with a pencil.

“Look, Paul’s left us a message in Linear A. It’s going to take me a little bit of time to read it.” She went over to her half tidy desk, sat down and started to make notes on a pad of paper. Erik stood looking over her shoulder as she was working.

“Can you please go over there to the bed? You’re distracting me.”

“Am I now? I’ll be waiting on the bed” Erik said with a pretend flirty voice. Emma looked up and laughed. He watched her work for the better part of an hour before she stood up, scratching her head.

“Paul’s left us a message using Linear A writing. I’ve written it out using Linear B values and it’s in Swedish!” Erik walked over and looked over Emma’s shoulder at what she had scribbled down on the paper:

‘NYA TECKEN FINNES I DENNA KORTA RAD’

“Does it mean anything?” Emma asked. “Is it Swedish?”

“It is indeed. Paul must’ve learnt something when he was in Sweden. It’s not very helpful though. It says ‘New signs can be found in this short line’. That doesn’t help us at all, does it?”

“I’m not sure. Evidently Paul must have intended to say something by it. Could he have meant something about the actual translation of the Linear A? Perhaps he used a special order which is the same as in the tablet? Or perhaps it’s an anagram!”

“New signs can be found in this short line.” Erik repeated it. “Let’s put it into an anagram translation site.” They opened Emma’s computer and quickly found one on the internet.

“Look at this: ‘Faddrarna Ikea Tecknen Snyten Nio’. Who would have guessed they would be able to put an IKEA in there! What does it mean?” Emma was pointing at one of the first results on the page.

“Nothing unfortunately. It means ‘The fathers IKEA the signs bundles nine’. Somehow I don’t think this is what Paul tried to communicate”, Erik chuckled. Emma laughed as well. They looked down the long list of possible anagrams but none made any sense.

“Try English? Paul could have written it in English”, Emma suggested. The anagram site was multilingual and Erik tried the Swedish sentence using English as the language. “Look, only 34,483 options! The first possibility is a rather amusing ‘A Anaconda Tenderfeet Kirks Ninny’. This’ll take a while. And Paul could have used Swedish, Spanish, Latin, Arabic or even ancient Egyptian for all I know!

What was he thinking?" Emma rolled her eyes in desperation. Erik smiled and held her chin with his hand.

"You look exhausted. We don't have to solve this now," he said and then looked around to see the white envelope still on the floor. "Aren't you gonna open that letter as well?" He picked it up and handed it over to her.

"Sure, it's from the university." She opened it. "They've arranged a replacement professor for Paul. Professor Brown. I don't know him. Apparently I have a scheduled meeting with him tomorrow. Lucky that I'm here in Oxford."

"Her", Erik added. "I think you'll find that Professor Brown is a woman".

"How do you know that?"

"Remember I told you about the professor in Athens who Paul and I met up with. I believe this is her. Professor Mary Brown."

"But how can you be so sure, Brown is a very common name?"

"I think I just saw her, just now when we arrived. She's here in Oxford and I can only assume that she's the Professor Brown who's now your new professor. I didn't tell you about it when I saw her as I wasn't sure but now it seems almost inevitable."

"Is she not also the Professor Brown who told you not to trust Paul?" Emma recalled with a frown.

"She certainly is. And following our meeting I've not been able to get hold of her. All very strange. And we also know that Paul has told her his theory about the tablet."

"Well, that should make my meeting with her tomorrow all the more interesting..."

Chapter 20

Her shoes against the aging stone steps made a familiar echoing sound. For some reason Emma was nervous as she climbed the stairs to Paul's office on the third floor of one of the older University buildings. Not only had she not made enough progress on her dissertation, she also had to come face to face with Paul's temporary replacement who Erik had been sure was the woman who had warned Erik about Paul on his visit to Athens. To make matters worse, she was in fear of breaking down in tears at the sight of Paul's desk, occupied by someone else only a few days after his disappearance.

As she approached the closed door to his office she hesitated. Paul had always left his door wide open and Emma was already then forming a disliking towards Professor Brown for not being approachable. How was she supposed to act meeting this person? She took a deep breath and knocked on the door. She almost jumped as a pleasant sounding woman's voice urged her to come in.

"You must be Emma", she said with a smile. She had a friendly face, Emma noted. She stood up and shook Emma's hand.

"Yes, pleased to meet you Professor Brown".

“Call me Mary,” she said immediately, confirming once and for all that Erik had been right. “I’ve been keen to meet you. I know Paul well and he told me a lot about you and your extraordinary linguistic talent.”

“I’m sure that...” Emma started to say but was interrupted.

“No, no need to deny it. I know your background and what you’ve achieved in your years here. All very impressive. I have to say that I’m more than a little eager to hear about your dissertation. We share an interest in Linear A. I’ve spent a few years at Athens University and it’s almost impossible to avoid getting into the whole Linear A and Linear B debate. Please, sit down.” Emma hesitated, wanting to leave the room but sat down.

“To be completely honest with you, I wish I had made more progress on my dissertation. You might know that I recently accompanied Paul ... Professor Simmons ... on a research trip to Crete. I spent some time there translating original Linear A texts using Linear B values and made some good headway on that but unfortunately I didn’t get any closer to decipherment and I felt as if I was wasting time, to tell you the truth.” Emma fell silent. Mary looked surprised but seemed to compose herself quickly. Emma was unsure what had prompted this reaction.

“I understand. Your achievements in Heraklion were good and I think Paul was right to take you. I’m not going to blame you for not having made progress on your dissertation during this time. It’s perfectly understandable.” She hesitated. “But I have to confess that I’m a little surprised. When Paul came to visit me in Athens, I got the impression that some significant progress had recently been made in the decipherment work. Paul gave me that impression. I thought you would have been involved.”

Emma regained the feeling of having been betrayed by Paul. Had he really made progress without telling her? Had he perhaps had the tablet to help him?! Emma did her best to conceal her inner turmoil. “If he had, he didn’t tell me.”

Mary didn’t even try to hide her disappointment. “That’s a shame but let’s talk about what you’ve achieved so far and what I can do to help.”

This was the enquiry Emma dreaded but she gave a summary of the limited progress she had made. To her surprise, Mary’s guidance was helpful and she left Paul’s old office with a feeling of renewed energy to do more work, with some new avenues to think about. Just before she left, she had asked the question which had been constantly on her mind. “I just thought I might ask. Do you have any idea where Paul could be? The police believe he could have had an accident, or may even be dead.”

“I really don’t know, Emma. All I know is that he asked me to contact the university to offer to cover for him. I agreed of course. I was just about to return to the UK anyway. He said he had to go away for a few weeks but didn’t say where. I didn’t ask. Knowing him he’s probably engulfed in his research somewhere. It wouldn’t be the first time.” She laughed a brief dry laugh, deep in thought for a moment. “Rest assured he will come back soon.”

Her response was comforting. At least Professor Brown didn’t think Paul was dead.

Walking home, she was feeling somewhat disgruntled but determined. Mary had sown a seed of doubt in her mind about Paul’s honesty. She didn’t like this at all

but it made her resolute to find out who had conducted the Torpa break-in, simply to prove that it wasn't Paul. But first, she decided, she would pay some attention to her dissertation. Erik had gone to London to see a client and she spent the rest of the afternoon working alone at her desk in her unusually tidy flat. It was late by the time Erik got back, looking drained.

"Clients!" he said with a sigh. "Looks like my team in Sweden have a busy few days ahead. I need to get back soon unfortunately, in the next few days."

In spite of his tiredness he looked stunning, Emma noted. He was still wearing his suit but had taken off his tie and undone the top buttons of his shirt. Having been away from him all day, it was as if she was looking at him with a fresh pair of eyes. He walked over to one corner of the room and started to change clothes. Emma suddenly had a strange flashback to the lake in Sweden when he had been swimming naked.

"How was your day?" he asked. "Any exciting news about Mary?"

She told him all about her conversation with Mary. "I would say, either Mary is not telling the whole story or Paul is hiding something," she finished.

"I'd probably say it's both."

"There may be a third option though. She might just suspect Paul of something, without knowing for sure whether it's anything inappropriate or illegal. Maybe she's looking into it as well". Erik had finished changing clothes. Wearing grey cotton pyjamas he sat down on the sofa and Emma got up from her desk chair to sit next to him. "Whatever you say Professor Brown has been acting strangely," she said. "And she basically got Paul's job at Oxford after his disappearance. She had everything to gain from getting Paul out of the way," She hesitated for a moment and continued. "She might have had an ulterior motive; to find out more from me about Paul's progress on Linear A. When I met her today, she said she was surprised that I had not been involved and that I didn't know what Paul had discovered."

"Alright, say she's involved and that she hired the burglar to steal the tablet at Torpa and at the same time framed Paul, what possible motive could she have had?"

"The obvious motive would have been to get priority access to the tablet and be the first to decipher Linear A," she responded quickly. "And to get Paul's job."

"But why frame Paul; I thought they were friends? When I met them in Athens they were very friendly... until Mary started to warn me about Paul behind his back that is. But anyway I don't think it's a good enough reason."

Emma hesitated. "I suppose, Mary actually seemed like a nice person. I can't believe she would have committed a crime in pursuit of her own fame and fortune. She simply doesn't seem like that sort of person."

"I'm glad you think so," Erik agreed. "I had the same impression of her, even though I found it a bit strange the way she warned me about Paul and then disappeared from the face of the earth without returning my phone calls."

"But what about that Professor in Crete? What was his name?" Emma searched her brain.

"Professor Palaikastro," Erik said. "What about him?"

"Well, he's another person in all this who may have had an interest in finding the tablet and who also knew Paul", she suggested. "Who knows what dealings

they might have had and what he thought of Paul? For all we know he could have had a particular grudge against Paul for some reason.” She paused and stood up to get her laptop on the desk. “He’s not a pure linguist though, I don’t think. I’m not sure why he would suddenly want to be the first to decipher Linear A, when he’s not within that field and wouldn’t have had the ability to crack the code even with the tablet!”

“I agree,” Erik said before Emma continued, arguing against herself.

“But could it be that he was interested in the tablet for the sake of its contents, the possible references to the ten plagues, Atlantis or anything else which he may have read into the half tablet? Or could he have had a particular desire to prevent other people from seeing the other half? He would have known about the ‘opening of the wall’ at Torpa and would have been in close contact with Paul. He would also have known, similar to Mary, of any progress Paul had made. To me, Professor Palaikastro should be a key suspect.”

“Hm, yes we should consider this,” Erik said. “Thinking about it, why would Professor Palaikastro have lent Paul his yacht? He could have done it to incriminate him—to make it look as if Paul was avoiding flying which would involve scrutiny, hiding and keeping a low profile! That Paul was trying to avoid the authorities certainly crossed my mind when he came to Crete in the yacht.”

“But what interest would Professor Palaikastro have had in the tablet?” Emma asked, playing the devil’s advocate. “How about we check his background.” She opened her laptop. Erik made himself comfortable on the sofa, leaning back and resting one of his legs on the table. His eyes were bright and he looked at her logging in. She couldn’t believe it was only Monday and that she had only arrived in Oxford the day before. Their eyes met for a split second. He smiled, making his dimples in his cheeks appear. She smirked back. She got her computer up and running and Googled ‘Professor Palaikastro’. The amount of hits was staggering. He had certainly been a busy man over the last twenty or thirty years. Erik looked over her shoulder at the screen. One of the more recent hits which caught their eye was the mention of the professor’s name in connection with a recent study on the origins of the Phoenicians. This study focussed on verifying, by pursuing DNA tests, whether there was any truth in the assertion that the Phoenicians had emigrated from various places to the eastern Mediterranean. Professor Palaikastro had been referred to as one of the authorities in the historical analysis of their findings.

They continued searching through the hits on the name of the professor but couldn’t find anything which seemed remotely controversial or connected to the messages of the Torpa tablet or Linear A. They found out he was in his sixties, a bit overweight, balding and wore thick glasses. Not exactly pin-up material. His career seemed to have gone up and down with a few highs prompting the mention of his name in the press. He was mainly known for his work on the history of the Mycenaeans but had also done a lot of research on the Phoenicians. Once again they had reached a dead end... In spite of Professor Palaikastro’s dealings with Paul and his yacht, they had not been able to find a strong enough motive for him to somehow steal the tablet or frame Paul. They decided to keep him in mind though. Erik suggested that they should ask Mary about his relationship with

Paul and to discuss their thoughts with Laura when they met up with her the following evening.

They never got a chance to... It was past midnight when Erik's mobile phone rang. They looked at each other wondering who would call at this hour. Emma's immediate thought was to Paul. She thought maybe he was trying to get in touch again. She hoped he was ok. She was disappointed when Erik answered in Swedish. It was his mother.

After a very short conversation, Erik hung up the phone and simply stared out of the window, his face impassive, emotionless except for a slight glistening in his eyes as they reflected the streetlights outside. He didn't turn his head, he just said: "They have found Anna..."

Chapter 21

Sweden, February 2006

Erik was surprised at his mixed feelings as the plane approached Landvetter airport outside Gothenburg. Hundreds of dark calm lakes were breaking up the green pine tree lined landscape. With his eyes fixed on a few houses next to a lake below them, he found himself struggling not to think about Anna. The shocking news from his mother the night before was still at the forefront of his mind. He had taken the decision to fly home immediately and await the return of Anna's body. After over a year her remains had been identified among the forgotten bodies of the Tsunami disaster—in Sweden! Not long ago finding her body had been his most urgent wish, save for finding her alive. He had thought that being able to bury her in Sweden near his family at Torpa would have been the only event allowing him to find some sort of closure. But now, after he had finally been able to move on with his life, the news of the find of her remains had ripped open a wound which had only just started to heal. He was once again crying inside, feeling guilty that he had allowed himself to have feelings for someone else.

He was even feeling a bit awkward about Emma's presence next to him. She had insisted that she should come with him, to support him like he had supported her and be there for him at the funeral in a few days' time. He had asked her not to, on the basis that he wanted to be alone but she had been adamant that he needed her and that she would be happy to come. He was debating with himself whether this had been the right decision. Only a few hours had elapsed since his mother's phone call and it was too early to say. It was almost as if Anna had made a statement from her grave that he should not move on and forget about her. He had allowed himself to fall in love again. Emma had preoccupied his thoughts over the last few months, rather than Anna, and even though his feelings had never been reciprocated, he had sensed over the last few days in Oxford that she was perhaps starting to think of him differently. Was it a coincidence that at this particular point in time, Anna had in a way come back into his life?

He knew that his thoughts were irrational and that the ghost of Anna was a figment of his imagination but it had been such a strange series of circumstances which had suddenly led to the recovery of her body. His mother had told him the story which she in turn had heard from the Swedish policeman who had visited them at Torpa the evening before to deliver the news in person. It involved the demise of a wealthy Swedish business man and his state of depression and guilt over his acts of lunacy at a time of distress. This man had lost his own wife in the Tsunami on the beach of Khao Lak. They had occupied a beach hut in the same area as Anna and Erik and he had spoken to Anna just before the waves had struck. He had managed to hang on to a tree but his wife of twelve years had immediately disappeared out of sight. Anna had not even told him her name and he knew nothing about her and vice versa. But those few moments had somehow made a significant impression on him and had been etched into his memory. When Anna had lost her grip and gone under water he had risked his life to save her by jumping in after her. In vain he had searched the waters around him but had soon decided that it was a suicidal task. She was gone. After the event, like Erik, he had spent some time searching for his own wife. It had been an emotional time and when he had come across Anna's body in one of the makeshift morgues it was almost as if he had somehow found something to hold on to, something tangible; perversely almost proof that his own wife was dead. He had later explained to the police that it had felt like the right thing to do at the time. He had not managed to save this beautiful unknown woman from dying but because they had shared the last moments of her life, he had felt a strong connection with her and he had wanted to ensure her safe passage back to Sweden. He refused to leave her. The only way he could take her body to Sweden was to identify her as his own wife. He would later bury her in Sweden under his wife's name, in a closed coffin. Their two children were able to visit the grave of their mother and never have to wonder whether their mother was still out there in Thailand, dead or alive. That doubt would always be preserved only for himself. After the funeral his life had taken a nasty turn. His oldest child had died in a freak car accident just outside the graveyard where Anna had been buried and in the aftermath he had lost his business; his life savings and his house had been repossessed. The guilt he was feeling over the lie he had told had absorbed him and he had concluded that it had been the ghost of the young woman he had buried in his wife's place who had sent him mad and who had brought misfortune into his previously happy and prosperous life. Over a year after the funeral he had taken the decision to come clean; to tell of the crime he had committed and let the body of the unnamed woman return to her rightful home, just like she, he imagined, had demanded. Her coffin had been dug up and the man had helped to identify Anna from photos of missing persons from the Tsunami in Khao Lak. He had looked through over a hundred photos before Anna's familiar green and brown eyes had stared back at him.

Despite everything, Erik was grateful to the man. He had been there for Anna in her last moments alive and brought her body back to Sweden, whatever his motive for doing so. He had eventually come clean about his crime; even though it had taken him over a year. It was certainly a tragic story. He was wondering how such an identification blunder could have been allowed to occur. The identification of

corpses was conducted using dental records and DNA tests. But he was aware that at the beginning of the identification work, when family members were allowed to identify by inspection, the normal procedures had been side stepped and errors had been admitted by the Swedish authorities. There had been outrage in Sweden about this at the time, in particular as many were of the view that family members would not have been in a psychologically sound state to be able to positively identify their deceased loved ones. Certainly in this unfortunate case, this had proved to be true.

The plane touched down. After passport control and baggage collection they were once again breathing Swedish air. It was relatively cold but no snow. Emma was trying her best to cheer him up, happily chatting on about how wonderful it was to be back in Sweden and how she was looking forward to working on her dissertation in the Torpa library. Nowhere else had she felt more relaxed and focussed. She described Torpa as a second home. This did cheer Erik up, as he took this as a sure sign that she at least enjoyed his company. She also suggested that being near the scene of the crime would allow them to make progress on the search for the person who may have set Paul up. Even though it was normally quite costly, they took a taxi from the airport to the estate. As always, the trip took an hour. In this hour Emma had talked Erik through all angles of her dissertation that she was planning to cover over the next couple of weeks. Linguistics normally didn't interest Erik and he was only half listening to her. The other half of his brain was planning his wife's overdue funeral. One of the main questions was where to bury her. He knew where Anna herself would have preferred. He was unsure whether this would be appropriate though. The place was not a burial site.

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It had been one of Anna's favourite spots, the Torpa woods by the Rune Stone. She had even suggested that they should have their wedding ceremony there but Erik had found the idea absurd. It was a pretty meadow with an interesting history but it was in the middle of the forest! In the end they got married at Torpa. The burial ground of the estate was where his ancestors lay buried and would probably also be where he would lay to rest one day. In the evening after their arrival at Torpa, Erik had called Anna's parents. They had suggested their local grave yard in Gothenburg, only ten minutes from their house. With her there they could easily visit her grave and look after it. Erik had agreed to this but only an hour later Anna's mother had called again, having changed her mind. She had known that this was not what Anna would have wanted. In fact, Anna would have hated their over sized local grave yard and its modern church. Her relatives were spread all over the country and there was no other obvious place. She reverted back to Erik's original suggestion, by the Rune Stone, close to her loved one.

Already the next morning Erik suggested that they go there, to choose a suitable spot. Emma took his hand as they wandered the path to the now familiar meadow. He understood that this was to support him and to show that she cared for him as a friend, rather than any declaration of love. In any event, Erik appreciated it. He looked over at her. She looked nice in spite of her baggy winter jacket and hat. Her cheeks were healthy red and her eyes were shining in the winter sun. She looked very different from Anna though, who had had a naturally tanned face with

freckles and distinct laughter dimples in her cheeks. He missed her. It was warm for February, around ten degrees. There was no snow on the ground and the sun was out.

“How will the logistics of this work?” Emma asked referring to the distance from the house to the stone.

“It’s a bit of a trek from Torpa and it feels like it’s in the middle of nowhere but one of our neighbours lives only five minute walk away from the stone and I’m sure they will let us all park there. It’ll be alright, as long as the weather holds up.”

They eventually reached the meadow. The stone looked just like it had done the previous summer but as expected; winter had taken its toll on the grass, leaving unflattering pale green moss in its place. There were no flowers to be seen and the whole place looked a bit sorry, scattered with dead leaves on the brink of decomposing and surrounded by naked trees. Even so Erik still sensed the magic of the place. The lonely stone on the little hill had not lost its romantic appeal, appearing as if it had been taken straight from the history books. Somehow it looked even more mysterious in these winter conditions than in the summer. It was easier to imagine the Vikings who had inscribed it. He noticed that Emma had tears in her eyes. He understood that she was thinking about Paul. He decided to embrace her. She cried on his shoulder for a moment. Erik wanted to cry but couldn’t. He looked around, trying to visualise where it would be appropriate to bury his wife. Somehow it didn’t feel right to put another stone in this place. The one stone there dominated the area and another stone would never live up to the one on the hill, or would even detract from it. Adding another stone might ruin the mystery and the balance of the place. It simply didn’t feel right. They walked around for a bit. Erik was just about to call it all off when Emma suddenly noticed something unusual.

“Look! Over there.” She was pointing in the direction of an area behind the hill. They walked over. Erik noticed it too. The earth had been recently disturbed. It looked as if someone had dug a hole.

“Very strange... Who would want to dig a hole out here?” He walked up to it and studied it closely.

“Someone who wants to hide something, Emma said with a mysterious smile.”

“What are you suggesting?”

“Well, someone could have buried something here.” They were both thinking the same.

“It’s not impossible... We need to call the police.” Erik suddenly felt a surge of urgency.

“We might be wrong. It could be nothing and we would have wasted police time. I say we try to check ourselves first.” Emma jumped up and down on the spot to evaluate the ground.

“But the earth is hard. There’s no way we could dig into ice.” He was unsure about the whole DIY venture.

“True but look.” Emma was bending down, feeling the ground with her hand. “The sun is shining in this area and the earth is less hard here. We can at least try.” She clearly wanted to.

Erik gave in. “Fine, let’s try. We need a shovel though. Let’s go back to the house.”

It took them another hour and a half before they were back by the stone with the shovel. Nothing appeared to have been touched in their absence. Erik volunteered to dig. It was surprisingly easy. Only about thirty centimetres down they hit something hard. Whatever it was it was hidden in black plastic bags. They were getting excited. There really was something there and whoever had dug this had not bothered to dig very deep. It took them less than half an hour and most of their combined muscle strength to get the plastic bags and the heavy contents out of the hole. It was well packaged and wrapped in three separate bags, sealed with string. They exchange excited looks as Emma untied the string. The size corresponded to what they had seen on the TV screens six months earlier. It was about fifty centimetres tall, one and a half meters long and fifty centimetres wide. Very heavy. One thing Erik noted was that it seemed big enough for a coffin, at least for a small person or someone squashed in there. This sent chills down his spine. His thoughts went back to Anna. He decided that this was not the place for her to be buried. Emma had got the strings untied.

At that moment Erik suddenly had a realisation. “Oh my God, Emma. Could it be that Paul is the perpetrator after all? He could have ordered the hired burglar to hide it here; because this was a special place for the two of you. A place where he knew you would go!” Emma looked unsure so he quickly added: “I might be wrong.”

She hesitated but then responded: “No, it makes sense, I suppose. He is the main suspect. Everything is pointing in his direction. The burglar’s story, his disappearance, his recent deciphering progress—everything! You are right. This was a special place for us. This is where we kissed for the first time. It is a memorable spot and he might have thought of it as a good symbolic place to hide the tablet.”

“Shall we open the plastic bags or wait for the police?”

“We’ve got this far. We might as well open them.”

“Ok, this is the moment of truth. If the tablet is here I’ll know it immediately.”

They both held their breath. Emma folded back the opening of the plastic bags and the chest was revealed. It looked different from the black and white camera images they had seen on the TV screen but there was no mistake. This was the Torpa chest; the chest that had been hidden in the space in the wall in the old Torpa stone house for hundreds of years; the chest that had been stolen six months ago; the chest that Paul had been sure contained the other half of the Torpa tablet. It was greyish in colour and damaged on all sides from advanced age and possible heavy handling. Its wooden lid had numerous cracks, in particular around the black metal hinges. It looked as if it was several hundred years old—and it probably was. Its odour was murky. This was the moment of truth. Could the tablet still be in there?

Emma hesitated: “Oh my God! I can’t believe we’ve found it! This is the chest!”

“Sure is!” Erik grinned enthusiastically. “Shall we open it?”

“I’m not sure. We don’t want to disturb evidence or incriminate ourselves but I suppose a little peek can’t hurt.” They exchanged a long look once again.

“Let’s do it. Let’s open it.” Erik carefully tried to lift the lid. “It’s locked.” The front of the chest displayed a key hole which made sure it was not possible to open the lid.

They looked at it carefully for a few moments until Emma said: “Erik, you know what. Do you know what I think?” She looked at him with something resembling relief. Her cheeks were red from excitement and the cold wind. “This chest hasn’t been opened! Look at the lock. Look at the lid. There’s no sign of anyone opening this recently! The lock has not been touched for a very long time. You can see that the space between the lid and the rest of the chest is full of dust and stuff which could only have got there over a period of many years—at least, not a few months.” She touched it gently with the back of her index finger. Erik inspected it closely.

“I can’t believe it; I actually think you’re right! But why? Why would someone go through all the trouble of stealing the chest and then not even bother opening it? It doesn’t make any sense. Paul would have wanted to see the tablet. He would have hired the burglar to take careful pictures of the tablet which was supposed to be hidden in the chest. If the burglar didn’t even open it he would have been well and truly ripped off.”

“Or maybe Paul wasn’t the perpetrator.”

Emma’s suggestion was left lingering in the air. Erik looked again at the lock close up and then felt a rush of excitement.

“Actually, we may not need to open the chest by force. I think I might know what key would fit!”

“How can you possibly know that?” Emma’s voice was full of doubt.

“After all I’ve spent my whole life in the vicinity of the old stone house and I know it very well. You know the key that was mentioned in the Torpa journals; it’s still in the house. I’ve always wondered about it but now, looking at this lock, I wouldn’t be surprised if we’ve found where the mysterious key belongs!”

Despite this realisation about the key, they decided to put the chest back in the plastic bags and into the hole for protection. They needed to call the police. Realistically, opening the chest was out of the question. The last thing they wanted to do was to destroy any evidence which had the potential of clearing Paul’s name. The fact that the chest was unopened was helpful for him. They re-covered the hole with earth and flattened it so that it would look as if they had not been there. Although it was fairly obvious that the earth in the spot had been disturbed, they hoped that not many people ventured out there.

“Are you sure it will be safe to leave it here? Would it not be better to stay here and wait for the police to arrive?” Emma asked as they had finished and stood and admired their work.

“It will take a long time before they get here. We had better get home. Besides, I didn’t bring my phone. Did you?” Erik felt his pockets as he spoke. Emma did the same.

“No. I’m afraid not. I suppose we don’t have a choice then, unless I stay here and you go back to the house.”

“That’s out of the question. I’m not leaving you alone here. Come on, let’s go.” He took Emma’s hand for a moment to pull her away from there.

They ventured off in the direction of the house, reluctantly leaving the chest in the hole by the rune stone. They were half running down the familiar path, which

by now, Emma pointed out, seemed much shorter than it had done all those months ago. They both felt some sort of urgency, not wanting to risk the chest being stolen once again. As they reached the house Erik immediately called the police. They promised to come straight away. As soon as he had hung up Erik suggested that he venture out to the stone house to fetch the key. Emma insisted on joining him.

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The old abandoned house was cold and Emma was glad she had kept her winter jacket on. She had not been in there since the summer's day when the camera hole had been drilled. Being there brought back memories of the Torpa ghost who she was sure she had seen but who may actually have been Erik's eccentric grandmother on a nocturnal excursion before she died. The space in the wall looked different. The wall had been carelessly opened and the space between the outer and inner wall was plain to see. The space had no windows and no furniture; only thick white and grey walls. The only thing found had been the chest and after its sudden removal the space had been left empty. Somehow the sight of the space scared her even more than when it had been bricked up. Her imagination started to run riot and she imagined that any ghost trapped in the space would now run wild in the house, leaving them exposed and vulnerable. She kept these deluded thoughts to herself though but was hoping that Erik would find the key quickly so that they could leave. He led them to the room where she thought she had seen the white haired person, possibly Erik's grandmother, that night in August. As they entered, chills were running down her spine. An old solid oak chair had been placed in a lonely corner next to the window. She imagined how the old woman had sat there when the burglar had entered the house. A kerosene lamp was on the floor next to it. The room was sparingly furnished with a grand fireplace at one end and an old wooden dining table in the middle but there were no dining chairs. The red thick curtains had been infested by moths and showed clear signs of age. That this house had once been inhabited was plain to see but it was equally obvious why ghost stories had emerged out of its cold, dark and dingy rooms. She could feel her teeth chattering as they crossed the room. Almost laughing at her own stupidity, Emma suddenly thought she had seen Erik's dead grandmother in the corner of her eye by the chair. She spun around so hastily that Erik turned to see what she was doing. He immediately spotted her discomfort and could not disguise an irritating smile. She didn't like him noticing her weaknesses. Torpa had clearly proved to be one of them. However, when they both heard a loud unmistakable noise from somewhere in the building Erik stopped smiling and got hold of Emma in one swift movement. She let out a little scream at his hasty action and felt herself, and possibly Erik, shaking from fear. There was definitely something there. Something appeared to be nearing the door to the room they were in. Erik was hugging her as if he wanted to protect her from all evil. When the door slowly started to open Emma let out a loud scream and Erik let her go to grab hold of an old fork-like object in the corner next to the fire place. The sight greeting the intruder was almost comical, with Emma at that stage sitting on the floor and Erik, like a knight ready for a duel, directing the fork

in the direction of the door. When they saw the surprised face of Erik's father, they both felt ridiculous.

"What are you two doing in here?" he asked, walking over to give them a welcoming embrace. Erik's parents had only just come back from Stockholm to spend the weekend at Torpa.

"That's a long story," Erik responded elusively whilst lowering the fork. "Let's go back to the house and we'll explain." Before leaving the room Erik found the rusty old key on the shelf where he had last seen it and put it in his pocket.

Less than forty minutes had passed but it felt like an eternal wait before two police officers finally arrived in one police car. Erik had warned them about the size of the chest and the weight of it but they didn't seem to have brought any special equipment. Erik and Emma came out to greet them. Erik's parents had already gone again, this time to go shopping in a nearby town.

The lack of resource on the part of the officers was immediately explained by one of them: "We had to call head office before heading off and I understand that your find is connected to a police investigation. We really can't do anything until the detective in charge arrives."

It was agreed that Erik would show them how to get there by car via their neighbours, to avoid a long walk. Emma was instructed to stay in the house and wait for the police to turn up. She felt generally jumpy after the nerve racking episode in the old house and didn't enjoy being alone. To keep herself occupied, she spent this time nervously browsing random books in the Torpa library, keeping an eye on the window with a view over the drive way. After an absent minded glance through, she noted that they certainly had an impressive Egyptian collection. Clearly someone in the Torpa family had at some point had a keen interest in ancient Egypt. But there were also books on other civilisations. The Olmec civilisation in Mexico seemed to have been a favourite as well as the pre-Inca civilisations in Peru and Chile. To her fascination Emma also found a book on Ankhor Wat in Cambodia. Most of these books seemed to be early 20th century. When Erik appeared after over an hour and a half, having walked back, Emma was taken by surprise and much to her annoyance she let out another girly scream. She was relieved to see that it was him and to hear that the chest was still there and guarded by the two local police officers.

An hour later the other police team arrived; and in style. They had certainly taken the report of the find of the chest seriously and had brought a police van as well as a car, one senior officer and, as far as Emma could tell, six constables or detectives. She hoped that among them was someone specialising in ancient finds. She could not wait to find out what was hidden in the chest. What if the tablet was still in there? What if it contained other prehistoric discoveries brought back by the Vikings? What on earth could be hidden in there? Hopefully they would know very soon. Emma was suddenly excited. One question that kept troubling her was why the burglar had not bothered to open the chest. She mentioned this to the senior officer and added that in her opinion this provided support to Paul's innocence. He made a note of her submission but remarked that this could simply have been a breach of contract by the hired burglar; that he had failed to open the chest, contrary to his instructions. Clearly he was not one to jump to conclusions.

Following a few discussions in Swedish, which Emma didn't understand much of, it was decided that the chest should be opened in situ before being taken away for analysis. This would prevent any unnecessary damage to the contents as a result of inappropriate packaging. The team had brought an array of equipment and tools which were all stored in the van. Emma and Erik got a lift in the police car leading the way to the neighbour's house near the rune stone. The neighbour in question didn't seem to be at home and Emma doubted that any permission had been sought to trespass on their property. This didn't seem to bother Swedes too much. The team very efficiently unpacked and soon they were all walking in the woods on their way to the chest, only five minutes away. Emma laughed to herself as the procession reminded her of Snow White's seven dwarfs on their way to the mine looking for rubies and diamonds. She started to hum the little jig...Heigh-ho, heigh ho... but somehow she didn't feel much like Snow White.

She wondered what occupied Erik's mind at that moment. He was looking his normal handsome self, talking politely to one of the detectives in front of her. But she knew that inside he must be upset and concerned about what they might find in there. He had coped remarkably well with the find of Anna's body but Emma was worried that he had not allowed himself to think about it or to prepare himself psychologically for the funeral. She hoped that the opening of the chest would not cause him further distress...

When they reached the spot she was amused to see the two local police officers quickly pretending to be busy on the crime scene. One of them appeared to have burnt his hand in an attempt to conceal his cigarette. The police team quickly sprung into action. It didn't take them long to dig up the chest, remove the plastic bags, lay plastic sheeting on the ground, apply protective covering and prepare to open the chest. With a serious grin, Erik handed over the old key to the man in charge.

"This is what I believe might open the chest," he said unnecessarily.

It was time. Finally. It had been a long wait following the glance at the chest back in August and then the disappointing break-in. Now, at last, they would find out what had been hidden in that space in the wall for so long. If anyone had any suspicions of what they would find, they certainly didn't voice it. No one said anything, except for some technical comments in Swedish. Erik seemed to have stopped breathing in anticipation. Emma walked over to him and took his hand. It was warm and felt comforting. She had intended to lend support to him but she now found that he was giving her strength to keep looking. The image of the tablet was etched on her inner eye. This is what she was hoping to see but never had she been more unsure about their theory than at that moment.

The lid slowly went up and they all gasped, a couple of the officers stepping back in disgust.

"Helvete!" swore one of the officers

"Now this is clearly not what we were expecting!" Another one said.

"I now declare this a murder investigation," the Officer in charge concluded.

Chapter 22

Emma could not look at it. It was too sickening. From what she had seen in the split second, before her eyes shut in a reflex movement, there was a dead woman in there. She must have been dead for some time. Her body was fully decomposed but the face of the skeleton displayed a strange expression of fear and pain. She looked over at Erik. He was looking at it with intensity and so were all the police officers surrounding the chest. Emma seemed to be the only one who had decided that the scene was too upsetting. She resolved to have another glance. The woman had long blond hair. It was difficult to tell how old she was but Emma guessed she was young. From what she had been able to guess, it was certainly not a burial from the middle ages, rather the woman must have been around in modern times, although she wasn't sure when. The body was heavily crumpled up in the chest, as if it had been forced in there. From what Emma could see, the woman's look was one of horror, mouth and eyes open at the time of death. She was suddenly wondering whether she had been buried alive. The facial expression seemed to suggest that but she could not be sure.

"Who is she?" Erik said in English with a pale voice.

"Do you have any ideas?" One of the detectives asked a counter question.

"No, no idea. Can you tell when she's likely to have died?"

"I would guess, looking at her clothes and the state of decomposition, that she must have been buried in the nineteen sixties or seventies." They were all surprised at this. "I would say based on the circumstances that she is likely to have been murdered but we would need to do checks to determine how and when. I can see no immediate evidence of force having been used. It is difficult to tell but I believe she was in her early twenties when she died."

Shortly thereafter the officers started to pack up, taking with them the chest with all its contents. Emma was gravely disappointed. They had been wrong all along. Unless there was something hidden underneath the skeleton the chest contained no tablet—no ancient artefacts whatsoever. Not even something from the Middle Ages.

"Have you looked to see whether the chest contains anything else?" Emma asked in a moment of panic.

Erik was quiet. Emma noticed that he had walked away from the group and was sitting on a stone a few meters away with his head in his hands. She felt a sting of guilt for not having paid attention to him. He must be devastated. Not only had they not found the tablet but it was also likely that someone in his family or acquaintance had murdered this woman, or at least it was likely that they would be under close scrutiny from the police. This must also have been a stark reminder of Anna's death and the forthcoming burial of her remains. She walked over and put her arms around him from behind. Her head reached his mid back.

"Are you alright?" she asked. She knew it was a silly question. Of course he wasn't alright. An officer came over to them and asked them a few basic questions about the find, how they had come across it, why they were there and if they knew anything about the woman. Afterwards the officer said that they were free to go.

“Do you want to go back to the house?” she asked. Erik nodded and as they started walking Emma continued: “You know what this means. Paul is likely to be off the hook. I would say this murder which took place more than thirty years ago and the theft of the chest a few months ago was committed by the same person, or persons. The burglary was of course an attempt to cover up the murder, to keep the secret hidden forever by moving the chest to a new location! Protected by the legend about the girl, the perpetrator thought no one would ever open the ‘wall’ but had not banked on our theory about the tablet.” Erik didn’t respond. “One thing puzzles me though. To put the chest in the space in the wall in the 1960s or 70s they must have opened the wall. I thought the wall had not been opened for hundreds of years?”

“Well, that’s what the legend says, as you know but it’s certainly not unlikely that it could have been opened before. The walls of Torpa have been re-plastered many times since the middle ages and an opening of the wall thirty years ago could have been concealed. As you saw, the wall wasn’t that thick.”

“I suppose it was never even contemplated to check whether the wall had been disturbed in secret before...” Erik didn’t respond and continued walking in silence until they finally reached the house. Erik went straight to bed and Emma decided to spend a little bit of time in front of the fire to think. Someone had lit the fire while they were out. She found the flames mesmerising as she sat there and stared at them from her favourite chair. She had left the lights off but the flames filled the room with an orange twinkling ambience. It had been a long day. After only ten minutes she was asleep. By the time she woke up, from the noise of the front door opening, the room was dark and the fire had died. At first a bit disorientated, she quickly came to her senses and sat up straight, wondering who was at the door. Before she had had a chance to turn the light on Erik’s mother entered the room, turning on all the lights and pretending to be startled when she saw Emma.

“What in God’s name are you doing in here in the dark?” she said in flawless English.

“Apologies, I must have fallen asleep.”

“So it appears. I hear you have had an eventful day!”

“Yes, we certainly have.” Emma could not think of anything further when a sudden realisation hit her. Erik’s mother could have been involved in the murder of the woman! She was old enough. Thirty years ago she would have been about twenty five. Or could Erik’s father have had something to do with it? That would have explained why Erik’s grandmother had always hated him; assuming she knew about his dark murderous past. But why and who was she? She continued: “So I take it you have heard about the find of the chest then?”

“Yes, we had a call from the police this afternoon. They are coming over tomorrow. Most shocking and unbelievable the whole thing! We have a proud heritage with no scandals in modern times. This will certainly put a black mark on our glorious past, even if the murder had nothing to do with our family.”

“Do you have any idea who this woman could have been?”

“No, none at all. A lot of people have been employed by the estate over the years and my best guess is that this is the daughter of one of the servants, or perhaps

even entirely unconnected to the estate. It certainly had nothing to do with our family. We have no history of any missing persons or criminal behaviour.”

“But even if it was a serving girl or the daughter or relative of one of the servants, surely someone must have reported a missing person and also someone must have known about the serious damage to the house—an old inner wall would have been partially torn down?”

“I’m not so sure about that. The old stone house has not been in use for many years. There was a time when it was entirely neglected and almost fell into ruin. It was really only when I started to take more of an interest in the house in the last twenty years or so that it was partially restored and opened to the public. It is a large estate but the old manor house has not played a part in it for many years.” Mrs Stenbock yawned as she checked her watch. “Anyway, I need to go to bed. We will have a busy day tomorrow. Good night Emma.”

“Good night.” Emma replied, though she remained sitting in the chair, deep in thought. It was dark outside and she noted that it was just after midnight. Mrs Stenbock had left the table light on. The mystery of the dead woman occupied Emma’s thoughts. They had no idea who she was or how she had died. Emma was suddenly aware that she might now be sitting in the house of a murderer. She had found Erik’s mother’s behaviour somewhat strange. Her arguments made sense but somehow she would have expected a bit more surprise or alarm from her. After all, the body of a woman had been found buried in her family’s house! She had dismissed it and been defensive about the reputation of the family. In fact she had shown no feelings whatsoever, coldly concluding that it could have been the daughter of a servant, as if that would have been alright. But then again, Emma thought, Mrs Stenbock had never opposed the opening of the wall. In fact, she had been in favour of it and had happily accommodated the press that day in August. If she had known about the dead woman, she would surely have opposed the opening; unless she thought that could incriminate her. She could have planned the break-in. She also could have influenced the local authority to oppose a full opening of the wall, knowing that a small camera would only allow the view of the chest. Or maybe Mrs Stenbock genuinely didn’t know—maybe the perpetrator was her husband! Maybe he had been unfaithful to his wife with the dead woman and Erik’s grandmother had known about it – and that was why she hated Erik’s father. But who would have killed her? She was struggling to keep her eyes open. It was clearly time to go to bed and start their search for the killer in the morning. Despite her tiredness Emma decided to look in the journals which were all neatly lined up on the bookshelf in chronological order. She was hoping to find a clue. The room was lit up by a ceiling lamp. Taking a quick peek outside she noticed that it was pitch dark but the old house was lit up. Its white exterior was almost glistening in the bright light, a thin fog surrounding its tower. She found a book starting in 1967 and began to flick the pages, soon realising that she could not understand much of the Swedish text. The only thing she could see was that what had been recorded was mainly double entry book keeping. There didn’t seem to be any comments of the kind that they had found in the earlier journals. She was aimlessly flicking page after page with uninteresting numbers...

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Erik woke up early. He had had a vivid dream again and had fallen out of the bed in the process. He had dreamt that his grandmother was standing next to his bed, trying to tell him something but he could not hear what she was saying. She was whispering. He was leaning closer to her to try to hear. Just as his head was next to hers she was suddenly transformed into a skeleton, similar to the woman in the chest. Her face was full of fear and pain, mouth open showing uneven teeth. The blond hair had lost its vibrancy. Although the eye holes were empty he could almost sense that the eyes had been wide open at the time of death. At that moment he woke up on the floor, shaking from the shock. He looked around, almost expecting to see human remains next to him. He crawled back into bed. The dream had been so real it scared him. He had hardly thought about his grandmother since her death, other than in connection with the break in, and oh, he suddenly remembered, the bible! His grandmother had been trying to tell Anna something. His subconscious had reminded him in his dream. He could not remember word for word what the message in the bible had said. Rather than trying to remember, he decided to go downstairs to have a look. The bible had been put back in the library. He put on a robe and slippers and went out into the dark landing. It was five o'clock in the morning. All the inhabitants of the house were still sleeping and the only sound he could hear was the constant ticking from the grandfather clock in the upstairs family room. Erik didn't feel the need to put the lights on. It was full moon and the natural light was sufficient. He tiptoed down the stairs. On his way to the library he took a detour via the kitchen. He heated up a mug of hot chocolate. The microwave seemed noisy in the sleeping house. He was hoping that he was far enough away from the bedrooms to avoid waking anyone up. As he was waiting for the hot chocolate to cook he walked over to the breakfast room and looked up at the old stone house through the window. It looked magical in the moonlight. He had always known that the old house had many secrets but never had he imagined that some of them could have occurred in his own lifetime. He almost jumped when the microwave beeped to signal that his drink was ready. He took the mug and made his way to the library. As he approached the open door he noticed that a light was on in there. Apprehensive of what he might find, he was surprised to see Emma sound asleep in the chair with an open book still over her chest. He looked at her, calm and peaceful. Her cheeks were rosy. Her nose was twitching and he wondered whether she was dreaming something to do with rabbits. He stroked her cheek lightly with the back of his hand and she smiled in her sleep. He noticed the book she had chosen; one of the journals from the late 1960s. She was clearly eager to find out more about the woman in the chest and the killer. Probably with the aim of clearing Paul's name once and for all. He was disappointed that Paul still occupied her mind.

He walked over to the bookshelves and started to look for the old bible. He found it almost immediately; almost as if someone had put it there for him to find. Walking over to the lit desk, he once again looked at Emma, considering whether to wake her. He decided to let her sleep a bit longer. He carefully pulled out the old office chair and sat down. He was turning the pages until he found what he was looking for in Genesis. *'You are right. The wall is hiding what you are looking for. Do not disturb her.'* He read it twice. *'Do not disturb her'*. It had been a warning not to open the wall, written by his grandmother to his wife. This would mean that his

grandmother had known about the hidden skeleton and might even have been involved in the killing. *'You are right'*. This also meant that Anna had somehow found out about it. He could not think of how though. She had wanted to tell him in Thailand... Anna had spent a lot of time reading the journals. But he wondered why anyone would have revealed a murder in a public document. *'The wall is hiding what you are looking for'*. He asked himself why Anna would have been looking for a dead woman or known about her existence.

"Mornin'!" Emma had woken up. "What time is it? What are you doing down here?"

"I could ask you the same question," Erik said, laughing.

"Well, I fell asleep here last night, as you may have guessed." She was still wearing yesterday's clothes.

"I gathered as much."

"What's the time? It's still dark out there."

"Six."

"What are you doing up? I thought you weren't working today?" She looked at him with sleepy eyes. Erik explained his sudden realisation about the message in the bible but didn't mention his dream.

"You never told me about the bible message. Why?" Emma had disappointment in her voice.

"I suppose I never got a chance. And I didn't really understand the significance of it until now," he said honestly.

"Anna somehow must have figured out what was hidden in the space in the wall." Emma was mulling things over in her head.

"Yes and the obvious place she would have looked is in the journals. Did you find anything last night?"

Emma gave him a peculiar smile. "What do you think? I don't speak Swedish! My Swedish is improving but is not that good! There was so much of interest in there I fell asleep," she added sarcastically.

"Let me have a look."

Emma gave him the leather bound book. It was in the same style as the older ones but with modern medium thick paper which was a little bit yellow around the edges. It carefully recorded all income, expenses, assets and liabilities of the estate in the late nineteen sixties. The last entry of this particular book was 1973. They didn't know the exact date when the murder was supposed to have happened so Erik randomly flicked through the pages, starting from the end. He browsed the list of items for a long time without finding anything unusual. The sun had started to rise and Emma had fallen asleep again when he finally concluded to himself: "No, this is a needle in a haystack search. I give up."

He saw a car on the driveway. It was a mail delivery. It dropped something in the post box and left. Erik got up and went outside to pick it up. It was the local paper, as he had expected. He was reading it as he was walking back in.

"I knew it!" he mumbled. He closed the library door behind him as he entered. The sound made Emma stir and wake up. Erik ignored her disillusioned look and proclaimed, waving the paper in front of her: "The local press might not be very enthusiastic but they somehow manage to sniff out the news of the region. Look at the front page!" It showed a picture of Torpa with a story about a body having been

found in its vicinity. It didn't say anything further. Clearly they had not been given any detail about the chest or the link with the space in the wall. Erik noted this with relief.

Emma quickly came to her senses. "Do you know how long the local paper has been around?" she asked, looking as if she had just realised something.

"Since some time in the nineteenth century I think. I know what you're thinking."

"Yes, let's go and check out the archives. If anyone went missing in the 1960s or 70s they would have reported on it."

"I suppose so. Do you want to go there now?" He started to walk towards the door.

"It's Wednesday, isn't it? It should be a normal working day for them. Let's have some breakfast and then get ready and go."

Erik agreed. An hour later, as it started to rain, they drove Erik's black shiny BMW into the little town nearby. It took almost twenty minutes to get there, with Erik staying meticulously to the speed limit. The town was at the other end of the main lake, set on a little hill with views over the lake. They parked up and walked to the town square near the church. A respectable number of small shops lined the pedestrian area, currently populated by about five people; one old woman who was walking slowly, supported by some sort of crutch; a young man who had the appearance of someone skiving off school and a mother with two small children. The shops were evidently not getting much business this morning, Erik concluded.

"Why have you never brought me here before?" Emma demanded. "It's charming!"

"If you say so... It is you and the Germans then." Year on year the number of German tourists visiting had increased to an almost unbelievable level. During the summer months one could hear more German voices than Swedish on the busy streets.

It didn't take them long to reach the office of the local paper. It was just off the square. It had a small reception and they were greeted by an older woman with a wide smile.

"Erik, what brings you here today?" she said with exaggerated surprise. Erik had never met the woman and he had no idea who she was but he had developed into something of a local celebrity after the whole 'opening the wall' incident. Also, in such a small town there was an ever present 'everyone knows everyone' mentality, even if that wasn't always the case. "Did you hear about the body they found in the Torpa woods yesterday?" she continued.

"Yes, I saw it in the paper this morning. Very shocking." He pretended to be unaware of the detail and got straight to the point. "If you would be so kind we would like to search your archives this morning. Would that be possible?"

"Interested in the origin of the dead woman, are you? Can't blame you really. Who knows who it could have been? Very upsetting really. We have no regulations about sharing our archives with whoever is asking. In fact, we have now uploaded all articles so that we have a complete computer system with two hundred years worth of news. Not everything is connected to our local search engine but you should be able to find all articles on one of our computers here." She showed them the way up the stairs and into a room lined with comfortable sofas and a table

with numerous coffee mugs. "You just missed the breakfast meeting," she added and showed them into an empty office with a desktop computer. "Here you go."

"Thank you so much." It had certainly been easier than Erik had expected but he was a little bit annoyed that she had so easily been able to guess why they were there. The computer was already on and they found the 'archives' link almost immediately. After having attempted to use the search engine to look for the word 'missing' they realised that all three hundred and ten hits were from after 1987 and revealed that 'A man had been missing his dog on his travels around China', a farmer had 'three missing cows' following a blizzard and Hjertrud would be missed by her 'three daughters, fourteen grandchildren and twenty seven great grandchildren' following her death at ninety seven. All very interesting but not in the least bit useful for their current quest.

"Let's try and search by year," Emma suggested. "Type in '1970'". A multitude of links to previous instalments of the paper from that year came up on screen. They were all links to scanned images of the paper.

"This is going to take us a long time..." Erik said with dismay. "We don't even know in what year she would have disappeared and whether it would have been first page news."

"The find of a lost cat would be first page news in this town! I think we should restrict ourselves to the front page. That would be much quicker." Erik agreed and they started to methodically go through the front pages of the whole of the year 1970. They spent no more than a few seconds per issue but it seemed to be a somewhat time consuming task. With three issues per week, there were almost 160 issues in a year. It took them forty minutes to go through the whole of the year.

"I think we can conclude that it didn't happen in 1970. Shall we do 1969 or 1971 do you think?"

"Let's do 1971. Not that I'm a fashion expert but to me her clothes, or what was left of them, looked more seventies than sixties," Erik suggested. Emma laughed but went along with it. They spent another hour going through the local news of that year without much success. There had been a story on Torpa but it had concerned the annual Midsummer celebration in the Torpa grounds and reported of an unfortunate breakdown in correspondence between the members of the folk-dance group 'Mora-truppen' which had led to a surplus of male dancers. At the end of the front page news item it was noted that the disappointment of the audience was evident by the decrease in herring consumption following the event.

"It's amazing what made front page news in those days," commented Emma absently.

At that moment one of the journalists walked past and spotted Erik through the window to the office. Erik recognised him as one of the reporters from the 'opening of the wall' ordeal and he guessed that he was the one who had taken the unflattering picture of him being carried out of Torpa in a sheet. For a moment Erik thought the reporter was going to stand outside and stare at them but he seemed to have decided to come in and say hello.

"Erik, you're well I see!" he said shaking Erik's hand. "Are you here searching for something?"

“Just showing Emma around town really. Thought we’d drop in and check if we could find something about that woman found dead near Torpa.” Erik decided to stick to the truth. It was pointless to lie as the receptionist was bound to have spread the news already.

“Yes, sad story that. I have done a little digging myself this morning. Not much success. Don’t have enough to go by. I suppose we can leave it to the police to do their job first.” Erik didn’t like his tone. It had sounded as if he disapproved of them snooping around. The reporter, who had introduced himself as Tomas was in his fifties and was wearing brown trousers and a beige polo-neck jumper with little style. There was something about him that made Erik dislike him but it was difficult to put a finger on exactly what it was. After having offered them coffee from the nearby machine Tomas said goodbye.

“Back-to-business then. It was nice to meet you.” He said smiling stiffly.

Emma and Erik continued through 1972, 1973 and 1947 without any clues as to the origin of the dead woman or her killer. Starting to despair they debated whether to go back to 1969 and do the earlier years first but decided to do 1975 anyway, to cover off the first part of the seventies at least. They were half way through when they finally stumbled upon something.

“Look!” A picture of Torpa from the January 1975 edition caught Emma’s attention. Dominating the picture was a woman standing in front of the house. She had long blond hair and appeared young, in her late teens or early twenties. She was smiling widely at the camera, wearing something which looked like a ballet dancing outfit under her jacket and a medal around her neck. Erik translated the text under the picture which revealed that she had won a ballet dancing competition and mentioned ‘...with Torpa as her temporary home during her stay in Sweden...’ This woman had actually stayed at Torpa, albeit temporarily. Erik was just about to move on but Emma stopped him, looking more closely at the picture. She inhaled sharply and said: “Look at her face. Can you not see the resemblance?”

“To whom?”

“To me...” she said sarcastically. “Who do you think? The dead woman of course!”

Erik leaned closer. “I suppose so. Both have blond hair and I would say an oval face but it is very difficult to tell. There was not much left of the body!” Erik returned the sarcasm. “The timing is right though.”

“There is definitely something familiar about her. Perhaps something about her eyes as well. Maybe she is a relative of your family and that’s why she was staying at Torpa. What does it say?” Erik quickly eyed the rest of the article.

“This woman is Danish, from Copenhagen. She was visiting the town for a dance-event and she won a ballet dancing competition. It says her name was Anne-Lise Andersen. That is really all it says. I don’t recognise her name. I have never heard any mention of any relatives in Denmark.”

“There is definitely something familiar about her.” Emma repeated. “Well, remember the legend about the girl who was buried in the wall. She had visited relatives in Denmark. That would suggest that hundreds of years ago your family did have some Danish connections at least, if the legend is to be believed that is. I

think we should make some enquiries about her. Let's start with the web!" Erik quickly Googled the name in the article but nothing useful came back.

"Maybe our next step should be to speak to someone who was around at the time. Though I would rather not speak to my parents about it. Maybe Britt-Marie. She would have been, working at Torpa by then I think and would probably have been about the same age as this woman. She was also pretty good at keeping up to date with the village gossip so if this girl somehow ended up living out here for a while, Britt-Marie would know about it. I say we call it a day here and speak to her tomorrow."

They took a copy of the article and thanked the helpful receptionist on the way out. Not sure about the significance of their discovery, they had dinner in a small café before heading back to Torpa. An impenetrable darkness had settled on the estate by the time they got there. Only a couple of windows of the modern house were lit. Erik guessed that his parents had once again been out all day, going about their business as always. His mother had numerous business ventures which she was keeping a close eye on. His father may have been involved in them as well but didn't have any of his own.

As it turned out his parents were at home and informed them that they had missed a visit from the police earlier in the day. They had questioned Erik's parents and had asked to speak to Erik in more detail at his earliest convenience.

* * * * *

Although she was in her fifties, she had never married and had no children. Britt-Marie lived with her parents, who were still alive but now aging and in their seventies. Her only sibling was a brother, who had moved out many years ago and started a family in a nearby town. They approached the house via a narrow driveway, lined with trees on either side all dusted in white from a light snowfall earlier that morning. The house was not small but yet not very grand in comparison to the splendour of the Torpa estate. With its two floors of lit windows it looked homely and welcoming. The exterior of the house was wooden and painted in a typically Swedish yellow. The garden was extremely well kept. Emma guessed that was Britt-Marie's doing now that she had more time on her hands. She recalled Erik telling her that Britt-Marie had been in the service of the family since before he was born. She had been Erik's nanny for many years and thereafter had taken the unenviable post as the caretaker of Erik's grandmother. Erik had mentioned that she was particularly attached to the old woman and their whole family, which seemed to explain her decision to stay but Emma still found it difficult to believe that anyone could form a liking to the old witch, unless she had turned nasty only in recent years. After Mrs Stenbock's death in August, Britt-Marie had finally left her post and moved back to her parents full time. Emma guessed that they now needed her more than anyone else. As they parked on the driveway Emma noticed for the first time that the house was situated only twenty or so meters away from the lake, with the garden leading down to a small sandy beach.

Erik pressed the door-bell and it seemed to take an age before the door opened, revealing a short woman in her seventies, white hair and an unpleasant facial expression.

“Vad vill ni?” Emma understood this as a rather rude ‘What do you want?’ Erik said something in Swedish in response which Emma understood as ‘We would like to speak to Britt-Marie if she is home’. Her Swedish was clearly improving, she thought to herself. They were shown in and were asked to sit down in the grand living room. Britt-Marie would be with them shortly. Then she left them alone.

“Was that Britt-Marie’s mother?” Emma whispered.

“Yes, I believe so. I have never actually met her before I don’t think. They never seem to attend any neighbourhood events or gatherings and I haven’t really had a reason to come and visit here before. Britt-Marie has always been around at ours.” They both fell silent, waiting. Emma was looking around the room, noticing some expensive looking paintings on the wall as well as various artefacts on display in the glass encased main bookshelf at the back of the room. The room was bright and stylishly furnished in the typically Swedish Gustavian style. The items on the bookshelf seemed to be a collection of beautiful porcelain figurines and vases. One of the vases stood out from the rest, being made of alabaster, Emma noticed. She could not help walking over to take a closer look.

“What are you doing?” Erik asked from the sofa.

“Just having a look.” Before Emma had even reached the shelves Britt-Marie entered the room. She looked much the same as she had when Emma had seen her back in August. She smiled brightly at them.

“What a lovely surprise to see you both! I thought you’d never come and see me Erik! What brings you here today?”

Erik felt a sting of guilt for not having visited earlier. “We just wanted to say hello and catch up,” He said, returning her smile. “How’s life treating you without Torpa?”

“Well it takes some getting used to. I probably shouldn’t say this but I could do with someone needing me.” She lowered her voice. “My parents take care of themselves. No need for me to look after them. I have been thinking of offering my childcare services to another family in the area.”

“Yes, why not. You are a great nanny, Britt-Marie.” Erik went over to give her a hug. They had been chatting for almost forty minutes, Britt-Marie providing coffee and cookies, before Erik brought the dead woman up. He did it casually.

“By the way, did you hear about the woman buried in the Torpa woods?”

“Yes, I read about it in the paper. Strange that. Very strange. Who could it be? Who could have done something like that around here?”

“It was Emma and I who found her. We found the woman buried near the rune stone.” Erik paused as if debating how much to tell... “She was hidden in the chest; the chest that was in the space in the wall at Torpa. It appears the burglar didn’t want to steal what was in the chest, he wanted to hide it; to prevent it from being exposed.” Britt-Marie seemed to pale. She set her cup down and looked at them both.

“I didn’t know this. The newspaper article doesn’t seem to have made the connection with the chest yet.” She looked down on her hands as if deep in thought.

“You know this means the woman was actually buried inside the old Torpa manor house. Do you have any idea who she could be and who did this?”

Britt-Marie quickly looked up again. “No! I don’t have a clue. It was a long time ago!” Her answer was rapid. Almost too rapid, Emma thought. She was around back then, thirty years ago. Emma doubted that Britt-Marie would have been involved herself. She was a person without a vicious bone in her body but there was the possibility that she could be protecting someone else.

“We found this article.” Erik handed over the copy of the page with the picture of the missing girl. Britt-Marie was shaken this time but was trying hard to compose herself. The picture clearly meant something to her but for some reason she was reluctant to talk about it.

“I don’t remember this. I’m sorry.” she said after almost a minute’s hesitation.

“Do you have any idea who she is?”

“I’m afraid not. I mean, let me think about it. My mother might remember. She was teaching dance classes many years ago.” The way she said it was with something that resembled guilt. Erik had never seen Britt-Marie react in this way. Her cheeks had turned red and Erik was convinced she was lying. She obviously wasn’t used to lying to people and undoubtedly hated having to do it. She could not get them out of the house quickly enough and although she was smiling brightly as she waved goodbye from the door as they left, they could both see that she was in a state of inner turmoil.

Chapter 23

It was raining heavily. The rain was cold and unfriendly, coming down like needles from the dark sky. Although it was midday it felt more like early evening. The noise from the rain and wind drowned out the struggling priest. Although he was doing his best to deliver his speech loudly, they could not hear a word. The weather conditions reflected Erik’s mood as the group of umbrella-clad family and friends gathered around the freshly dug grave into which they had lowered Anna’s coffin. Erik glanced over at her parents. They were wrestling with their umbrella but this didn’t prevent her mother from crying loudly, grasping her husband and shaking from a combination of grief and cold. Anna had been their only child and a year and a bit after her death they were still finding it difficult to accept she was really gone. They were good people and Erik hoped that the return of Anna’s body and the ceremony today would help them to find some sort of peace and move on.

Erik had changed his mind about burying her by the rune stone after their surprising find there. They had finally settled on a burial in the local graveyard nearby Torpa where Anna’s grave had been placed next to the resting place of Erik’s grandmother. He wasn’t sure whether Anna would have liked this but had been unable to protest. Refusing that spot would have been insensitive to his mother and would have raised some eyebrows.

Walking up to the coffin to say his last farewell to his wife, Erik had given up on his umbrella. He was crying silent tears which were disguised by the rain. He put a rose on top of the coffin and whispered ‘I love you’. He could feel her presence there, or at least he thought he could. He thought he heard the sound of her voice

whispering back a short 'Goodbye' but he suspected it was all in his mind. She was gone. She would never come back. He didn't want to leave the coffin but his mother came over and put her arm around him, leading him away. He wasn't sure whether she had done this to show her affection for her son or to ensure that the ceremony came to an end. Either way he was surprised. She had never been one to show any feelings or warmth towards anyone, especially not him. In any event, he didn't want her support or sincerity. He broke loose from her light grip by pretending to reach for his handkerchief.

"It's time to say goodbye," the priest said as everyone, one by one, paid their last respects. When the ceremony was over Erik spent some time alone by the grave, contemplating everything that had happened. He didn't want to join the informal gathering in the Torpa hall just yet. The rain had eased, suddenly turning to snow. Large white flakes were falling slowly. He felt close to Anna in a spiritual sense, standing next to her coffin. The discovery of her remains had been unexpected and strange but at least it meant that he had somewhere to go when he wanted to remember her and it confirmed once and for all that she was dead. This had been a contentious point though. Despite advice against it, when the body had arrived, he had wanted to identify it to make sure that there was no mistake; that it really was her. He had been shocked by the bad state of her remains. There was nothing to suggest that the corpse really was Anna. Having been shown evidence in the form of DNA tests and dental records he had been forced to accept it but it had not been clear cut in his view.

There had been no development on the 'dead woman found in chest' situation. Britt-Marie had failed to get back to them after their visit and although the police had been over to interview them, they had come with no news at all over and above what they already knew. He suspected that the police investigation had revealed more than they were letting on but he wasn't surprised that they had no intention to share their findings with him or any other member of the Torpa family until they had gathered more evidence. Erik had not been able to sleep properly, plagued by nightmares involving his grandmother in a ghostly form. All in all, he didn't feel well. Even Emma's presence had not been able to cheer him up over the last couple of days. Someone in his family or in the staff of the Torpa estate had committed a horrible crime all those years ago but he was no closer to finding out who or why. He didn't even know who the victim was, even though they had her remains and possibly even her name and picture, assuming they were right about the dancer. Her name meant nothing to him. Anne-Lise Andersen. He had no idea who she was or how she had died.

"Are you coming?" Erik jumped. It was Emma, wondering where he was hiding and why he had not joined the feast of coffee, homemade cake and cookies. He looked over at her. She looked her normal self in spite of the cold, rain and snow, although he could see she was uncomfortable, not wanting to disturb him in his solitary contemplations in front of his wife's grave. As if she had been able to read his mind, she added: "Britt-Marie asked me to go and get you. She was worried about you."

"I'm fine," he said, suddenly realising that he was crying. He wiped his tears quickly. Once again Emma surprised him when she walked over and put her arms around him.

“You’ll be alright,” she whispered as they embraced next to his wife’s coffin. Erik found this a little bit inappropriate even though he knew that Anna would not have minded. As always, it was merely a friendly hug. He had almost given up on any romantic notion between them. Paul was still on her mind and he knew that his feelings were not returned. He was holding her closely for what must have been a few minutes in silence but was startled when she unexpectedly looked up at him. Her eyes were teary but bright and alive.

“There’s something I have to tell you.”

“What?” He noticed that a large snow flake melted on her nose.

“You know Paul’s message: ‘*NYA TECKEN FINNES I DENNA KORTA RAD*’ or ‘New signs or clues can be found in this short line’.

“Yes...” He wiped her snow filled hair with his hand.

“Well, I think we can say with certainty that it’s an anagram. I have been doing some work on it. It took me a few hours but I have realised that we were right. Paul, forever the linguist, has made a bilingual anagram! This sentence makes much more sense in English. The one solution I have found which makes perfect sense is:

*NYA TECKEN FINNES I DENNA KORTA RAD
FIND KEY NEAR AN ANCIENT DARK STONE*

To say that it took me a few attempts is an understatement. I gave up on the anagram translation site. I then tried Greek, Arabic and Spanish. In the end, I did it by hand and ended up with this!” She was excited like a child at Christmas.

“My god, it must have taken you ages! It certainly sounds right! What do you think it means?” As always Erik was none the wiser.

Emma had an idea. “What ancient dark stone do you know of?” she asked rhetorically. “I think the word ‘dark’ signifies that this is of a material such as granite. You must know now!” Her eyes were glistening through the increasing snowfall. “What stone would Paul regard as the most important stone in history?”

“The Rosetta stone?”

“Exactly! I think that Paul may have hidden some sort of key in the British museum near the Rosetta stone! As I said, the Rosetta stone is THE STONE in Paul’s view, indeed for any linguist. Its discovery allowed the decipherment of ancient Egyptian and it’s the ultimate inspiration for anyone working with the translation of languages. It’s what attracted Paul to become a professor of linguistics and ancient history in the first place. Also, he knows the British museum better than most and we have spent a lot of time there together. It is the ideal place, I’m telling you! I can’t think of any other stone which he possibly could be referring to.”

“Well, what would you suggest; that we go back to London to check? Paul has clearly gone absolutely bonkers!”

“Actually that’s exactly what I’m suggesting. I’m not asking you to join me on this one. I could be wrong but I for one would like to check it out. It would be great if you came but for God’s sake, you need to go back to work soon, don’t you?”

“I have just buried my wife. I think my boss would understand and give me another few days. I would like to join you. We are in this together. Paul asked us

both, remember?” They started to walk back to the house. Erik took Emma’s hand.

“Yes but technically speaking we have already done what he asked us—we have cleared his name.”

“Well, we don’t actually know that yet and besides he could have hidden something of immense importance for us to find, or at least something of interest. Why else would he have left us the message? Or maybe it is something which tells us where he is.” At this Emma suddenly looked hopeful. Erik almost regretted suggesting this, as it may have given her false hope of Paul’s return. He continued after a moment’s hesitation: “Or maybe, thinking about it, maybe the ‘ancient dark stone’ is not the Rosetta stone but the rune stone here and the ‘key’ he is referring to is the chest!”

“No, that would mean that Paul was guilty of the break-in, which we have already concluded he’s not, on the basis that the chest was unopened. I refuse to believe that annoying police officer who suggested that Paul may nevertheless have been the perpetrator but the contract burglar had breached his contract by not opening the chest. Also, the rune stone is not ‘dark’ like the Rosetta stone. No, there’s simply no other ancient dark stone which he could possibly be referring to—not even the rune stone. I’m sure of it.” She hesitated for a moment and stopped walking and then continued: “Although... Paul has for some reason always loved dual meanings. Whenever he set us exam questions you could almost expect each question to have two right answers. He has mentioned dual meanings a few times in lectures. His message may have a dual meaning as well. He could be referring to both the rune stone and the Rosetta Stone...” She hesitated. “No, that would mean that he’s guilty so it can’t be... I’m sure he’s referring to the Rosetta stone so a trip to London is required.” She fell silent.

With the decision taken to travel back to London the next day, they walked without saying anything for a while until they reached Torpa and the great hall where Anna’s friends and family were conversing over coffee and some local speciality cakes that Anna had always adored. A series of tables had been arranged for the occasion, all carefully set to accommodate everyone and decorated in Anna’s favourite colours—blue and gold. At one end was an enlarged picture of her, in a gold frame. Erik stopped in front of it for a moment, looking into her eyes, unable to prevent the tears. His contemplations next to her grave suddenly seemed inconsequential. What mattered was Anna, her family and friends and her memory. He missed her but she would never come back. He had to be strong and get on with his life...

Chapter 24

London, February 2006

The ancient stone looked superb in its glass casing near the entrance to the Egyptian rooms in the British museum. The museum had only just opened for the

day but it had filled up quickly with busloads of tourists. They all appeared particularly interested in the Rosetta Stone and seemed to delay their stay in front of it long enough to learn both Greek and ancient Egyptian. Emma was standing next to Erik a few meters away, contemplating their next move. Emma was sure she had managed to find the right anagram from the message left by Paul. It made perfect sense: 'FIND KEY NEAR AN ANCIENT DARK STONE.' It simply had to be referring to the Rosetta stone. But standing next to it, there didn't seem to be an obvious place to hide anything. The place was eclipsed in a tight net of security, with cameras and security guards. Cleaners would sweep under and around the stone and probably also clean the glass on a daily basis. There was no way Paul could have hidden a key on or very near the stone. The room where it stood was full of impressive ancient Egyptian stone statues, depictions of kings, queens, deities and symbolic objects. The massive stone bust of the pharaoh Rameses II was looking down on them. Kings and queens, as well as parts from temples and tombs, transported from their ancient hiding places in Egypt in the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth century by early explorers, removed from their place of creation and home. Emma looked around, trying to see whether there was a nearby statue which would be particularly good to house a small object like a key or one which was particularly connected to Paul's areas of interest or the tablet.

"Let's have a proper look around. I'll look to the left and you to the right," Emma suggested. They each went about, studying each of the objects closely in search of a key, a written message or any other clue. Emma started with the objects immediately surrounding the Rosetta stone. She noted that by coincidence these were all from the 18th Dynasty, the dynasty started by Ahmose from the same era as the Torpa tablet. In a commanding position behind the stone to the left was a colossal lime-stone head from about 1550BC of the queen Ahmose Merytamun, Ahmose's daughter. She was bearing the large Hathor-wig. Her face was beautiful but had an almost shrewd look to it. Next to this was another massive head of a female from 1400BC, this time unmarked. The plaque simply guessed that it was the head of the mother goddess Mut. In front of the Rosetta stone to the left was a third head from around 1500BC. The plaque had identified this one as 'probably Thutmose' but Emma figured it was probably Queen Hatshepsut—the face bearing the distinctly female features of her other statues. This was all very interesting but Emma could not see how it helped them to understand what Paul had wanted them to find. The rest of their search revealed nothing; no sign from Paul at all.

"Perhaps the message is on the Stone itself", Erik suggested, "something in the text maybe?"

"No I don't think so. There's got to be something else we're missing, something obvious!"

"Let's take a walk around and think about it". Erik took Emma's hand and pulled her away from the ancient Egyptian section and out into the entrance area. "I think we just need a break to clear our heads. We'll find it!" Emma laughed at him. He was so sweet and enthusiastic, trying to cheer her up.

"Erik, I just wanted to say thank you for being here with me. You're a real friend." She could see his disappointment at the mention of the word 'friend'. She had suspected for a while that he had feelings for her. She looked at him. She had feelings for him as well but she wasn't sure what they were. He was incredibly

good looking, intelligent, sexy and he also had a fire in his eyes every time he looked at her. This made her feel warm inside. What made her keep her distance was her feelings for Paul and the expectation that he would return. Paul was her type, an intellectual, a linguist and not someone who would turn heads with his looks. She had seen pictures of Erik's wife and although they shared the same unusual eye colours, Anna had been stunning, a real beauty. Emma herself had plenty of insecurities about her exterior. Frankly, she was puzzled by Erik's interest in her. She suspected that he had only developed an interest in her because of the features she shared with Anna; her eyes and her interest in history. She doubted that he was really interested in her for who she was. She speculated that he may subconsciously have been looking for someone who reminded him of his wife, even if she was a far cry from Anna's doppelganger.

"What's the matter?" Erik asked.

"What?"

"You gave me a strange look."

"Did I? Sorry. I was actually thinking about Paul." Emma tried to look aloof. "Remember when we were here last. Paul was so excited about finding out more about what you knew about the tablet."

"Yes, I have to admit I thought the whole thing about the tablet and the Minoans a bit weird at the time; especially when you showed me the book."

"Wait a minute. That must be it! The tablet! Remember Paul and I sometimes refer to the Torpa Tablet as a keystone, because of its multilingual nature; the key to Linear A? Maybe he's referring to the tablet as the key, not the Rosetta stone. FIND A KEY NEAR AN ANCIENT DARK STONE." Emma paused gathering her thoughts. "Now, the tablet itself isn't here of course but as you know there's a very good photo of it in the Museum collection register." Erik nodded in response to Emma's sudden excitement. "If I was going to hide something in the Museum and didn't want anyone to stumble across it in the first place I'd choose a book, especially if the thing I was hiding wasn't a thing but information! It's obvious! Paul must have thought of the register as a place where we would look—but not necessarily where anyone else would! It's brilliant!"

"Well, it's certainly worth a look!"

"Let's go and have a look and see if I'm right!" replied Emma grinning triumphantly.

Like they had done several months ago, less than an hour after they had first met, they made their way to the King's library near the museum entrance. Erik led the way, taking the stairs two at a time up to the mezzanine floor and down to the corner via the narrow walkway where they had previously found the old volume listing museum collection items. They were all alone in the remote corner but they could be seen from the floor below. The lighting was low but the sun still managed to shine through from the windows on the other side of the room. Emma quickly found the book, searching its pages for the picture of the half stone tablet.

"Be careful with it! Paul could have hidden an item in the book itself; or maybe behind it", Erik suggested. He looked in the gap where the book had stood. "Nothing. Try shaking the book lightly; there could be something in it." Emma did as he had suggested, taking great care. To their disappointment nothing dropped out. She found the page with the reference to the tablet. At first they could see

nothing out of the ordinary. There was the picture and the brief caption. Emma studied it carefully.

“Let’s head over there to the Paul Hamlyn library,” Emma suggested pointing to the opposite end. “The lighting’s better there.” She had spent a lot of time there doing research as it was a comfortable reading room connected to the King’s library, in close proximity to the museum’s many treasures. She carried the book casually under her arm to avoid attracting attention. She knew that it was not allowed to remove books from the shelves. Luckily they managed to find a desk in the reading room without any problems. In stark contrast to the neighbouring rooms of the King’s library, the room they were now in was fairly modern, with desks equipped with computers and sensible reading lamps.

She refused to believe they had been wrong about the anagram and the reference to the picture of the tablet. The additional light certainly made it easier to see. She had not looked at it for long when she noticed minute writing on the side of the half tablet in the picture. If she had not looked at this page before and known it well she would not have noticed it. The text could easily be mistaken for a small stamp of approval of some kind and fit in with the style of the rest of the document but Emma was sure she had never seen it before. This could have been a new addition – something carefully added by Paul. She was suddenly excited.

“Look! Can you see the tiny writing?” She looked closer. “It’s Linear A! I think we might have found what Paul wanted us to find!”

* * * * *

She wasn’t sure what to expect but she suspected that the message would be in English this time. Almost an hour later she had succeeded in coming up with a comprehensible translation, although it was a very confusing message:

‘BL two thousand and four.a.twofourfourfivetwo’

There was nothing to say that this had actually been written by Paul. Had she translated it right? Double checking her Linear B values made her sure she had. She looked over her shoulder and noticed that Erik was nowhere to be seen. Where had he disappeared to? Emma packed up and put the book back on the shelf. She knew they must be close now; close to finding out Paul’s secret.

She was excited but unsure of what to do next so she wandered off in the direction of the exit in search of Erik. She found him immediately, outside the British Museum souvenir shop looking pleased with himself.

“Where have you been?” she asked. He didn’t answer but instead gave her a small package.

“This is for you, for being so perfect.” That took her by surprise. Not only was she so completely unaccustomed to being complemented in that way, she also couldn’t think what she might have done to deserve it. She stood there, stunned into silence. “Well? Open it!” he demanded grinning. Emma did as she was told. Inside the package was a white gold necklace with a small white gold pendent in the form of a replica of the Rosetta stone. “I found it in the shop...” he looked back “...and couldn’t resist buying it for you!”

Emma was touched. Nobody had ever bought her jewellery like this before: "Thank you Erik, that's so sweet of you! It's beautiful!" She really meant it. The necklace was an exquisite little thing which Emma knew she would always hold dear, even though it had been bought in a souvenir shop. This was undoubtedly one of the shop's more expensive items. She kissed him on the cheek and gave him a hug.

"Let me help you put it on," Erik offered, taking the necklace out of the box placing it around her neck. He was standing facing her as he struggled with the lock. His hands were warm and his body was close to hers; her head level with his chest. She could make out his well formed torso underneath his shirt. As he pulled away from her, having finished with the necklace, she said:

"Fancy hearing what I managed to make out from the message in the book?"

"Yes, of course!" They sat down on a bench near the entrance. Emma was speaking with a hushed voice which perhaps was a bit unnecessary since there were only two more people there and they were at the other end of the room by the reception desk.

"Well, it's a little bit confusing really but I think I translated it correctly. All it says is a number spelt out as words." She found her notebook and read it out. "*BL two thousand and four.a.twofourfourfivetwo*. Do you have any idea what it could mean?"

Erik hesitated for a moment, before shaking his head. "I'm afraid I don't have a clue. Could it be a bank account? Or perhaps a date in 2004? Or lottery numbers?" He added the last comment with a little laugh. "Could it be a phone number to someone with the initials BL? Or a post code somewhere on the continent, maybe in Belgium, hence BL? Or a GPS reference? There are plenty of possibilities."

"Well, could be but it looks a bit long to be a post code, it doesn't seem to fit with a date and unless Paul had suddenly adopted psychic powers I don't think this could have been lottery numbers. It could be a bank account number or a phone number, I suppose. You know, we can try the trusty internet again to see what comes up. We've done pretty well that way up to now."

"Yes, I suggest we go back to the library and use the computers there to check the message from Paul," Emma said as she stood up. Erik couldn't come up with a better course of action so he followed her example and they headed back to where Emma had been sitting previously.

"Try putting the whole sequence in the search box," she suggested. Erik did but there was nothing, not a single hit. "Try the number on its own". Again, this produced no results.

"How about BL on its own." Erik typed it in.

This time there were thousands of results. "Look, the first hit is the British Library!" she gasped. "Of course, it's so obvious! This is a shelf reference for a book in the British Library! Paul's done it again; he's hidden something in a book! It all makes perfect sense now. He and I have spent a lot of time in the British Library because it's where most of the books which were previously in the Museum were moved to."

“Let’s try the British Library website then and see if we can find the reference there.” Erik typed in the numbers in the library catalogue search engine and clicked search. Nothing.

“I think we might have more luck searching in person. Come on, it’s not far from here!”

Chapter 25

Unlike Erik, Emma was very familiar with the modern building near Kings Cross which housed a large proportion of the British Library collection. Although the building from the outside looked like any other contemporary construction, she explained to him that it was the largest public building erected in the UK in the 20th century and that the basements extended to a depth of 24.5 metres, housing millions of items. Emma, as a university student, luckily had the required Reader Pass to be able to gain access to the reading rooms and collections. The library was of significant importance. It housed treasures such as the Magna Carta, Leonardo da Vinci’s Notebook and the Gutenberg Bible. For this reason, security was key and it sometimes appeared to be more difficult to borrow a book there than to break into the Bank of England.

“Can I help you?” the librarian in the reception enquired with a friendly tone.

“Yes, we’re looking for a particular reference and were wondering how we would go about finding it: 2004.a.24452.” To their relief she didn’t ask any questions but immediately put the number into her computer noting:

“I see, you are looking for ‘*En las Cortes de Cádiz*’, by Alfonso Manuel Rodriguez.” Erik was taken aback and bewildered by this.

Emma reacted quickly, keeping her cool and answered: “Yep, that’s the one!”

“You would need to take the lift through that gate up to the second floor. You can ask one of the attendants there to collect it for you.”

They thanked her and went off to discuss their next move.

“What does the title mean?” Erik asked. “I don’t speak Spanish unfortunately. All I got was ‘Cadiz’.”

“It means something like ‘*In the parliament of Cadiz by Alfonso Manuel Rodriguez*’.”

“What on earth was Paul thinking when he chose that book?”

“Well, the only part of the message which makes any sense is the reference to Cadiz.”

“Yes, of course it could simply be a clue to where Paul is hiding. His yacht was found abandoned in Southern Spain, very near Cadiz.”

“Perhaps. That’s certainly a thought. Maybe that’s it. He was simply trying to reveal where he is. A professor lost in the parliament of Cadiz... Perhaps there’s no secret or hidden message.... This could be the end of the trail,” Emma said sarcastically.

“Well, there’s only one way to find out – to look in the book and see if there’s anything more to it.”

Erik, who didn't have a Reader Pass, had to stay downstairs whilst Emma ventured up the lift in search of the strange Spanish book which Paul had led them to. He wished her good luck and saw her disappear through the lift doors, blowing him a kiss. Erik laughed and blew her a kiss back but she had already gone and didn't see it. He casually diverted his hand to his hair mid kiss. He wasn't sure what she had meant by the gesture but he suspected that it meant nothing more than friendship. She clearly still had feelings for Paul and he didn't let himself think about what would happen in a possible reunion between them. It would be complicated but he was prepared to continue his quest to win her over. As for the message, he had no idea what any of it meant. The trail Paul had left was becoming more obscure by the hour! Could he have hidden or communicated something in that Spanish book. Could he have deciphered or at least made progress at deciphering Linear A and left his workings for Emma to find? Or was this, as they had discussed, the end of the trail, simply leading them to Cadiz to where Paul was hiding?

* * * * *

Erik had been waiting nearly two hours and there was still no sign of Emma. He started to get worried though he knew that rationally there was probably very little that could happen to her in a library. He dialled her mobile number for the fifth time but again it went straight to voicemail. He suspected that there was no coverage where she was or that she had been required to turn her phone off. Unable to sit and wait any longer, he walked up to the reception desk.

"I was wondering whether it would be possible to gain access to the reading rooms today please."

"Yes, certainly. Please go through there to complete our PC based application form. It is there on the upper ground floor," she said pointing at some stairs. He had just started to walk in the direction of the stairs when she shouted after him: "I assume you have two forms of identification bearing proof of your signature and home address?" He walked back.

"I do have two forms of identification, my driving licence and my passport but I do not have proof of my address unfortunately."

"Then I'm afraid you would need to come back another day."

Erik waived his arms in frustration. "I'm sorry but my friend is up there looking for a book and she's been away for nearly two hours. I'm getting worried something may have happened to her."

"Well, I wouldn't worry too much. Not all documents are available on open shelves in the reading rooms. Actually most items are kept in storage and it normally takes about seventy minutes to deliver books from the storage areas downstairs to the reading rooms." Erik looked at his watch. She continued: "And even then, after your friend has had the book delivered, she will not be able to take it with her. It's not possible to borrow books from any of our reading rooms. She would have to take copies or read it there and then. Depending on the book, that could take time of course."

Erik was surprised at the stringent application of the library's rules and the difficulty by which the facility's immense and impressive resources could be used. He was unsure what to do next. Having thanked the receptionist again for her

advice, Erik decided to give Emma another hour and sat down on one of the less than comfortable sofas near the lifts. She had not returned when another hour had passed. Three hours he had been waiting. Something was wrong. He knew it. He walked up to the reception desk again.

“My friend has still not returned and I’m worried that something may have happened to her up there. She went to the reading room on the second floor. Would it be possible for you to check with one of your colleagues up there if she’s alright?” He gave her the exact shelf reference, the name of the book and Emma’s name.

“Alright. There is not much that could happen to be honest. We don’t have many accidents around here but I’ll check if it will settle your nerves.” She smiled sweetly in a motherly sort of way and added: “Wait here and I’ll make a call.” When she came back two minutes later she had reassuring news: “Your friend is still in the reading room. I guess you’ll just have to wait.”

“Of course, thank you again.” There was no use trying to fake address details or sneak upstairs. Like the librarian had said, he would just have to wait, however much he hated it right at that moment. What on earth was Emma doing up there? He was just about to go back to the reception desk again when a familiar face exited one of the lifts. It was Emma. She had been crying and had mascara on her cheeks but was smiling more brightly than he had ever seen. He went over to her and in spite of being angry with her for taking so long he was incredibly relieved.

“Where have you been? What took you so long?” he blurted out.

“I have so much to tell you!” she said with an ecstatic shriek. “Let’s go and find somewhere to talk.” They found a quiet corner and a couple of chairs near the entrance. Emma looked around a number of times to ensure that there was no one around to eavesdrop on their conversation. When she was sure they were alone she leaned closer and said in a hushed voice: “Are you ready?”

“Yes, never more so. Please tell me what you found.” Erik assumed that it must have been something astonishing to merit such a reaction and precautionary measures.

“I don’t know where to start.” She hesitated, leaving him in suspense. He was getting impatient.

“Was there something in the book or did you meet someone? Surely Paul wasn’t hiding inside it,” Erik said with a dry laugh, almost spitting.

“It was the book. True to form, Paul had left something in the book for us to find. You won’t believe what it was!” Her voice was still hushed and she was smiling widely, almost teasing.

“Come on, what was it?” He was as good as jumping off his chair from anticipation.

“Paul has the other half of the tablet!” she hissed as quietly as she possibly could.

Erik stood up. It simply couldn’t be true. “What! Surely he couldn’t have hidden the half tablet in the book?” Erik whispered half joking, half in disbelief. “There is no way he could have the half tablet!”

“No, it’s true. I can’t believe it myself! Hidden inside the hard back binder of the book was a photograph of the Linear A side of the missing half tablet!”

“That’s absolutely fantastic! But...”

“Yes, this could mean that he’s guilty of something. It’s very strange. He clearly didn’t get hold of it from the burglar as the chest had not been opened when we found it and there was nothing outside of the chest in the space in the wall when we looked inside it.”

“But when?”

“Well, this is the part that really bothers me. According to the British Library records, the book in question had not been used since September 2004, when it was first published. And there was no evidence at all that the book had ever been taken out by Paul. He could have managed to get hold of the book without registering it. But in any event, it seems to me that Paul may have had the tablet all this time, for several months, and he has not told me about it! That’s what really upset me up there. He could have told me! Instead, he’s been working away, trying to decipher Linear A, probably laughing behind my back at my vain attempts at writing my dissertation and going through hundreds of items on Crete. This also explains what Mary suspected, that it seemed as if he had made some progress. He has not told me about any of it!”

“He did leave you the message to find it though. But it’s very strange. I suppose he didn’t want to incriminate you in any way,” Erik suggested.

“Or could someone else have sent me the message with the anagram which started all this off?” Emma was suddenly unsure. “No, it must have been him, or else someone who knew him extremely well and could write Linear A.”

“What were you doing up there for so long?”

“First waiting to get the book. Then reading some of the book, which was mainly in Spanish. Then being utterly confused for a while, somewhat mystified about the stories about the Napoleonic wars and the role played by the national legislative body in Cadiz, wondering if Paul had gone mad. And my Spanish is not as good as it used to be. This was how I spent most of my time up there. But then, when I was this close to giving up,” she illustrated just how close with her fingers, “I decided that there must have been more to it than that. I examined the book closely and found a small gap in its lining. Hiding in a quiet corner of the room I carefully opened it up and found this photo.” She handed it to him discretely, looking around nervously. It was in colour and taken close up, making it possible to read the text.

He was overwhelmed and confused by the sight of it. “What about the text. Did you also spend some time looking at the text of the tablet?”

“No, I didn’t get a chance to. That’s going to take me a bit of time. I had already been away for three hours when I found the photo. And besides, this is only one side. We still miss the other Egyptian part. I will be able to use it and make a start but it will be limited. Anyway, I can’t describe what I felt when I saw the picture; the item I have been searching for; the key to my dream, my one desire, of deciphering Linear A! I was confused. I panicked but was also excited. I cried and laughed at the same time and managed to get told off by the old man sitting a few desks away. At that point I figured it was time to leave.”

“I still don’t understand how Paul could have got hold of it and when. And why was he keeping quiet about it, letting us continue our search? It doesn’t make much sense, unless he committed a crime obtaining it. That could also explain his absence.” They sat quiet for a moment; contemplating the possibilities.

“Yes, he could have been in hiding, knowing that he had committed a crime obtaining the tablet.” She shrugged. “I don’t know but perhaps we should focus on the tablet and what it reveals in terms of clues for my dissertation. We’re sitting here with a picture of the forever lost half tablet—we could be a few hours away from knowing whether it’s possible to use it to decipher Linear A!” Emma stood up quickly. “It’s already afternoon and it’s been a long day but let’s go and see what that tablet has to say,” she said as she grabbed his arm and dragged him towards the exit as if she had no time to lose. Erik followed her like a little dog, without knowing where they were heading. After a few minutes she revealed their destination: “I can’t wait to have a proper look at it. I suggest we head back to the British Museum. I wouldn’t mind sitting in the Paul Hamlyn library. That would give me some peace and quiet and allow me to easily refer to the other half of the tablet from the museum reference book.”

A few minutes later they reached the museum stairs by the entrance. Erik knew that he would be superfluous to requirements in the translation exercise. He therefore suggested that he instead would go to an internet café and research about Cadiz to establish whether the book title had any significance, either as a hiding place for Paul or for another unknown reason. Emma agreed.

* * * * *

Emma found herself a desk. Except for one person, an older woman who seemed to be revising for a late afternoon guided tour, she was alone. She turned on the desk light with an excited grin, placing her notebook and the photo in front of her. As she grasped her pen she pondered whether this would be the day when she succeeded in deciphering Linear A. She was sure it would at least give her something; some new angle or connection to work with. She desperately needed progress for the sake of her dissertation. The revelation of a revolutionary ancient secret in the text of the photo was of course out of the question since the Linear A text could not be understood.

She more or less knew the familiar side of the tablet by heart but felt that it would be sensible to take it down on a piece of paper. The photograph was taken close up but because it was blurry she struggled to read it and had to strain her eyes to make out what the symbols were trying to convey. She quickly realised that it was an impossible task. Even though she had the entire Linear A side, she only had half of the diagonally inscribed Egyptian side. As far as she could tell it wasn’t possible to match the correct texts. She stared at the symbols for a while, hoping that a solution would jump out and present itself. It didn’t. She was so angry with Paul. If he had the last piece of the tablet, why didn’t he just give it to her? The answer was obvious. He didn’t want her to decipher Linear A before he did. He really was a criminal after all; a deceitful man with no regard for other people. All he cared about was his own fame and his own skin. How could she have been infatuated with him for so long, even several years? How could she not have seen how selfish he was and how strangely he had behaved? She thought back at his words to her: ‘we could never be together... you have a gift with languages’. Yes, a gift that he was intimidated by. Perhaps it was for the best... In a fit of hatred towards him she stood up and packed her things. She toyed with

the thought of calling the police to tell them about the photo and Paul's clues but she couldn't do it...

Chapter 26

Erik had a spell of bad luck. It started to rain as he said goodbye to Emma outside the British Museum. The rain got progressively harder as he started to walk towards Tottenham Court Road in search of an open café with a speedy internet connection. Half way there he decided to catch a lift with one of the quirky roofed bicycle taxis which reminded him of his honeymoon in Thailand. Following a somewhat nerve-racking ride with an evidently suicidal Rastafarian he suddenly realised, after his chauffeur had left, that his rucksack was missing. Despite shouting and running after the man on the bicycle there was simply too much hustle and bustle to catch his attention. The colourful roof soon disappeared round the corner and was then nowhere to be seen. There was nothing to be done—he had lost his bag. The only thing of value in the bag was his grandmother's bible, which he for some reason had taken from the Torpa library shelf before departing for England. Other than that, all it contained was some toiletries and clothes. Still, the loss of his grandmother's bible was devastating. He had been entrusted with it but had failed even in this simple task. Distraught and disappointed with his own gullibility, he sat down on the street corner, leaning his head in his hands just as a classic red bus tore past throwing up one of the many newly formed puddles nearby, drowning him in polluted street-water. His normally blond hair had taken a more subtle mousy brown tone and his face was streaked with mud. His mood wasn't lifted when he looked up and realised he was sitting in the middle of the London red-light district, which by day was no more than a tourist hang-out but at that time in the afternoon started to show traces of the hubbub to come. He was just about to get up when a miracle happened. His rucksack appeared out of nowhere to land in his lap! He turned around just in time.

The taxi rider man was ringing his bell, waiving at him, shouting in his distinctive West Indian accent: "I think you forgot something!"

"Thank you!" was all Erik could shout back before the bike whizzed round another corner out of sight. Erik was left waiving a grateful hand at nobody in particular, shocked into stunned silence with a silly grin on his face. To his relief everything was still in the bag just as he had left it, including the old bible. It occurred to him how ridiculous he must appear, drenched to his skin, covered in mud but still with a huge smile on his face. At that embarrassing but yet happy moment he heard a familiar voice.

"I leave you for half an hour and you end up begging on street corners!" Emma laughed. He laughed as well. "It was pure luck I found you!" Her hair was wet and messy and she was out of breath from the walk there. She reached out her hand to help him up. It was warm. "You're all dirty and wet. What on earth have you been up to?" she asked. Before he could answer, their eyes met. Erik noticed that

her cheeks were red and her green eye seemed even greener than normal, just like Anna's sometimes had done when she was happy, angry or generally upset about something. The look she gave him was full of something which he could easily have mistaken for... affection. This took him by surprise. She came nearer and put her arms around him, standing on her toes to reach around his neck. The street was still bustling with people. This didn't prevent Emma from holding him and putting her head on his chest. He could feel the warmth of her body next to his through their clothes as he held her tightly. He was in a state of disbelief, not wanting to ruin the moment by moving or speaking. They remained motionless in an embrace for what must have been several minutes, with people constantly rushing past, until Emma looked up at him and their lips met. They kissed, tenderly initially but after a few seconds more violently. The sensation was overwhelming. He had been dreaming of that moment for some time. Now that it had come, it felt more right than he had ever dared to hope. It was as if the people around them had disappeared and they were all alone in the middle of nowhere. In his mind they were back at Torpa, standing next to the lake in the woods after their swim in August. He could virtually hear the seagulls and the wind rustling in the trees. Water was dripping down his naked body after the swim. He touched her hair, ran a finger down her neck and then down to her waist. The material of her jacket was thick and coarse. This brought him back to reality. Brutally, the noise of the busy London street returned, as if someone had pressed a button. He opened his eyes. They stopped kissing and Emma looked at him. Her eyes radiated tenderness.

"This is no place to have a first kiss, is it?" They both looked around and smiled. They were surrounded by a strange mixture of tourists, business people, homeless people and families, all hustling for space on the pavement. She took his hand and they started to walk down the street with no particular destination in mind.

A surge of happiness filled his chest. He didn't care about the rain or the crowded street, or the fact that he might get fired if he didn't show up for work soon. All that mattered was the two of them, walking hand in hand down a busy London street on a rainy afternoon. He almost felt as if Anna had come back and he visualised a shorter version of her walking next to him.

Emma broke the silence again: "What about Cadiz? Shall we go there to check out whether Paul meant anything by the book title, to continue to follow Paul's trail? It would be a shame to stop now that we've made such good progress." She looked at him with sheepish eyes. "What if he's hidden the other side of the tablet there..."

That was a possibility which Erik hadn't thought of but he nevertheless felt that a trip to Cadiz would be a complete waste of their time. "I need to get back to work and you need to write your dissertation. I doubt whether Paul's hidden the tablet in Cadiz. In order to smuggle it out of Sweden he would have had to drive. He wouldn't have had time to do that..." He scratched his head and continued. "...Unless he hired someone to do it for him of course. But why hide it in Cadiz of all places. It wouldn't make sense."

"I agree. It would be a bit weird. But what about Paul himself? Perhaps he wants us to find him there?"

"I doubt it. If he wanted us to find him he could've just told us where he was."

“I suppose you’re right... Travelling to Cadiz may not help us with the last piece of the jigsaw; to find the missing Egyptian hieroglyphic side...”

Chapter 27

Torpa, Sweden, April 2006

Erik had another vivid dream. He saw the body of a person, hanging lifeless from a rope tied to a branch of a tree. The process of decomposition hadn’t started properly. The hair and face were unmistakable. It was Paul. He was dead; neck broken by the impact of the rope. His eyes had been picked out, leaving two bloodcurdling black holes... He woke up in his bed at Torpa. It was Saturday and a lovely spring morning, although it was somewhat ruined by the sickening feeling the dream had given him. The dream reflected a fear he had about Paul; that he had committed suicide, not necessarily by hanging but perhaps drowning or whatever. Paul lived for his career. If he got caught and convicted he risked losing his position at Oxford and his reputation would be ruined. He would lose everything he had ever worked for. If he was guilty of the break-in and of indirectly having caused the death of Erik’s grandmother, then he would have had at least one reason to take his own life. It was two months since Paul’s unexplained disappearance from Beirut. Much had happened in that time. The police were still treating him as a suspect, convinced by the contract burglar’s story, that Paul had been his employer. But the official police search for Paul seemed to have been scaled down. As the police officer had said, they suspected that he was dead but no body had been found. This didn’t mean that Paul was out of the woods. There was no doubt that if he showed up, he would get arrested and it would then be up to him to prove his innocence. Following the discovery of the unopened chest, his motive for the break-in had been put into question. If he had hired the burglar with the intention of finding the tablet, it would have made no sense not to open it to discover if the tablet was indeed hidden inside. If arrested, that could form the basis for Paul’s defence. The only evidence to bring Paul down would be the testimony of a convicted criminal no doubt with a track record as black as soot and a history tangled with lies and corruption. His chances of success were better than even. But the fact that he appeared to possess the tablet itself put all that into question, if it was revealed to the police.

Erik had come back to Torpa the night before, after having spent several weeks in his flat in central Gothenburg back at work. His parents were in Stockholm and he had the house to himself. He didn’t feel lonely in spite of the secluded setting of the house and the lack of company. For now, the calm of the Torpa estate and surroundings was enough for him. He was not intending to contact any of his friends or visit anyone but instead he was looking forward to a weekend of quiet contemplation and exercise, something which he had been deprived of during weeks of late evenings at work and lunches with clients.

He missed Emma a lot. They had spoken on the phone a number of times but it wasn't enough. It had been a whole week since their last call. He couldn't wait to speak to her, or better still to see her. Unfortunately there were no plans for either of them to travel over as yet. He had decided to leave Emma alone to get on with her work. Back in Sweden he had buried himself in his work, getting into the swing again, trying to repair the damage which a few weeks of absence had caused the relationship with his boss. He wasn't helped by the fact that he had not been able to sleep very well. He was plagued by a feeling that he had missed something important. Sometimes he had even woken up on the floor after having fallen out of bed and once he had woken up in the empty bathtub. He was worried about Paul. He had been away for a long time without calling or otherwise letting them know where he was or what he was doing. It was strange and Emma was concerned as well but according to her it was not wholly unusual for him. He had done it before; disappeared without keeping in touch. He needed to think over everything that had happened, figure out what to do next, decide whether this was the time to continue the search for Paul and the perpetrator or just forget about the whole thing. He also had a bad conscience. He had not been to Anna's grave since his return to Sweden. He decided that the graveyard would be his first excursion for the day.

After a quick breakfast he put on his tracksuit and trainers and went outside, walking the path in the direction of the graveyard not very far from their house. Because the weather looked promising, wonderfully spring-like with a pale blue sky, a warming sun and little wind, he decided to take a walk first, thinking that walking would kill two birds in one stone. It enabled him to think straight, contemplate his situation and get some exercise. He was breathing in the fresh air and enjoying the bird song as he was striding along the path through the forest. When he reached the secluded graveyard he first thought it was empty but then he noticed someone, a woman, standing next to one of the graves, bending down to place flowers in a vase. As he came nearer he saw who it was. It was Britt-Marie next to the grave of his grandmother. It was clear that she had only just got there. She knelt next to the stone and seemed to be starting to pray. Her eyes were closed and she didn't notice Erik approaching. He waited for her to finish before going up to make himself known, keeping the distance, not to disturb her. He could hear her saying something but could not hear what. As she eventually opened her eyes and released her hands, he walked over.

"Britt-Marie, so nice to see you!"

She was startled by his voice and stood up in haste. "Oh my god, you really scared me there!" As she looked at him he noticed that a tear made its way down her cheek. He had not appreciated that she was still mourning the death of his grandmother, having almost forgotten that she had spent most of her life serving her and her family. The old woman's death had clearly changed Britt-Marie's life overnight, making her redundant in a way.

He walked over and gave her a hug. "I'm sorry I haven't been over to see you more, Britt-Marie. You are more my mother than my own mother in many ways."

"Well, you have always meant a lot to me, Erik."

"Do you miss her a lot?"

Britt-Marie nodded gravely and had a funny look on her face when she replied: "Yes, it's not the same without her. She wasn't always easy to be around but it's certainly strange now she's gone." Erik could have sworn that he had seen a glimmer of guilt in her face for a split second. "Anyway, I'd better be going."

"Do you want to come over this evening to keep me company in the house? My parents are in Stockholm. It would be nice to catch up. It's been a while."

"Thank you Erik. That would be very nice. Shall we say about seven?"

"Sounds good – and this time I'm cooking!"

She laughed and started to walk in the direction of her car, waving goodbye as she drove away. Although she had been Erik's nanny throughout his childhood until he was a teenager, practically raising him single-handedly, he didn't know much about her; whether she had many friends and where she would normally go on holiday. He felt ashamed about this fact. It meant that he had always treated her as a servant rather than as a member of the family; that he had been too focussed on himself and that he had not even bothered to ask her what she was doing in her spare time. He would not have the solitary evening that he had planned but in a way he was looking forward to spending some time talking to Britt-Marie. It had been too long.

He spent half an hour next to Anna's grave before embarking on the walk back to the house. To extend it, he walked via the lake where he had swum with Emma all those months ago, in August. Memories of that came flooding back. Although he had been living his life day by day, getting on well on his own over the past couple of months, he realised that it wasn't actually living—merely getting by. He missed Emma. Somehow she brought meaning back to his life; made it into something other than a never ending client meeting. He would call her as soon as he came back to the house and suggest that she come over. He even ran the last bit. He started dialling her number as soon as he came in the door, sitting down still with his shoes on in the library chair. To his surprise a man answered Emma's mobile phone. He guessed it was one of her brothers.

"Hello? Is Emma there?"

"No, she's not here at the moment. Can I take a message?"

"When will she be back?"

"Who is this please?"

"I'm Erik, a friend of Emma's."

"Well, Emma's been in town every day this week. I've hardly seen her. Not sure if she's met a man or what. I certainly hope so; it's about time. It's not like her to spend so much time out of the house when she's down here." Erik was confused. Her brother clearly didn't know that there was something between him and Emma. It had only been little over a month since his departure from London. For a split second he imagined Paul had returned and Emma was spending all that time in London with him but he quickly pushed the unlikely thought away.

"Well, when she gets in, please let her know I called." He agreed and then hung up. Erik started to take his shoes off and leaned back, taking a deep breath as he relaxed. He was deep in thought as he heard a loud bang in the distance. It was too early for Britt-Marie. He had a quick look around, both inside the house and out through the window into the garden but saw nothing out of the ordinary. He was still completely alone. Thinking nothing more of it, he decided to take a bath

to try and calm his thoughts. Whilst the bath filled he got himself a glass of wine, grabbed a book from the library and got undressed. The bath was lovely and warm, complete with bubbles and all. He could feel his body relax as it was eclipsed by the water.

He had been in the bath for nearly half an hour, fingers wrinkly, when he heard another loud noise. It sounded almost like a door closing hard in the distance but he wasn't sure. He couldn't be bothered to check, staying in the bath ignoring it, sure that any inspection would reveal nothing again. If the noise was caused by the nearest neighbour cutting wood, it must have been done with an enormous sledge hammer on metal to be heard this clearly from such a distance away. Not very likely. Perhaps his mother had allowed some local farmers to cut down some of their trees or maybe it was a hunter. Anyway, he was sure there was a perfectly logical explanation. Putting the questions aside, he decided to have some lunch and spend the rest of the afternoon reading; finishing the book he had started and allowing himself time to relax for a change. He wanted to keep his mind occupied to avoid thinking about Emma. He managed to keep his thoughts at bay by taking a drive to the local supermarket to buy ingredients for what he was planning to cook for dinner. He then spent an hour doing his best to cook a starter and main course, wanting to impress Britt-Marie, perhaps to start the overdue repayment for all she had done for him over the years. He had timed it better than he had expected and was as good as finished the moment Britt-Marie rang the door-bell. He opened the door and hugged her again as she came in. She wore a flowery dress which he had never seen before. He suspected it was new.

"Thank you for coming! I hope you didn't have any other plans for this evening?" he asked, suddenly worried that she might have felt obliged to join him for some reason.

"No, certainly not. I don't have much of a social life nowadays. It would have been another Saturday night spent with my parents watching some less than exciting quiz show on television. I'm glad you suggested it!" They went into the dining room where Erik had set the table.

"This is lovely Erik. And I can smell there's something very tasty cooking!" She sat down and Erik went to get the starter. Not exactly haute cuisine but Britt-Marie seemed to appreciate it.

"So, what have you been up to then?" he asked, keen to show a bit of interest in her for a change. "Are you going away anywhere on holiday this summer?"

"Not very much, I'm afraid. No holiday plans either, other than doing some gardening and perhaps going over to Stockholm for a weekend in July. What about you? Where's Emma? I'm sure she will come over later on in the summer?"

"Hm, I'm not sure. I've been thinking about asking her to come over pretty soon. We also need to think about Paul's whereabouts and that damn old tablet which is still missing..."

"That's strange. Paul has still not showed up then, has he?" She said it with confusion in her voice, looking puzzled. He trusted Britt-Marie and decided to explain the whole sequence of events.

"He was wanted by the police for the Torpa break-in, and..." he paused, unsure whether he could tell her but decided that it could do no harm. "...and he had the tablet in his possession, or at least a picture of one side of it. I can't for the life of

me work out how he managed it though. How on earth could he have obtained the tablet? This would have no doubt incriminated him. Anyway, he left us a message which seemed to lead to Cadiz but we decided to stop our search and go home basically. I can't say I'm not worried what may have happened to him though..." He didn't tell her about his dream. It was not worth upsetting her unnecessarily. Britt-Marie didn't say anything for a long time. Her behaviour was strange. She seemed perplexed, not touching her food and avoiding looking at Erik. Eventually, she looked up, taking one of his hands over the table. He wasn't sure how to react.

"Erik, there's something I have to tell you." Erik was a little uncomfortable and Britt-Marie was acting very strangely. She continued. "I hate to tell you this but I feel that with the unfortunate events and all the questions being asked you ought to know the truth. I cannot keep it to myself any longer. It wouldn't be fair on either of us." She paused, looking as if she was resisting tears. Her hand felt cold against his skin. What could have prompted this reaction? Erik had no idea. She started her explanation: "It happened thirty years ago."

"What did?" he said, voice full of accusation.

He looked into her eyes as she continued: "I knew the woman in the chest. I know who she was." Britt-Marie said this calmly, still holding Erik's hand across the table.

"What? You knew her? Who was she?!"

"She was a dancer from Denmark, Copenhagen." Britt-Marie smiled. "She really was an amazing dancer. Tall, slim and very beautiful. When she was on stage she was almost floating, gliding effortlessly across the floor. Everyone loved her. She was my friend; we had been pen pals from a young age. She was staying here at Torpa when she was over for the dance competition. It wasn't the first time. She had been over several times before. I thought I was the reason to why she came here; I was working here already then, as your grandmother's maid. My mother convinced Anne-Lise to enter the competition. I have never been able to dance so my mother saw her as a godsend—someone to teach with success rather than embarrassment."

"But you weren't the reason to why she kept staying here?"

"Well, at least not the only reason. It turned out she had met a man here. She was so happy when she told me; said she was in love. She didn't say who it was but I guessed soon enough. There weren't that many men on the estate, at least not handsome ones."

"What happened?"

"Unsurprisingly she got pregnant. Their relationship was still kept under wraps but your grandmother found out. She reacted in a way no one could have predicted. She took her under her wing, cared for her, let her stay on the estate in secret during her pregnancy, as Anne-Lise had not wanted to tell her parents. God knows what she told them. As far as I was aware, abortion was never an option. It was a happy little existence here those few months. She helped me in my duties as a maid. She never went outside the estate, spent most of her spare time in the cold stone house but she was looking forward to having the baby, reading lots of books about it and planning what she would do when she got back to Denmark. She never planned to stay with the baby's father. I know she loved him but it was all too complicated."

“Did she have the baby?”

“Yes and everything went well. At that stage, your grandmother had arranged for one of the rooms in the old house to be hers and that’s where she had the baby.” Britt-Marie had a strange dreamy look. “It was a lovely room, albeit cold. She cared for it for a couple of months there, breastfeeding, changing nappies, and reading to it, just like any mother. I helped her, and so did others on the estate. But then she got restless, said she wanted to leave. She said she didn’t want to continue to be a burden and that she had decided to go back to her parents and come clean. I said goodbye to her and that was the last time I saw her—until you showed me her picture a few months ago, linking her with the woman in the chest. I cannot deny I was shocked but I didn’t want to tell you this then.”

“What are you saying? Do you think we were right to make the connection? Do you think she was murdered and buried in that chest?” Erik almost lost his voice as he spoke.

“Yes, I’m afraid I do.” Britt-Marie looked down and put her head in her hands.

“How can you be so sure?” he said aggressively.

She looked up. Her voice was weak, indifferent. “Well, I never heard from her again. I wrote her many letters but she never responded. I always wondered why. We all knew that she had left and gone back to Denmark. That is what she had told us before she left. She was looking forward to seeing her family. The strangest thing was that she had left the baby behind. I always found that most surprising. She loved that little baby. I gathered she just wanted to lead a normal life, to forget about being a single mother and live life but it was so unlike her. So out of character. I never suspected your grandmother though. Not once when she was alive did it cross my mind that she may have had something to do with Anne-Lise’s disappearance. In fact, I admired her for helping Anne-Lise at such a difficult time. But it was after her death when you and Emma showed me the picture of her that the pieces of the puzzle started to fall into place. It made perfect sense—the woman in the chest was Anne-Lise. The only possible perpetrator I can see here is your grandmother.” Her words were followed by silence.

“But why? Why would she do it?” Erik managed to say.

“Well, she had a motive.” Britt-Marie hesitated.

“What do you mean?”

Almost a minute passed until she spoke again: “She had started to take a liking to the little baby boy. Her only child, her daughter, had been unsuccessful in producing an heir despite several years of trying. Tests had confirmed that she was unable to have children. She had told me on several occasions.” She gazed at Erik.

“What!? That can’t be! Tests like that in those days can’t have been totally reliable.” Erik’s head was spinning. Britt-Marie continued, ignoring him.

“So when this little baby boy came into her hands it was almost too good to be true—there was the future of the Torpa estate.” Britt-Marie paused, lost in her own thoughts while Erik stared at her in disbelief. Through it all he realised that Britt-Marie appeared much older than the last time he had seen her, as if the weight of the secret she had been keeping from him all these years had suddenly taken its toll. “Your parents raised that little boy as their own.” Her eyes were sheepish, as if saying: ‘please understand’.

The truth was devastating to Erik. He was that unfortunate little boy. His whole life had been a lie and the woman buried so cruelly in the chest, this Anne-Lise, was in fact his real mother! He wasn't sure what to say or do. The only words that came out of his mouth were: "Who is my father?"

"Well, I thought you had already worked that out." She paused and took his other hand. "Your father is your father Erik! He was unfaithful to your mother. You might have noticed that your grandmother didn't always see eye to eye with your father. This is the reason. Your mother doesn't know. It was kept a secret. She doesn't know who your biological father is. Many people on the estate have guessed it but your mother has never said anything about it. Either she never knew, which is not unlikely given that she didn't spend a lot of time on the estate or with her husband at the time, or she pretends to be ignorant about it to protect her own position."

Erik felt ill. He needed to get some fresh air. He stood up and went outside without uttering another word. It was dark but the floodlights revealed the old stone house in all its glory. At that moment he hated it. He felt lonely, abandoned. The large empty, lifeless building exaggerated his solitude and isolation from the rest of the world. The revelation that his mother was not his biological mother explained a lot, in particular the complete lack of emotions and love from her side towards him. But still, it made him feel like an outsider, as if he didn't belong there. His mother was a young woman from Denmark who had been dead for thirty years! His father was nothing but an adulterous deceiving crook that had lived his life knowing that his own child was the fruit of that adultery! Who was he; a lost soul with no one in his life? In a way he had lost his life. He had lost his wife and now he had also lost his parents and his understanding of whom he was and his heritage. Some people would say he was lucky. He had money, a good job and a good education but that was nothing without love, laughter, relationships and having an identity. He took a deep breath and listened to the sounds of the evening. It was almost completely quiet around him. Not a sound, not even birds. Suddenly the calm was interrupted when his mobile phone, which he for some reason still carried in his jeans pocket, started to ring. It took him by surprise but he managed to come to his senses quickly enough to answer, without reflecting on who it could be.

"Erik, it's me. My brother just told me you called. How's it going?" Emma had finally phoned him back.

"Hi! So good to hear your voice!" He told her about the dreadful news he had only just found out, that the dead woman in the chest was in fact his own mother.

Emma was speechless but quickly recovered in time to suggest she come over to Sweden for a few weeks to keep him company: "It would be so good to see you, and Torpa, and also to have some peace and quiet to work on the final stages of my dissertation."

Erik was more than happy to oblige. He tried to tone his reply down but inside he was screaming with joy. From having been in a state of depression, Erik was suddenly cheerful. She missed him and she wanted to see him!

They agreed that she would try to get a flight already for the next day. After they had hung up, Erik couldn't stop smiling. He figured it would be strange to return to Britt-Marie with a big grin on his face after the terrible news she had only just

shared with him. She would think he had gone mad. So when he re-entered the house he tried to keep his facial expression as serious as possible.

Britt-Marie had moved and was sitting, almost hugging her glass of wine, in front of the fireplace in the living room. She was rocking back and forth, which wasn't a good sign. He looked over at the wine bottle next to her. It was almost empty. She must have had at least two glasses whilst he was out. She didn't look over at him as he came in. He felt he needed to tell her it was ok. He would be ok... and it wasn't her fault.

"Emma called. She's coming over, hopefully tomorrow!" She turned around with a perplexed look on her face. He could see she had been crying. He went over to her and bent down to hug her. "Don't worry about me. I'm fine now that Emma is coming. I'm a big boy. I will survive. I have survived so far with less than loving parents. This won't change anything."

She finally spoke. "I'm sorry for not telling you before."

"Don't worry. I understand why you didn't. It's not exactly the sort of news you can just blurt out." He then realised a point which he in a state of shock had failed to see; that none of what she had said explained how Paul had got hold of the tablet. That was how their conversation had started. He asked her and sat down next to her. She hesitated for what felt like an eternity before she answered, still with her eyes fixed on the dancing fire. It had started to rain outside and he could hear the violent smatter on the living room window.

"Ever since I made the connection about Anne-Lise's death I suspected that your grandmother was somehow the instigator of the break-in in August. She knew what the wall was hiding and she would have wanted to ensure that the murder that she may have committed all those years ago remained a secret. It makes perfect sense."

"From what I heard one of the police officers say when we opened the chest, Anne-Lise was either poisoned or she was buried alive in there. There was no sign of any exterior wounds. I have not heard anything further from the police but either way, the perpetrator must have opened the wall somehow, removed the existing contents of the chest, if any, put Anne-Lise in there, either asleep or dead and then bricked up the wall again and re-plastered it. I really cannot see how my grandmother could have done all that. She must have been helped by someone who knew what they were doing."

"I agree. She couldn't have done it all alone," Britt-Marie said gravely.

"Well, my other point is that she, or the person who helped her, must have emptied the contents of the chest thirty years ago. It could have contained anything—and my guess is that we were right; it contained the other half of the Torpa tablet. She could have hidden it somewhere on the estate and Paul could have found it. Or she could have given it to Paul..."

"Yes, I suppose so..." Britt-Marie seemed tired or diverted. They had both had a fair bit to drink by that point and could not drive. Erik offered for her to stay over in her old room. She gratefully agreed.

"Goodnight Erik. I'm sorry about everything. You're a lovely boy. I love you as if you were my own son."

"I love you too, Britt-Marie." They hugged again and each went to their rooms. Erik could not sleep. He lay awake for what felt like half the night, tossing and

turning, running everything over in his head until it hurt. It was nearly four o'clock in the morning when he suddenly heard footsteps in the corridor outside his door. He wondered what Britt-Marie was doing. Her footsteps continued down the stairs and then out of earshot. She must be going for some water. Erik then thought he heard the front door close but figured he was probably tired enough for his mind to be playing tricks on him. He decided it was definitely time to get some sleep. It was Sunday but he had to be fresh, just in case Emma managed to get some last minute deal on a flight. He pulled the covers up under his chin and drifted off to happy thoughts of seeing Emma again. The news that his mother was not actually his biological mother was no longer at the forefront of his mind. He had earlier decided that he was not going to mention to his parents that he knew, at least not yet.

Chapter 28

Britt-Marie made no mention of her nocturnal excursion over an uncomfortable breakfast the next morning. Erik might have imagined it but he doubted it. It was definitely footsteps and she was the only other person in the house. He did not ask her about it. Instead, he thanked her for telling him about his biological mother and went straight to the airport to pick up Emma. She had managed to get a last minute flight.

As he saw her walking towards him at Arrivals he got a warm happy feeling inside, looking forward to a couple of weeks in her company. Erik took her heavy bag on the way to the car park, chatting about the events of the evening before. As soon as they were in the car, he realised with disappointment that he may not have been the only reason for her Swedish visit. She dived straight into a speculation of where the lost half tablet could be. She explained that without the entire tablet she had no chance of getting anywhere. She only had the existing half and the incomplete photograph of the Linear A side of the lost tablet but she had realised that she could not crack the code of Linear A without the complete Egyptian hieroglyphic side. She was intending to devote a significant proportion of her time to its search while she was there. She saw it as a key ingredient to academic success.

“Torpa is still the obvious place to look for the tablet. Who would be stupid enough to carry something like this around. And someone clearly gave the photo of it to Paul when he was at Torpa. Unless someone later transferred the tablet from its thirty year old hiding place, it's still there; waiting for us to find!” In her excitement at the thought, she kissed Erik on the cheek. “I've missed you! It's so good to see you!”

“I've missed you too. You should know that I've been thinking about asking you to come over here many times but I wanted to give you time.”

“Time for what?” she asked. Erik hesitated. He thought about Paul. He didn't want to spoil the moment. “To let me work?”

“Yes...”

“Well, for what it’s worth, I’ve made excellent progress on my dissertation. It’s looking good and even Mary seems satisfied. She’s also given me some useful hints. Apparently Paul told her a few of his decipherment theories on his visit to Athens, to use her as a sounding board. As a result she had suspected already then that he might have had the tablet in his possession. He wasn’t very careful with what he said; not a very good criminal, bless him. She had reasoned that some of the things he had said didn’t make sense unless he had been able to read a bilingual text. I suspect that’s why she warned you about him.”

“Perhaps... I can’t believe you told her about the photo of the tablet!” Erik said with disbelief and a hint of repulsion. “Can we trust her?”

Emma was surprised. “Weren’t you the one who trusted her when she said Paul could not be trusted? You defended her then; what’s changed? She even proved to be right about Paul; or very likely so! And besides, she would never tell the police. She’s a true academic, just like Paul. Almost everything goes in pursuit of science and new discoveries.”

“Not very ethical but I suppose we can’t both be wrong about Mary. I still trust her. She seems an honest person who would stick to her word... Did she know anything else? Had Paul told her anything?”

“No, not according to her. I asked her. She didn’t know for sure that he was up to something until I told her about the trail and the photo.”

* * * * *

They had the house to themselves when they arrived an hour later. Britt-Marie had gone back home and his parents were still away. He noticed with joy that the fridge had been restocked and the house cleaned in the couple of hours he had been away. Probably Britt-Marie’s doing, he guessed.

“Would you like some coffee or tea?”

“Mmm yes, tea please! Can we take it in the library? The lovely chair in there has featured in my dreams over the last few weeks! I can’t wait to sit in it in front of the fire again.”

Erik laughed at her and carried a tray with tea and some homemade buns which Britt-Marie had left behind. Her love of Torpa amused and pleased him. It reminded him of Anna. More than ever he felt like kissing her there and then. He lit the fire and they sat together on her favourite chair, listening to the flames spitting and cracking, drinking their tea and talking about their pleasant and unpleasant shared experiences—all with some connection to the godforsaken Torpa tablet.

“I have to say that although with hindsight I probably shouldn’t have started the search for the half tablet all those months ago, I can’t say that I regret it, even despite Paul’s sticky situation. At least I met you!” Erik looked at her. She stroked his cheek with the back of her hand. In a reflex reaction he took her hand and held it against his cheek for a split second before slowly releasing it. “Erik, you should know that you’ve become very important to me.” With this she walked over to the bookshelf with the journals and reached out for the journal covering the year 1976.

“Have you looked in this properly? This was the year when your grandmother, or whoever it was, must have uncovered the tablet in the chest in the space in the

wall. It could give some clues as to where it was hidden. It must have happened two or three months after you were born, so around December of 1975. Now that we know this more exact timing it should be easier.”

“Well, I don’t think I’ve actually read through the whole thing, if that’s what you mean.”

“You should, starting now if you don’t mind. I would love to myself but my Swedish still isn’t great.”

“Not far off though!” he laughed, referring to her undoubted linguistic ability. Whilst she went to find her laptop so she could start work on her dissertation, he did as she had suggested and started to go through the thick collection of journals of 1976 from the start. He quickly realised that it was even more boring than the earlier ones, merely book keeping, a record of purchases and income, as well as assets and liabilities. Obviously, he didn’t find the same gruesome comments about death-count that he had found in the journals from the middle ages, just plain numbers and short descriptions. There was nothing of interest at all, although he noted that the estate was in excellent economic health.

It had been nearly an hour since he had started to look through the journals. He was nearing the end and was on the brink of throwing the book in the fire in a fit of rage due to its boring content when he suddenly spotted a thin bit of paper tucked between a couple of the fragile pages. Someone had cut out an article from the local paper and stuck it in there. The paper had gone a bit yellow from age but was still intact. The article was brief and had the title ‘*Has he found the escape route from Torpa?*’ It proclaimed that a local plumber had found an historic relic during works to equip the estate with new drain pipes. What he had found was believed to be the entrance to the old escape route leading from the house to the other side of the smaller of the two lakes on the estate. It had been mentioned in history books and was known to have been built for the purpose of serving as an escape route if the estate’s defenders had to surrender to their enemies, the Danish, hundreds of years before. The article continued saying that following the find the entrance had quickly been covered up again. It said that lack of funds had made any excavation of the old underground tunnel impossible and it was too dangerous to leave open as it was as the tunnel was unstable and liable to collapse. Erik was surprised at this, given what he had just seen in the journals—the estate’s economy was good. He was also surprised that although he had grown up on the estate and had spent all his life there, he had never heard any mention of an underground passageway. It had been forgotten or ignored but either way must have fallen into oblivion.

“Emma, look at this article here. Apparently Torpa had an underground passage way!” He translated the article for her and told her about his thoughts. He showed her the picture which accompanied the article. It was black and white and boasted a bearded young man with a cap, the plumber, together with a hole showing the top of the archway to the entrance, covered almost entirely by rubble. The picture had been taken just after its discovery, before it had been covered up.

“I suppose it’s a little bit odd that you’ve never heard about it but not very surprising really. It could have been seen as a bit of an embarrassment that the local paper had said that there were not enough funds for the excavation work and it could have been a topic which no one wanted to approach with the estate’s

family members. And people's memories are short. It was probably completely forgotten about by the time you were old enough to understand."

"But why couldn't they have spent money on the excavation works? There were clearly enough funds there. Something is not right about this. This underground passage forms part of Torpa's history. Its discovery must have been significant. People would have been interested to see it. It could have become a tourist attraction. But instead, they chose to board it up and forget about it."

"Perhaps they simply weren't very interested in these things in those days. But what are you suggesting?"

"I might be wrong but I'm thinking that perhaps it was secretly used for something else, even in my lifetime."

"Like what?" Emma paused. "Perhaps the tablet was hidden there?" She sounded hopeful.

"I'm not sure about that but I would certainly like to find out. This place seems to have a lot of secrets, more than I ever could have imagined... I suggest we take a walk to look for it in the garden. I'm not sure where this is," Erik said pointing at the photo. "But I can't imagine it could be that difficult to find."

"You're the boss! I could do with a bit of a break now anyway." They put their trainers and jackets on and ventured outside. It was drizzling but not bad enough to require an umbrella. Having decided to walk together rather than split up, it took them longer to browse the expansive gardens but the whole experience was all the more pleasant. Erik suggested they looked for a small mound of rubble, like the picture had suggested. He guessed that by now it was probably covered in grass and may not be very prominent or even noticeable, which complicated their search even further. They spent a long time leafing through every inch of the garden without any hint of anything which could have been hiding an underground passage entrance.

It was not yet dark but they decided to give up the search for the passage entrance for the moment. They started to walk back. It was suddenly a gorgeous evening. The rain had given way to a weak spell of sunshine, although the sun was on its way down, spreading a purple band of cloud across the sky. The spring air was still warm and fresh, smelling of pine and moss. Some persistent birds were entertaining them with song. The expansive gardens had the remains of a few autumn leaves strewn about but was otherwise well kept and entirely surrounded by large trees. Erik put his arm around Emma and they stopped for a moment, looking at the old house on the other side of the moat. In the soft light of the last sun rays it looked ghostly but yet alive. The smaller of the two lakes was faintly discernible behind it. The white render shone brightly, in stark contrast to some of the windows at the front. The sun was shining in from the west, creating an optical illusion of dancing dust in some of the rooms on that side. The inside of the east side was completely submerged in darkness. Emma suddenly froze.

"I could have sworn that I saw something moving in there! Right there, in the window to the right on the ground floor!" Alarmed she pointed in the direction of the house. Erik couldn't see anything, only a dark window.

"Are you sure, or could it have been the reflection of trees in the window?"

"I don't think so. It was definitely something inside the house. Someone or something was moving in there! We should call the police!"

“What?” He laughed. “They would think we were mad, calling them about a possible sighting of ‘something’. I don’t think we should waste police time over this. Let’s go and have a look ourselves first. It’s probably nothing. There could be an open window somewhere, which made the curtain move.” Erik had no desire to enter the godforsaken house again. He had only had less than pleasant experiences in there; and his childhood fears were still rife within him, in particular since the revelation about the death and gruesome burial of his biological mother inside the house. But he didn’t want to let Emma down, or be shown to be a coward. He decided that some precautions were necessary. “Wait here a second, he said mid step as he rushed back into the house.

He was going to get his father’s hunting rifle. He was no stranger to it, having used it once when he accompanied his father on a hunting expedition as a teenager. After that he had decided never to do so again but at least he had learnt how to load and use the weapon. It was kept in a wooden box inside the bookcase in one of the reception rooms. If there really was an intruder there, it would be the most effective way of protecting them, he reasoned. But he refrained from loading it there and then, scared of accidentally pulling the trigger. He also made sure his mobile phone was charged and functional before he went outside again, carrying the rifle on his back in a leather string over his right shoulder, just as his father had taught him, as well as the keys to the old house. Emma was still there outside waiting.

“Shall we?”

“What’s that?” Emma looked at the weapon with disgust.

“My father’s rifle. I thought we needed some protection,” he said cheerfully, stroking it.

“Be careful, you could kill someone with that thing!”

“Perhaps we should sneak in, rather than just walk up to the entrance,” Erik said, ignoring her. “If there is an intruder in there and he has seen us, he would be getting ready for us now, or trying to escape.”

“Perhaps a voluntary escape would not be such a bad thing. At least then we wouldn’t risk getting you in jail shooting someone! I say we just walk up, as if nothing has happened.”

They didn’t say a word as they walked over the walk bridge over the moat and up to the entrance. Erik fiddled with the keys. His hands were shaking somewhat, making it a more difficult task to unlock the door. If there was a person in there, he must have used the back-door, as the front door was locked from the outside, including the three extra locks that his mother had had installed after the break-in. As they went inside, Erik left the door unlocked, planning for a swift escape. He felt braver with the weapon in his hand but thought it may have been a mistake not to load it.

“Let’s stop for a second,” he whispered. Inside the entrance hall he took out the bullets in his pocket and loaded the gun. Holding it carefully, they continued down the hall and into a room that Erik doubted he had ever been in before. It was still fully furnished, seemingly with old or broken furniture that his family had left there. Other than the main reception rooms and one of the bedrooms, which had been restored to their former fifteenth century glory for the benefit of tourists, all other rooms were run down and covered in dust. The curtains had black moth

stains and looked a bit sorry. A familiar smell of damp was prevalent all throughout the house. No wonder, given that it had no modern heating system. There were no guided tours over the winter months, the first ones starting in June, with the last one at the beginning of August. His parents had not prioritised the upkeep of the house for the rest of the year.

The door which they had calculated should be leading to the room where Emma thought she had seen the movement was closed. Erik's heart was pounding hard as he pressed down the handle to open it. To their disappointed relief, it was locked.

"Now what?" he whispered.

"Do you have a key?" Emma pointed at the bundle he was carrying.

"Good point." He searched through it as inaudibly as he possibly could but there was no helping it. Searching for a key was not the quietest of jobs. "No, this isn't it. I didn't bring all the keys with me. These are just for the external doors. I know there's another bundle of keys in the keycupboard in the house. We need to go back and get it."

"I'll stay here and keep a look-out. You hurry!" Erik didn't want to leave her there but they had not heard or seen any sign that there was someone else there. What she had seen could have been a trick of the light. Relying on that, Erik didn't think she was in any immediate danger.

"Alright. You go back to the main hall and wait. Take this." He gave her the rifle. She accepted it without a word. "Keep quiet, whatever you do."

Erik ran as fast and as quietly as he could through the corridor and outside, over the bridge, over the garden and up to the modern house. As per normal when he was at home he had foolishly left the door unlocked, although consequently there was no need to fumble with keys again. The key-cupboard was in a little room off the hallway. He quickly found the bundle of keys. There was only one that seemed to have the right sort of look. It was fairly long and simple in its design, the kind of key which was likely to fit most old internal doors. He grabbed the bundle and started to run back, locking the house on his way. He didn't want the intruder to get access to the many valuables there. As he reached the old house again he could hear nothing other than the wind hitting the trees outside. Walking slowly up to the main hall, his heart pounding in his chest, he hesitated, scared that Emma would think he was the intruder and that she would use the rifle on him. He therefore whispered: 'It's me!' as loudly as he could before entering. She was sitting on a stool in the corner, white as a sheet, rifle in combat position.

"Thank god it's you!"

"You ok?"

Emma nodded. "Shall we go back to the door?"

Erik concurred and carefully took the rifle back. Emma moved ahead creeping in a funny walk on her toes with back slightly bent, as if she had to go to the toilet. Erik couldn't help himself laughing but at the last second realised that under the circumstances it was probably unwise. Instead he focussed on trying the key in the old door and found to his relief that he had chosen wisely. The lock clicked open. The moment he pressed the handle again he had stopped breathing from anticipation and fear. He looked at Emma, as if to reassure himself that she

wanted him to open the door. What if she had been right? What if there was someone there? The door opened with a creak and the room came into view. It was lighter than the corridor, with two windows each of the external walls but the sun had started to set and it was certainly not swimming in light. The main thing was that it was empty. There was no one there. The only strange thing about it was that the furniture appeared to be dusted and the curtains were of better quality than the other rooms. It even had a red Persian rug, an antique looking sofa in a light blue shiny patterned material and a desk. On the desk was a pen in a stand and a kerosene lamp. The pen and lamp ensemble looked antique in itself but this was in stark contrast to an item that had been thrown on the desk chair. Emma, who had become braver, walked up to it and held it up. It was a black T-shirt. At that moment a noise resembling a shriek escaped her.

“What’s the matter?” he whispered. He walked up to her and held her shoulders. She didn’t answer, merely continuing to hold up the T-shirt in disbelief. A memory of Emma, Paul and him walking in the woods started to form in his mind. Paul had been wearing that T-shirt that day; the day when he had shown them the rune-stone! It was Paul’s T-shirt! Paul’s T-shirt was in this room! Suddenly Emma started to panic.

“Oh my god, Paul is here!” she said in a voice somewhere between a whisper and a scream. “He’s here now! I know it; it must have been him I saw in the window!”

“Emma, you’re not making any sense. How could Paul possibly be here? He may even be dead.”

“Look over there!” She pointed at a door in the corner. Erik had seen similar doors in many of the rooms. It was to the stairs which led either to the basement with the servant quarters and kitchens or to the dungeon. The house had been cleverly designed and Erik guessed that this one, having previously been a bedroom, led to the servant quarters. If there had been someone in here earlier, that is where he or she could have escaped.

“Do you want to go down there and have a look?”

“Well, we can’t stop now.” She led the way to the door but Erik went in first as she opened it.

“It’s dark down here. We need a light.”

“We can’t leave the room now. Perhaps we can use the kerosene lamp.” She walked back into the room and picked up the lamp. It looked as if it had not been used for a while.

“Luckily for us, I have matches on me! I used them when I lit the fire earlier!”

“Perfect!” She took the matches, lifted the glass and lit the wick. To their surprise, it worked. “Amazing! These things are certainly long-lasting.” She gave the lamp to Erik who started to walk down the stairs again. Emma followed, deliberately leaving the door open behind them. It wasn’t long before they reached the basement at the bottom of the stairs. What was before them was the skeleton of a kitchen. It had been stripped of all its appliances, leaving a large space with unwelcoming cold stone walls, no windows and nothing but rubble and a big black stain where Erik guessed the stove had stood. There was no sign of any life, as far as they could see in the kerosene lamp light.

“At least we are not in the dungeons,” Erik laughed quietly.

“Quiet! I think I can hear something!” It was unmistakable. It was definitely distant footsteps. “Oh my god, the steps are coming closer.” The steps were rapid and sounded aggressive in the hollow space, almost as if someone was coming up some stairs. There was no doubt that the intruder was coming nearer. It sounded as if they were now in the same room. They could even hear someone breathing. Emma walked over to the corner to stand behind Erik who prepared his weapon. “Don’t shoot unless you see who it is,” she added in a breathless whisper. Emma was holding up the kerosene lamp. Suddenly the steps stopped. Whoever it was started to run in another direction, away from them.

“Let him run. Let’s go upstairs and get out of here.”

“No, come on, let’s follow. There’s something strange going on here. We need to know.” Emma was adamant and started to walk in the direction where the steps had come from. Erik overtook her, still with his rifle prepared for battle, continuing the hunt. He feared that she still believed that it was Paul. She ensured that they had light by walking beside him with the lamp raised.

“Oh my god, look over there!” she said. “Do you think this is where he went?” Emma moved the lamp around the area. Before them was a flight of stairs, leading down to the dungeons. It was the only way the intruder could possibly have gone. It was the end of the room. Erik knew that before the family had moved into the modern house, it had been used as a wine cellar for more than a century after its use as a dungeon had been discontinued. It should not have been frightening but the legends and stories about the place were still alive in Erik’s mind at that moment. According to some, that was where the ghost referred to as the ‘grey lady’ had appeared to a local woman at the beginning of the twentieth century. Up until then, the grey lady had supposedly been haunting the house, grieving for her lover who had been executed there in the fifteenth century. Erik had heard the story many times when he was growing up. The ghost had led the woman to a stone under which fifteenth century letters and books had later been found hidden. The husband of the woman who had found the letters had died shortly after in a farming accident where he had ended up hanging from a tree, and it was generally speculated that it was the ghost’s revenge for her not keeping the letters a secret. Erik had never believed in the story, not even as a child but he had not had the courage to ever enter the dungeons or the basement. He was not alone in this phobia. The fear of entering the dungeons of Torpa was widespread as a result of this and numerous other legends. Even in modern days the tour-groups were not allowed to enter any part of the basement but the fanciful stories about it were frequently told to sceptical but excited tourists. With the recent experience with the space in the wall, he asked himself whether these legends could have been another laborious plan to keep something from being found.

He took a deep breath and started to descend the stairs. Emma walked right behind him with the lamp. He was still clutching the rifle tightly and was doing his best to appear brave and at ease. It was not only the fear of the dungeons which made him apprehensive of every step. It was also the thought of being greeted by an unknown intruder at the bottom of the stairs which filled him with trepidation. Following in this criminal’s footsteps was a bad idea from beginning to end but Emma was adamant. They were risking their lives for her misguided belief that they were following Paul but he didn’t blame her. Someone had broken into his

house and it was his duty, as the owner of the house, to catch the intruder. He had to be strong. He could hear from her breathing that she was frightened. He turned around and gave her a peck on her cheek.

Emma scowled half heartedly and said: "This is hardly the time to get frisky!"

Erik struggled not to laugh and whispered reassuringly: "We can get through this". She gave him a pale smile in the lamp light. He noticed once again how her eyes were shining, even in that awkward situation. As they reached the bottom of the stairs they walked side by side, past shelves which still appeared to contain dusty bottles of wine. It smelt murky and it was cold. The space was surprisingly small, with only a couple of sub-chambers which must have been the cells at some point in history. For some reason, Erik had always pictured the dungeon as much larger. His heart was beating faster as they approached the second subchamber. If the intruder was hiding anywhere, it had to be there. There simply was nowhere else to go. But to their surprise, the small space was deserted. Erik was suddenly panic-stricken. What if the intruder had lured them into the basement and gone past them and back up the stairs, locking the door. No one knew they were down there. His parents were not back for another week. The cleaners would think he had gone back to Gothenburg. He checked his mobile phone and unsurprisingly he didn't have any coverage. If they were locked down there, they would be trapped. Unless it was possible to survive on wine, they would be left to starve. "Emma, come on, hurry, let's go back! I'm sure the intruder is planning to lock us in here!"

"No wait, look!" She was shining the lamp on the floor. There were fresh footsteps in the dust. She followed them around to the back shelves at the far end of the dungeon where they suddenly disappeared. They both looked around, up and down, in panic, expecting to see someone in the dark nearby. No one was there. Not a sound.

"This cannot be. There is no way the steps could just end here."

"Unless this shelf moves. Look at these slide-marks!" She pointed at some marks to the right of the outer shelf.

"Herre gud! I think you're right! It seems that this could be what we have been looking for. I would say that we have, along with the intruder, found the entrance or exit to the old escape route! And I would also say that this is not the first time this person has ventured through here. It's probably the same way he came in."

"Well, let's see, shall we?" She started to try to slide the door but it would not budge. "There must be some sort of lever somewhere."

"Maybe this has one of those mechanisms you see in the films." He lifted a couple of wine-bottles but nothing happened. "Or perhaps it's not that clever. It could need brute force." He pushed it as hard as he could but without success. They were at a loss. Erik studied the shelf in detail whilst Emma stood back and looked at it from a distance, having put the lamp down next to it.

She suddenly realised something: "Look! What I thought were slide marks is actually the end of a semi-circle. The shelf-unit opens like a door! I'm sure of it!" She went up to it and immediately found a very small, almost invisible, black handle on the left hand side at the back of the shelf, where a door-handle logically would have been if it had been a normal door. It was no bigger than an average size nail. She pulled it out and then pressed it down. The door opened easily with

a brief squeak, revealing a dark narrow tunnel behind it. They could hear no steps.

“I assume that whoever it was has managed to escape in there. We were too slow.” Emma was disappointed. Erik was relieved. “I wonder where this ends up. It was supposed to go from somewhere in your garden to the other side of the lake but it must have had three entrances! If what the newspaper article said is right, the one in your garden that was discovered in the 1970s has been blocked up, so it must only lead to the other side of the lake.”

“This chamber is at the back of the house, towards the lake so that fits well but there is only one way to know for sure.” He sounded braver than he felt. They left the door open as they ventured inside the confined space of the passageway. Erik was uncomfortable in more ways than one. His height meant that his back was bent awkwardly as they walked but that was nothing compared to the trepidation he felt over what was coming. His biggest fear was that someone would be hiding around the corner, waiting to attack them or perhaps somehow trap them in there. If Emma died in there, he would never forgive himself. They also had no idea whether they would be able to get out at the other end. Someone could easily have tricked them in there. He knew he was being paranoid but the circumstances were worrisome to say the least. The walk felt like an eternity. The lamp died after what they thought must be about half way. They decided to continue, preferring that option over going back through the dungeons. Thereafter they walked slowly, fumbling in the dark. He had no idea how long they had been walking in there when he suddenly stumbled on something large on the floor.

“Oh my god, there’s something here.” His voice was trembling with fear.

“What is it? Can you feel anything?”

Erik’s blood froze in his veins. He didn’t want to know what it was. Forcing himself to continue he concluded that his worst fears had been realised. A person was on the floor in front of him. There was no mistake. The person was still warm, so it was not a question of an old dead decomposed body. This was someone who had either just died or past out only a few minutes ago.

“Emma... There is someone, a person, lying on the floor here!” Without warning Emma screamed. It was a chilling scream which bounced around the walls, echoing like a jet plane in the confined space, all along the tunnel. Following this she started to run back the way they had come. Erik was just about to run after her when he felt the person grab his foot. In a fit of panic he fired his gun twice. The person let go of his leg and remained lifeless on the floor. He heard Emma screaming his name in the distance. He ran after her as best as he could in the awkward bent position, taking care not to hit his head on the uneven walls. It was strange to think that they were underneath the lake.

“Emma wait! Wait!” He caught up with her and grasped her arm. She screamed again. “It’s me. Calm down. We have to stay calm. I know this is awful but we have to get through this. There is someone here who might need us to save his life. Let’s go back. We can’t be far from the other side now.” He held her in his arms.

After a couple of minutes Emma came to her senses after the shock. “Alright, let’s go back...”

He may have committed a murder. Erik treaded carefully, waiting for the encounter with the person on the floor again. It never came. Instead they heard slow footsteps further up.

“He has woken up!” Erik would have preferred to wait until the other person had escaped, to avoid another encounter but he forced himself to run, this time quicker than before. The passageway had started to veer upwards. They were nearing the surface, the exit. He was spurred on by a breath of fresh air flowing towards them, a sign that a door had been opened. He left Emma to her own devices. He knew that if he didn’t get there before this person had closed the door, they would be trapped, faced with another gruelling walk back though the tunnel without a lamp and with the added pressure of getting to the other side before the intruder. He reached the metal lid just as it closed. Using all his strength he pushed it open with a loud bang, coming face to face with the intruder. It was getting dark. They were completely surrounded by murky threatening trees. The sun had already disappeared behind the horizon. There was no mistake. He could see the perpetrator clearly. The sight left him dumbfounded. They were staring at each other, both in disbelief. Emma appeared in the hole, stopping in her tracks as she laid eyes on the scene before her.

Chapter 29

For some reason they had both assumed that the intruder had been a man. Emma had thought it was Paul. However, before them was a woman that they both knew well—Britt-Marie. Her grey hair was a mess, her clothes dirty and blood was dripping from a wound on her forehead. She carried a rucksack. Erik realised that she was on the brink of collapse. She must have had a serious blow to her head. She had likely hit an uneven block in the ceiling of the passage whilst running.

“Are you alright? Should I carry you?” He didn’t need an answer. He managed to catch her as she crumpled and passed out again.

Emma closed the rusty metal lid which covered the entrance to the passage. A loud metallic sound followed. Erik suddenly realised that this was the same sound he had heard the night before and in the bath. At that stage it wasn’t clear why Britt-Marie had used the passage but there was no time to stay and ponder over that. She needed a doctor and quickly. None of them had any sort of medical training but they could both see that Britt-Marie was in a bad way. She had walked into something and they could see a wound on the crown of her head as well as her forehead. From the state of her clothes they could not tell what was blood and what was a mixture of mud and grime and soot and dirt from the cellar and the passage. In the darkness they had no way of knowing truly how badly she was hurt. They had to get back to the house. Emma called for an ambulance as they ran, Erik carrying Britt-Marie in his arms. Blood was dripping from the wound and it was a long way around the lake, much further than the route they had just come. She was heavy but Erik felt strong, despite the long night.

Adrenalin helped him to carry on. As they arrived inside the house they put her on the first bed they could find, ironically his grandmother's on the ground floor. Emma went to get a wet cold towel with ice to put on her forehead. Erik stayed with her, holding her hand. The ambulance got there half an hour later. Britt-Marie was still unconscious but she was breathing and her heart was beating regularly. After only a couple of minutes the ambulance staff concluded that she was going to be fine. She had a mild concussion. Britt-Marie regained consciousness not very long thereafter, complaining of a headache.

"What happened to you?" the female doctor asked.

Erik answered in her place: "She hit her head down in the basement of the old house. God knows what she was doing down there." He pointed in the direction of the house.

"I believe she was getting some wine," Emma said. It was by pure luck that we found her. Britt-Marie nodded slowly in silence.

They thanked the ambulance staff and were instructed how to treat the head wound and resulting concussion. On Britt-Marie's insistence, they had concluded that there was no need for her to travel to hospital. The journey would likely make her headache worse and her condition was not very bad. Therefore, Britt-Marie remained in Mrs Stenbock's bed, left in the care of Erik and Emma. Erik silently thanked god that he had not managed to shoot her with the rifle.

"Now have a rest. Read something." He found a couple of magazines in the bedside table drawer and put them next to her on the bed. "At some stage we need to talk. We are very confused about all this. You need to explain what happened."

"I'm sorry..."

"Don't worry about it. Just focus on having a rest!"

As they left the room, Erik grabbed her rucksack. It was surprisingly heavy. They returned to where they had sat earlier that day—the library. Erik left the door ajar in case Britt-Marie needed them. It was late, almost eleven o'clock but they both knew that if they went to bed they would not be able to sleep. He was physically tired and a bit shaken but the adrenaline was still pumping furiously in his veins. Emma was overwhelmed by the whole event. She had not said anything since they had left Britt-Marie. Erik lit the fire in silence, letting her calm down. She was sitting in her favourite chair with a cup of hot chocolate that he had prepared for her. It was a worrying sign that she was staring at thin air like a zombie. It had been the discovery of the lifeless person on the floor in the tunnel that had pushed her over the edge. Before then she had been fine, dealing with the whole situation arguably better than him.

"Are you alright?" he asked when he had managed to get the fire going.

"I think so..." She sipped from her mug and looked at him. "I thought it was Paul down there in the tunnel. It was just that seeing Paul's T-shirt in there brought it all back... and then when I heard the steps, well..."

"I don't blame you for jumping to conclusions. It's understandable under the circumstances. It could have been Paul."

"It's not that. It was...when I heard the gun shots...I thought...I thought it was you! I thought you were dead and I felt as if my whole world had fallen apart. You are so sweet Erik. The way you handled everything down there..."

He smiled. "You were pretty impressive yourself."

"I was more scared than I let on, I have to confess," she said. Erik was going to confess the same but then decided not to. He didn't want her to think that he was a vulnerable coward, even though he probably was.

"I really don't understand what Britt-Marie was doing there. She could have asked me to borrow the keys to the house. There would be no need for her to creep around like this, or maybe she wasn't. She may not have seen that it was us and fled to escape an encounter with more burglars. But then she should have told me she was still here." Erik sighed. "I don't know. It just doesn't make sense."

"There's no point in speculating. We can talk to her in the morning."

"We may not have to wait that long." Erik suggested with a sneaky smile. "Let's have a look in her rucksack. It could give us some answers."

"No, don't. It's her personal possessions. We can't just rummage through without permission."

"She broke into our house. She trespassed on our property. She may be a close friend of the family but she doesn't work here anymore." Britt-Marie was almost like a mother to him but at that point he was angry with her. "She has no right to be in here without telling us. If she'd asked if she could borrow the keys I would have gladly let her but she didn't even mention it. I think we need to know what's going on. The way I see it, I have the right to look in her bag. I should really have called the police, she could have killed us but I didn't because she's a friend. Instead, I'm checking her bag now!" He walked over to the desk and opened the zipper to the large compartment. It was full of things including a torch, a raincoat, a knife and a plastic bag from the local supermarket with something in it. He emptied the rucksack out on to the desk next to him. The plastic bag landed with a thud. He turned his attention to that first. He doubted that it contained her weekly shopping. Emma leaned over in anticipation. As he opened it he could not believe his eyes. He had seen something similar once before, in the museum in Heraklion. He wasn't sure how to react. His heart was beating faster. He looked up at Emma, savouring the moment. With a small grin on his face, he said as calmly as he could: "Emma, I have some news!"

"What? What is it? Show me!" She stood up and walked over to look. Her face had taken on a new glow and she was smiling widely in response to his grin. She had her suspicions. "Is it what I think it is? Is it?" He didn't say anything but simply opened the plastic bag again, just enough to enable her to see.

"Oh my god! It really is! It's the other half of the tablet!" She was jubilant, ecstatic. She sat down but was up again almost instantly. She could not sit still, dancing around as if she was performing some sort of ancient ritual. He laughed with her. He had never seen her so excited, which was in stark contrast to a few minutes ago. Somehow Britt-Marie had got hold of the tablet. He had no idea how but he was grateful nevertheless for Emma's happiness. Her search, which had resulted in their meeting and indirectly Paul's criminal act and his grandmother's death, had come to an end. He gave her a look which he hoped would tell her how he felt about her. She stopped dancing and stood in front of him, suddenly serious. He could see she was tired.

"Would it be alright if I slept in your room tonight?" she asked as if she had been able to read his mind. "Frankly, I wouldn't like to be alone right now."

"Of course, my bed is big enough for two..." he said without hesitation.

* * * * *

They had both been tired when they went to bed the night before and had forgotten to pull down the blinds in Erik's bedroom. As a result the sun rise filled the room with an orange mist. Emma was lying on one side of the bed. She turned around and expected to see Erik next to her but she was surprised to find him on the floor, sleeping like a baby. She had been so tired that she had not noticed earlier. She smiled to herself. He was certainly a gentleman. She was grateful for that, although it had not been necessary. She would not have minded him there, on her side in the bed. In fact, she thought it would have been rather pleasant with a strong pair of arms around her and his warm body next to hers. His naked body as he walked into the lake the previous summer entered her mind once again. It was a pleasant thought that was soon replaced by memories of the upsetting events of the previous night.

Her mind wandered. The thought of the tablet made her heart jump. They had found it! Before going to bed, Erik had told her that as a precaution he had placed it in the family safe downstairs behind a painting in one of the reception rooms. He had told her the code for it. It was still very early in the morning but she couldn't contain herself; she had to look at it. She got up, put on her dressing gown and slippers and walked downstairs without waking Erik. It was still in the plastic bag when she opened the safe. With great care she carried the tablet upstairs to the guest bedroom which she had used previously. It had a small desk upon which she placed the artefact. As protection she used some rather unsuitable knitted gloves which she had brought with her in case the Swedish spring weather surprised them with a late winter. She carefully took the tablet out of the plastic bag, turning it so that the Egyptian hieroglyphic side was up. She was excited. For the first time she would be able to read the entire text! A message from more than three thousand five hundred years ago was about to be revealed!

Before starting the translation she decided to get her transcript of the other side of the tablet. It would help in seeing the context. With a pen in her hand and a note pad at the ready, she began. Egyptian hieroglyphs were not something she normally struggled with. She had translated many texts in the past, mainly as part of her coursework, and she had always achieved top marks. This time it was different. The text was partly damaged and some of the symbols were completely incomprehensible.

It took longer than expected to get through the first column of text and it required some degree of imagination to work out the various symbols but eventually she had a complete sentence:

"The rage of the gods caused the rain to come down with violent fury. The darkness lasted for several [days] and the gods expressed their discontent by producing vigorous storms, with powerful winds and hail unleashed from the sky. The temples and pyramids were flooded by a wall..."

She could not contain her excitement. This was describing the events surrounding a natural disaster. It must've been the effect on Egypt of the Thera Volcanic eruption, as they had discussed in January on Crete, she speculated.

She could simply not see any other possibility. She had always wondered why there were so few records of this in Egypt but this was clearly an example of one. Granted, it was still not adding much over and above the existing Stele of Ahmose but reading this together with the next part of the known half of the tablet, it was clear that what was described was a Tsunami as well, which could have been caused by the volcanic eruption. It stated:

“...of water which swept in over the land with godly force. Smoke was clouding the sky. By day, the darkness was persisting with no [torch] being lit and by night a pillar of fire could be seen in the [west]. With his council, His Majesty descended in his boat to observe the devastation of the victors...”

So far so good. ‘A wall of water’; a clear reference to a tsunami. She thought she heard something and looked over at the door. She jumped. Erik was in the door watching her.

“Have you not learnt how to knock? How long have you been standing there?” she said teasingly with a smirk.

“About a minute. Good morning to you too!” He returned her smile. “I wanted to check that you’re alright. I heard noises. But you were so focussed I didn’t want to disturb you.” He was wearing only underpants, his perfectly formed body in full view. “I think we need to go and check on Britt-Marie. I’m a bit worried. After all, we were given the responsibility for her care and we have ignored her since last night.”

Emma was suddenly concerned. “Oh god, you’re right. Let’s go down there now.” In all the excitement over the tablet she had almost forgotten about Britt-Marie. They got dressed quickly and went downstairs. It was nine o’clock in the morning and they suspected that Britt-Marie, who had always been a morning person, had already woken up. Erik knocked on the slightly ajar door. There was no reply. They exchanged looks and Erik opened it fully with a worried expression on his face. She was not there. The bed was empty. Perfectly made but empty. The room bore no trace of Britt-Marie. It was as if she had never been there the night before.

“She must have gone home.”

Erik was relieved. She was well enough to get up and get out of there. Emma would have wanted to continue her translation exercise but other matters were more urgent. They had to get over to her to see to that she was alright and to talk to her about what had happened. Having put the tablet back in the safe and after a quick breakfast they got into the car. Emma was half expecting to see a crashed car in a ditch or an accident scene; worried that Britt-Marie had not been fit to drive. Then she realised that as far as she knew Britt-Marie had not had a car with her the night before. How on earth had she managed to leave the house without a car? It was too far to walk. She didn’t share her thoughts with Erik. In any event, by the time they arrived at Britt-Marie’s house, it was clear that she had not had to worry. Britt-Marie was there, wearing gardening gloves, pruning the roses in the front garden. She had removed the bandage that the doctor had put around her head and had managed to largely hide the wounds with her hair. She waved at them as they parked up as if nothing out of the ordinary had taken place the previous night.

“Come on in! Let’s have some tea!” She was walking towards them, taking off her gloves. “My parents are in town shopping at the moment.” They followed her to the kitchen where they sat down whilst Britt-Marie put the kettle on for tea. She magically produced some home-made buns and cookies which she placed on the kitchen table, together with mugs. When it was all set, she sat down opposite them. “I assume you have come here to talk about what happened last night? I thought you would bring my rucksack by the way; have you seen it?”

Erik looked awkward when he replied: “Yes, we picked up your rucksack. Unfortunately, I forgot to bring it now. It was very inconsiderate of me.”

“Don’t worry Erik, the contents belong to you now, and I’m happy for it!”

“Well, it’s actually the contents of your bag that we wanted to ask you about.” Up until then, Britt-Marie had been calm and collected. At Erik’s words she jumped up and picked up the kettle which had started to boil. As she poured the water she glanced at Emma, as if to evaluate what she knew about the rucksack.

“What do you mean?”

“You know what I mean, Britt-Marie.” For some reason Erik raised his voice. “You had the tablet! You gave it to Paul! As far as I know you might’ve killed my biological mother as well! How else did you get this in your possession?”

At this, Britt-Marie first looked at them with eyes filled with guilt, walked to the nearest chair and then sat down. She slowly put her elbows on the table and put her face in her hands. She started to cry; heavy sobs, almost as if she was coughing. It was several minutes before she had recovered enough to respond.

“I’m... I’m so sorry for not having told you the whole story Erik.” She hiccupped and offered them the buns in a way which made clear that unless they had some she would not speak. They obliged. “Where should I start?”

“Why don’t we start with my biological mother? Was anything you told me about her true?”

“Yes, all of it. I didn’t lie to you Erik. I just omitted my involvement in the more recent events... and the fact that I had the tablet. I was also aware that your grandmother wanted to steal you from Anne-Lise but I had no idea she would kill her. You have to believe me on that.”

“But you knew that she was dead?”

“Yes... no... I suppose I had my suspicions but I didn’t know for sure. I never asked her. I thought she went back to Denmark. As a matter of fact, I wasn’t entirely displeased by Anne-Lise’s disappearance...” She started to cry once again.

“Why? She was your friend!” Erik squeaked. Britt-Marie composed herself, looking down at the table while she continued.

“She had been my friend. Britt-Marie stared into oblivion. She stole my mother away from me. My mother paid no attention to me when Anne-Lise was in the room. I was like a second class citizen. I could not dance. I embarrassed her. It was only a childish jealousy thing though; nothing sinister.”

“And then?”

“And then your father had an affair with her.”

“My father was and is a married man. He was married to my mother for god’s sake! He still is.” He looked at her, face red and eyes burning. She was still looking away, seemingly indifferent.

“When Anne-Lise came to the estate he got obsessed with her and started seeing her in secret.” She paused again, looking disgusted. “But when she fell pregnant he conveniently forgot about her, pretending that he had nothing to do with it. Their relationship was not widely known. No one suspected he was the father of her child. Your grandmother found out soon enough though. I told her. I wish I hadn’t. I still remember that day. It was so strange. I’ve never seen her happier. I had to ask her why she was smiling and that was when she told me about her plan to keep the baby for herself, to rectify her daughter’s childless state.”

Erik didn’t say anything. He was now uncharacteristically pale. The story was not complete.

“So you had nothing to do with her murder?” Emma asked.

“That’s right. As I said, I didn’t know she was buried in that chest. I didn’t even know she was dead! I’m disgusted that Mrs Stenbock could have done something so terrible.” She grimaced. “I know it was her. I know she did it because...” She hesitated for a moment and took a sip of her coffee. “...Mrs Stenbock entrusted me with some other strange items. I had no idea where they had come from. As I said, I didn’t know that Anne-Lise was buried in the space in the wall. She said they were valuable and that I had to keep them safe in my parent’s house; that she had to keep the items out of Torpa when her husband died around the same time. I was flattered by her confidence in me. I thought that I was doing her a favour. Some of the items were beautiful so I kept them on the shelf here. She specifically said she didn’t have a problem with that. I thought nothing of the half tablet though. It was ugly. I kept it in the attic in a cardboard box with the other less aesthetically pleasing items. I had completely forgotten about it. It was only when you and Paul started to go on about an ancient tablet that was broken in half that I suddenly remembered it after all those years. It took me some time to remember it. My memory isn’t as good as it used to be, I’m afraid.” A weak laugh escaped her.

They all sat quietly for a while, contemplating her story. Emma didn’t doubt that she had told the truth. It was unlikely for a person as honest, nice and helpful as Britt- Marie to have come up with an elaborate lie or to have done something criminal. In the end she had done nothing wrong. She had not been part of the criminal acts committed all those years ago.

Emma had not said much during the whole conversation but decided to ask the question she had been puzzling over: “But why didn’t you just give us the tablet?”

“I thought you might wonder about that.” She looked at them both, first Emma, then Erik. “I realised that I had the tablet shortly after the camera had revealed the chest within the blocked up wall and I confronted Mrs Stenbock about it all. I cared for you and wanted to offer the tablet to you but I didn’t want to do that without asking her first. After all, the old items she had entrusted me with were hers. I thought she may have forgotten about them. It was thirty years ago. I would have given it to you but when I confronted her about it she was adamant that we should keep it secret. In fact she begged me and then started to threaten me. She explained that by giving me these items she had created a fail-safe for herself if she ever got caught. She would blame me, incriminate me and make me the scapegoat for whatever was hidden in that chest. I was in possession of items which had come from the old chest. It wouldn’t be difficult to prove that. She

would use them against me and say that I had obtained them from the chest. I was angry with her and thought about disobeying her orders but my loyalty towards the old woman was too great, I couldn't do that to her. I still didn't know what the chest contained and I didn't ask her, afraid of what she would say but I suspected that it was something dreadful. At that stage Anne-Lise didn't cross my mind. Not even when the newspaper declared that a body had been found did I suspect it was her body. It was only when you showed me her picture shortly after the discovery of the chest that I realised. I was absolutely horrified, especially given that I was still in possession of all the items which your grandmother had retrieved from there over thirty years ago. Given my bad feelings towards Anne-Lise, which were known among some of the servants, I knew I was not an unlikely suspect. I had to get rid of the artefacts somehow."

"But how on earth did Paul get hold of the tablet?"

"Erik, your grandmother may have been old but there was nothing wrong with her head. She came up with the idea that we should offer the tablet to Paul in secret. I helped Mrs Stenbock to write an anonymous letter to Paul with the arrangements, asking him not to reveal it to anyone or else there would be consequences. What I didn't know was that your grandmother was planning to frame Paul for the break-in she was setting up to steal the chest. She was probably thinking that by giving the tablet to Paul she killed two birds with one stone; she got rid of it and incriminated Paul. With the tablet in his possession he would appear guilty of the theft. I have no doubt that she then used one of her old contacts in Stockholm to arrange the burglary, naming Paul as the employer."

"So if you gave the tablet to Paul, how come you ended up with the tablet again and what were you doing creeping around with it in your rucksack last night?"

"Well, we had arranged with Paul that we would give him a photograph of one side of the half tablet, just to show him that we were telling the truth. He was initially very doubtful, mistrusting us, but the photo made him very keen to go ahead. We would then send him a photo of the other half and also give him access to the actual half tablet. I had no problem with that, in fact, I was rather happy to get rid of it by that point. Believe it or not, I really wanted you to have it so I arranged for Paul to pick it up. I placed it in the old house and instructed Paul to come and collect it. I even revealed the existence of the old escape route, instructing him to enter the house that way and telling him where I had hidden the tablet; in the east section bedroom inside the sofa. I knew that sofa well. It was hollow underneath, perfect as a place to hide things. Anyway, that was where I had intended for Paul to pick up the tablet."

"But he didn't?"

"Well, I thought he had and I had almost forgotten about it until the other night when I came over to you for dinner. You told me that Paul was missing and suspected dead. You mentioned that Paul had given you the photo of the tablet and that it was only of the one side, the Linear A side. That was when it occurred to me that he may not have actually taken the tablet and that it might still be hidden in the sofa. Thinking about it, he would have been foolish to actually take the tablet. He would never have been able to travel with it and it could have incriminated him. Also, how could he have explained his possession of it anyway? I couldn't stop thinking about the tablet and decided to go and fetch it. I was going

to give it to you; to save you from looking for it. I was going to tell you that Mrs Stenbock had given the tablet to me. After all, that was the truth. I took the underground passage to go and get it. I had entered the house that way many times over the years. I picked it up from the sofa and then started to venture back the way I came in. But then something made me change my mind. I thought that perhaps it would be best to leave it hidden there in the old house after all and perhaps that would strengthen my position. I turned around to go back and that was when I heard voices in the house. I panicked... I didn't want to get caught red handed sneaking around with the tablet on my back... and the rest you know."

"But why were you running when it was only us?"

"I couldn't see anything and I didn't know for certain that it was you. I couldn't afford for anyone else to catch me with the tablet and I certainly wasn't going to allow it to be stolen! There in the darkness of the basement I started to imagine all sorts of things. As I said, I was scared of getting caught red-handed with the incriminating goods in my bag. I was sure you had called the police to arrest me, so I ran. I was sure the escape route would help me."

Erik had started to cry. It was silent weeping but he was shaking. Britt-Marie went over to him and put her chubby arms around him, stroking his hair.

"Now there; I have told you everything! You should be happy? You can call the police now. Just go ahead and tell them everything. I just wanted to protect your grandmother—and me—but it all went wrong." She felt better now that she had told them everything. The lying and the secrecy must have been difficult for her. Her face had relaxed and she looked at them calmly. When none of them said anything she continued, almost as if to herself: "You could almost say that Mrs Stenbock dug her own grave. She was the instigator but she was also the victim in the end... That's what I call irony..." She chuckled but then turned serious again. "Or maybe they won't believe me. I was in possession of the tablet. I also had a possible motive to kill poor Anne-Lise. Mrs Stenbock is now dead so she cannot confess it all." She was suddenly devastated and started crying again. "Who will believe me now? I had nothing to do with Anne-Lise's death. I promise. But all the evidence is stacked up against me." Erik, who had stopped crying and instead had started to look increasingly worried about Britt-Marie's state of mental health, stood up and gave her a hug.

"I believe you, Britt-Marie. I have known you all my life. I know you are the most honest and decent person in this whole episode. You have always been there for me and I will be there for you now. I will tell it all to the police. I'm sure they'll believe it." They were still hugging.

"You know I love you and that you are like the son I never had."

"Yes, I know. And you are like the mother I never really had."

Britt-Marie released him from her embrace. He picked up the phone to call the police.

Emma silently hoped that Paul's innocence would be possible to prove. The academic world needed him. She was still angry with him for keeping quiet about the tablet all those months. She suspected that he had gladly kept the tablet to himself to allow him to work on the decipherment undisturbed. Although he had left her all those clues to lead her to the tablet, she suspected that he had done it that way to buy time. Paul could have told her that he had the tablet already in

August... but she supposed he was frightened that someone would find out and ‘there would be consequences’. He had provided her with a picture of one half of the tablet but it was still not clear to her why he had not provided a photo with the other side at the same time. His T-shirt in that room in the east wing of Torpa proved that he had been in there in August. He had not brought the tablet with him but he may have copied it or taken a picture of it. She was still puzzled by that.

Chapter 30

It was not quite nightfall but the sky was almost black outside. Thunderous clouds stretched as far as the eye could see promising an imminent explosion of lightning and rain. Emma was glad she was inside. It was only a matter of minutes before the heavens would open and start its display of anger. Erik was still at the police station, probably filling in forms and answering questions. She was grateful that he had spared her that experience by dropping her off at the house. Britt-Marie had gone with him upon the request of the police officer he had spoken to on the phone. Taking advantage of the unexpected moment of solitude, Emma was sitting at Erik’s desk with her computer, ready to continue where she left off earlier on the translation of the tablet. To her relief, she had managed to open the safe and the tablet had still been there, still in the plastic bag.

Having translated the first line earlier that morning, she set out to do the next, which was a little bit shorter than the first. It didn’t take her long:

“...The east and the west were silenced. Temples and houses were destroyed by the great flood, leaving its few remaining inhabitants with nothing. Hail covered the ground and [everything around] was...”

She reflected on the significance of these words. Again, they were consistent with a terrible natural disaster. Emma knew that the volcanic eruption at Thera must have been absolutely devastating. Such a tragedy would not only have impacted on the immediate surroundings of the Eastern Mediterranean. Its effects would have been felt all over the world. The resulting climate change would have had a destructive impact on farming and all aspects of life. She recalled seeing reports even in England that excavated Bronze Age villages had seemed to decline about that time. No wonder then that the impact on nearby Egypt was felt. She was not sure whether the tablet described the effects of the eruption on the Minoans or on Egypt. She read the next known section from the other side of the tablet:

“...coloured white. The descendants of the great Tetisheri [symbols for both priestess and queen] were orphaned and without possessions/[clothes]. His Majesty set about to strengthen the two lands, to cause...”

At this stage she was on a roll and was literally flying through the text:

“...the water to evacuate without military force, to provide them with silver, with gold, with copper, with oil, with clothing, with all the products they desired...”

Again, striking similarity to the Donation and Tempest stele – and according to Paul a reference to the Mycenaean gold collection in the museum in Athens.

“...Before the [tempest] the fleet of the [] coalition had conquered the foreign invaders and liberated those who were under their command...”

And then came the reference to Ahmose which they had been able to guess from the Linear A side of the known half tablet and which had been illustrated in the old journals by Erik’s ancestors:

“...and Ahmose and Ahmose Nefertari pay tribute to the forces which...”

“...came out victorious but lost their lives when the gods interfered...”

“...to open up the sky and the earth. The fairness and...”

“...discontent of the gods [titles] ensured that the...”

“...defeated foreign invaders met a similar fate and their capital island...”

“...disappeared under water. All that existed had...”

“...been annihilated to leave only mud.”

She had done it! She had translated the remaining part of the tablet! Having translated the last lines of text fairly quickly and in her excitement at her achievement, she had not paused to think about what it actually said. Now that she had come to the end, she read back through each line piecing them together to form a complete story. She froze.

It was the sentence *“...the defeated foreign invaders met a similar fate and their capital island disappeared under water”* that had caught her attention. She couldn’t believe it. This was as close as you could possibly get to a match of Plato’s Atlantis story! A power which had invaded parts of the Mediterranean is defeated and thereafter its capital island is flooded and disappears under water to leave only mud! The clear Atlantis reference in the tablet may have explained Paul’s increased interest in the lost city and it was probably also the starting point for Laura’s dissertation topic, ‘The strengths and weaknesses of the Crete-Atlantis theory’, which Paul had convinced her to take on. Emma recalled that Laura had realised something about Atlantis, in particular the identity of the Atlanteans. She had run into Laura a couple of weeks ago in Oxford and had asked her about it. Laura had offered to email her a draft of her dissertation. There had been no time

for Emma to read it since then and frankly she had to admit that she had forgotten to check her emails. She felt guilty for being a lousy friend. She quickly opened her emails and true to her word Laura had sent it. With a slow connection the document took a moment to download and when she opened it she saw that it was lengthy. She unplugged her laptop and went to sit on Erik's bed to read it.

Emma found that almost every sentence was backed up by footnote references. Laura had done a thorough job supporting her assumptions and the findings were well presented and convincing. It was safe to say that Laura didn't agree with the Crete-Atlantis theory. The conclusion she came to was that the mysterious Hyksos were the people which Plato had referred to as the 'Atlanteans'. Looking again at her own translation of the tablet Emma realised that Laura must have been right. Because of the historical context, it was almost inevitable that the 'foreign invaders' in the tablet referred to the Hyksos. Plato never described the Atlanteans as friendly. Instead he had said they were intent on warfare and that they introduced the use of the horse and chariot. This corresponded well with the descriptions of Hyksos, who were also said to have brought the horse and chariot to Egypt; one of many characteristics about the Hyksos which fitted well with Plato's story.

Laura told a detailed story of how the Minoan royalty Tetisheri had married a weak Upper Egypt pharaoh to form a strategic union between Upper Egypt and the Minoans. The Minoans had then helped the Egyptians to expel the Hyksos from Lower Egypt by providing a powerful fleet, with manpower from the Greek islands and mainland Greece. In connection with this the Minoan civilisation was completely ruined by the gigantic catastrophe of the Thera Volcanic eruption. Emma recalled the silver pin with the reference to Tetisheri. She was glad that someone had taken that thought further.

Laura then went on to describe the link to Plato's Atlantis story. The main point was that the events and descriptions in Plato's story corresponded well with the Hyksos conquest. According to Plato the 'men of Atlantis' had occupied most of the Mediterranean, including Egypt, as well as other parts of the world at the time. The Greeks defeated the Atlanteans and liberated everyone but after the defeat there were earthquakes and floods which sank the Greek army and flooded the island of Atlantis. Laura stated that the Hyksos period was one of only a few known periods where Egypt was occupied by another country. She also pointed out that the city from where the Atlantis story originated was very near Avaris in the Nile delta, the city of Ahmose and the old Hyksos capital where Ahmose later built his Minoan palace, making this region significant to the Atlantis story. It was also said at the beginning of Plato's story that the people of that area were 'in some way' related to the Greeks. So Plato identified a link between the Egyptians there and the Greeks, long before any such link was known or proven. Laura then went on to give a number of similarities between Plato's story and the Hyksos conquest, as well as references by Plato which gave further support to her conclusion.

Emma was now convinced that Laura was right. The tablet had provided the final confirmation. Although she was disappointed that Laura had not gone one step further to try to identify the Hyksos. Emma knew from her studies that the identity of this people was far from clear. They were referred to as Asiatics and they probably came from the Lebanon area but there was no consensus on

whether they necessarily originated from there. She also knew that a common understanding was that they were later referred to as 'Phoenicians'. Funnily enough, she thought, the Phoenicians had also often been linked to Atlantis since they were believed to have suffered a great cataclysm. So even this corresponded with Laura's conclusion.

Emma found Laura's dissertation very interesting, revolutionary even. She had to call her and tell her about the tablet as soon as possible. She felt sick when she thought about the fact that Paul had known all along what the tablet said. He had had the full tablet since August. He had been able to work on the decipherment of Linear A using the tablet for almost nine months. But she doubted that he had succeeded in that time. She only knew what Mary had told her and she did not know whether he had developed any further deciphering theories, whether he had found any patterns in the tablet which would confirm an existing or develop a new theory for the decipherment of Linear A or whether he had simply concluded that the tablet wasn't lengthy enough to draw any wider conclusions. Perhaps the full tablet wasn't much more help.

There was only one way to find out, she reasoned. She had to start working through all the possibilities. She opened a document on her computer entitled '*Half tablet decipherment*' where she had stored her analysis of the half tablet to date. It contained no revolutionary ideas or groundbreaking theories. Starting to work on the analysis of the complete tablet, she hoped that would change. She had only just begun to match words and extend her Linear A to ancient Egyptian dictionary. Her heart was pounding from excitement at the prospect. She knew she could do it; break the Linear A code. In a few weeks she would crack it and hopefully the mysteries of the Minoan civilisation would come to light. She heard the front door open and close. Erik had finally made it home. She could not wait to tell him about the tablet. Wearing only her pink robe, she ran downstairs to meet him at the door but stopped abruptly when she saw him. He was soaked from the rain. He looked exhausted and his hair was uncharacteristically messy. He had dark circles under his eyes.

"Oh my god, what's happened? Have they arrested Britt- Marie?"

"No," Erik said.

Emma feared that the police had not believed their story. "But you told the story as we had planned?"

"Yes. Everything went to plan. As for Britt-Marie the police understand fully that she was unaware of the break-in and the murder thirty years ago." His voice was surprisingly steady. It was almost as if it had been drained of all emotion.

"And Paul?"

"We didn't mention Paul at all. I don't think they even know that he had the tablet. He should now be out of the woods."

"Oh, thank god!" She was relieved but Erik still looked funny. "But oh dear, what's wrong then? It all went so well."

"Yes... I feel slightly ill... my grandmother..."

"What? We already know she was a horrible person, so what's new." When he remained silent she continued. "Come on Erik, out with it! What's the matter?"

"It's just that the police has confirmed for definite that Anne-Lise was buried alive!"

“Ghastly!” She paused and touched his wet hair. “Well, we had suspected that anyway I suppose... Her face told its own story, didn’t it?” Emma didn’t want to sound insensitive but she realised that she had. “I’m sorry Erik. I know that this is difficult for you.”

“She died whilst she was in the chest. The pathologist who examined her remains has confirmed it.” He looked as if he was going to stop talking but then decided to continue. “There was enough evidence in the chest to identify the perpetrator. Fingerprints had been preserved all over it. She had died from suffocation inside the chest. The fingerprints belonged to my grandmother. She killed her by putting her in there, after sedating her with sleeping pills!” He stopped talking abruptly. She embraced him and he put his arms around her. His jacket was wet against her face on his chest.

“Let’s not think about this sad business right now,” she said with a gentle smile. “Come on upstairs, I have one or two things to show you!” She took his hand and dragged him to his bedroom. His pained facial expression softened as they walked through the house. “We finally know what the tablet says!” she beamed. They entered the room and Emma went to get her computer on the bed. At that moment a photo frame on the window sill several meters away from them fell down on the floor, creating a racket of glass breaking. Erik took a deep breath of alarm and walked over to the window, staring at the picture in the broken frame.

He was facing the window and she could see who was in the photo—Anna. It had been over a year since her tragic death but she could see why he may interpret the sudden unexplained fall of the photo of his late wife at that particular instant as a sign. She walked over to him by the window.

“Erik...” She was just about to say that they could talk about the tablet later if he preferred, when she glanced up at his face and saw that he wasn’t looking at the photo anymore. She followed his intense and upset gaze. He was staring out the window; down at the old stone house. The flood-lights had been turned off but the white building could still be seen. It looked almost ghostly in the darkness surrounding it and with the dark lake behind it. Everything was still.

“Look!” he said. “One of the ground floor windows is definitely lit! It must have been a lamp or candle creating a faint glow of light. It was in the room where we were yesterday. The room where Britt-Marie hid the tablet!”

She walked over to the window. “Are you sure? I can’t see anything. It could have been the moonlight reflecting in the window or something?”

“Well, I’m not sure but there could be someone down there... again! Or perhaps you’re right. Perhaps I did imagine it. I was a bit freaked out by Anna’s photo and...”

“I don’t think it would be a good idea to go down there tonight anyway. Let’s call the police if we see it again,” Emma suggested. She had another look and still couldn’t see anything.

“Yes, you’re right. But we should make sure all the doors are locked. You stay here. I’ll go downstairs and check the doors.”

He put the broken photo of Anna on the bedside table next to the antique dark wood four poster bed and walked out, closing the door behind him. She was petrified. Perhaps they should have called the police after all. She didn’t want to look at the old house so decided to pull down the two blinds. Although this

temporarily shut out the threat from outside, there was another intimidation inside the room next to her. She had seen several pictures of Anna but had never really studied them in any detail. She took the broken frame and sat on the bed. It was Anna's graduation photo; taken close up against a light blue background. She was wearing a graduation hat. She had shorter hair in that photo than in other later pictures she had seen. Coming face to face with Anna's image under the circumstances almost scared her. Her face was so real, almost alive, and oddly familiar. She had been very beautiful and very unlike Emma but it was her eyes that caught her attention. Erik had mentioned the similarity of their unusual eye-colouring but she had never really grasped it properly until then. She walked over to the bathroom to look in the mirror. As soon as she turned the light on a scream escaped her. She thought she had seen a ghost. All she could see was her eyes staring back at her, refusing to look away. They were Anna's eyes. The resemblance was striking; both in colour and shape. It was so very odd and somewhat frightening. She forced herself away from the mirror, ending her bizarre obsession with her own eyes, left the bathroom and went to bed. She crept inside Erik's sheets. It wasn't long before he came back.

"Emma. We're safe in here. All doors are locked and I've locked the bedroom door as well. You can relax now."

"Thank you Erik," she said still shaking but trying her best to relax and sound at ease. "I hope you're not sleeping on the floor again tonight?"

"Of course not."

"Just hold me." She didn't have the strength to say anything further. Tiredness had exchanged fear. Erik joined her in bed. It felt strange but nice to lie next to him, wearing only a nightgown. She could feel his skin and warm muscular body against hers. All she wanted at that moment was his comforting arms around her.

Chapter 31

Erik was woken early the next morning by a ray of sunshine peeking through the blinds. It was half past seven. He still embraced Emma. She didn't say anything but then turned around to face him. She looked sleepy. After a moment's hesitation she leaned towards him and they kissed. To his disappointment something made her stop. He had heard it too. It was a familiar noise, a loud metallic bang which could only have come from the other side of the smaller of the two lakes in front of the old house; the sound of what must have been someone closing the opening to the Torpa escape route.

In a swift movement she dragged herself away from him and got out of bed. She walked over to the window and opened the blind fully. Momentarily he had managed to forget about the intruder but as it all came back to him he was concerned. He joined her by the window, looking outside to see if they could see anything out of the ordinary. There was nothing obvious.

“Erik, we need to call the police or do something. I think we can safely say that you were right and that the intruder has left the house. We need to find out who it is.”

“Do we have to? He or she will probably disappear now and we will be too late anyway.”

“It’s not like you to be so blasé about things.” She dragged him to his wardrobe. “Come on now. Get dressed! We need to hurry. This person has spent the whole night in the old house. We should at least find out why.” Erik reluctantly agreed. They quickly got dressed and went outside, Erik with his rifle in a tight grip. Despite the rather worrying circumstances, weather-wise it was one of those days you would just want to wrap up and keep as a memory for the dark winter months. The rain the day before had made the air remarkably fresh, although most traces of damp were gone, evaporated by the warmth of the early morning sun. It was as if spring had come back over night, bringing with it warmer temperatures, bright blue skies and a variety of budding flowers. The house looked much less frightening in daylight but the thought of a person lurking around in the woods uninvited filled him with trepidation.

They walked past the house and over to the lake, starting to walk around it by the water’s edge. The sky reflected on the surface, giving the illusion that the murky dark water was light blue. They both stopped abruptly as a figure suddenly became visible further down. Given the distance they could not see who it was but they decided to dive into the woods. Erik was sure the person had seen them but they continued to hide behind a tree. He held his rifle tightly ready for attack.

“Hello!” the person shouted. “Wait!” It was a man, shouting in English. They could hear him running towards them. They exchanged looks. Emma’s face lit up and she didn’t hesitate. She started to run to meet him. Erik followed a couple of meters behind. It was Paul! He had come back! Following the events of the day before the charges against him had finally been completely dropped, although Paul was unlikely to know that. Erik had mixed feelings. He was relieved that Paul was alive and well. At the same time he was feeling hostile towards him, that he had wasted their time over several months and afraid that Emma still had feelings for him. He wasn’t sure. But what on earth had he been doing in the old house? It wasn’t difficult to guess; he had been looking for the tablet and had planned to take it without telling anyone.

Emma reached him first. Much to Erik’s distain, Paul took her in his arms and hugged her briefly. Paul even lifted her up, squeezing her tightly as if he had never abandoned them all. Erik found this inappropriate.

“Oh my god, I’ve missed you so much.” Paul said before giving her a peck on the cheek. He noted that Emma didn’t look entirely pleased. She nevertheless managed a smile.

“Hello Paul. Good to see you’re alive and well,” Erik said without excitement. Paul wasn’t wearing his glasses and he looked skinnier than last time Erik had seen him. His hair was messy. He was wearing jeans and a black leather jacket, open to reveal a plain white T-shirt. Paul didn’t say anything but instead he patted Erik’s shoulder as if they were good friends. “I see you have found what you were looking for,” Erik said sarcastically. Paul didn’t seem to notice the cynicism, or else he pretended not to.

“Yes, hm,” Paul muttered and cleared his throat. They started to walk back towards the house. “I have to apologise for being here. I’m still on the run, as you know. I’m so sorry for everything. I’ve been a complete fool.”

“Yes, you can say that again!” Erik said with a sniff. “But you don’t have to worry about your crime anymore. It’s all over and you are cleared as of yesterday.”

“Are you serious? Are you saying that my name has been cleared?” he said in disbelief with a cautious grin.

“Yes,” Emma added.

He stopped and hugged her again and then shook Erik’s reluctant hand. “Thank you, thank you, thank you. I’m eternally grateful.” He then said to Erik: “I can see why you’re angry and I don’t blame you at all.” Erik mumbled something intelligible in response. Paul continued, this time turning towards Emma: “I have some good news as well! I’ve been rather productive since Beirut and have made some interesting discoveries.”

She was immediately excited but at the same time hesitant and Erik imagined an undertone of suppressed anger. “No, you haven’t! You haven’t done it have you? Have you?”

“Er... well, partly. I had some help as you know. And it has confirmed some rather interesting facts as well!”

“You have used the tablet to decipher Linear A?”

“Sort of... I’ve cracked most of the code. There’s still some way to go but I’ve made some progress.”

“Oh my god...! I just can’t believe it...” Her excitement was mixed with reluctance. Paul picked this up.

“Don’t worry. We will share the recognition. It’s thanks to you that this was possible. You’ve been absolutely instrumental. I wouldn’t have been able to do it without you.” Emma was unsure how to react. She was speechless. He could see that she was angry but tried hard to conceal it. He guessed she would have preferred to have been part of his deciphering work.

Erik decided to interrupt: “You must be exhausted. Shall we have some breakfast? I would be interested to know what on earth you’ve been doing these last couple of months and what you were doing in my house all night.” He looked away, torn between the natural instinct to be a good host and the urge to hit Paul hard in the face.

“I’m sorry Erik, of course. It was very late when I arrived and it seemed like the only option. I didn’t want to stumble in unannounced at midnight. And I thought I was still wanted by the police. I’ll explain everything...”

They decided to walk up to the patio by the house. Erik fetched some cups, bread and home-made buns which Britt- Marie had left behind. It was lovely to have breakfast outside, soaking up the glorious sunshine but Erik was frustrated with Paul and his smugness. He was astonished that Emma had not been openly angry with Paul after all that had happened and after what he had done. She had not confronted him about getting hold of the tablet without telling her; working on the decipherment behind her back and going into hiding without explaining what was going on. Paul had been very selfish to say the least.

“I don’t know where to start.” He paused and looked at them with almost sheepish eyes, as if he was ashamed of what he was about to say. “I suppose I

should begin my story here at Torpa last August. It was in the morning on the day after we'd seen the chest via the small camera inside the space in the wall. I was rather disappointed that we still didn't know what was hidden inside the chest but yet excited about the prospect that there was still a chance that the tablet was there. The slow progress of it all had really started to get to me. I was just about to go downstairs to have breakfast when I saw a letter by the door, probably tucked in when I was sleeping. It wasn't addressed to anyone but I opened it and it was for me. It was very brief, typed on simple white paper and the English was very poor. All it said was that the person knew where the half tablet was and that I could have it if I didn't tell anyone about it. If I did, there would be consequences. It didn't say what sort of consequences though. If I agreed to this I would find evidence that the person really knew where the tablet was. The letter told me to go to the room in the east wing of the old house via the secret passage-way under the lake. I went there without telling anyone and a photo of one side of the tablet had been left inside the sofa. It was such an exhilarating experience to see it there. The realisation was elating; the tablet was actually there on the estate and we, or you rather Emma, had been right all along. The arrangement was that the person, whoever it was, would send a photo of the other side of the half tablet to me in the post and then hide the real thing inside the house in the same sofa for my next time in Sweden. The plan was for me to happen to come across it by chance at that time and then make the find public, leaving me with time to work on the decipherment in the meantime. I was very excited but things didn't go as planned. I didn't know who had given me the tablet. The letter had been anonymous. I had suspected that it was your grandmother because she gave me an odd look at breakfast just after I'd got the letter. But then she died in the break-in and I understood that it wasn't her. The second photo arrived in the post a couple of weeks later. There was no letter or anything, just the photo.

"It *was* my grandmother who arranged the break-in... Britt-Marie sent the photo of the tablet to you," Erik said calmly.

"Really? I'm surprised that Britt-Marie was involved to such an extent. She doesn't strike me as someone who could have any involvement in anything dreadful. Anyway, at the time I didn't care who had sent it to me. I had what I wanted, although there was a part missing. She's not a very good photographer." He laughed. "The photo of the Egyptian side missed a major part on the left hand side. It meant that many words were cut off. Very annoying. I've made some assumptions about the words there but it would be nice to get them confirmed."

"Hence your excursion to Sweden now..." Emma added with a hint of a sarcastic tone.

"Yes, I needed to take a better photo. I had not intended to be seen by anyone, to tell you the truth, although with the disappointing discovery last night when the tablet was gone I decided to come and see you. And as it turned out, my timing couldn't have been better. I'm in debt to the two of you."

"So why did you go into hiding after Beirut?" Emma asked.

"Well, things turned ugly when we were in Lebanon and they caught the contract burglar. As you know I was set up. The contract burglar named me as his employer. I found this out on the bus between Byblos and Beirut. A Swedish police officer called me on my mobile to inform me of this. He asked me to go to the

nearest police station to give myself up. It was a complete shock to me. I had nothing to do with the break-in. I had obviously been chosen as a scape goat because I had a real motive to steal the chest; to try to get hold of the tablet. At that moment I guessed that the anonymous perpetrator had given me the tablet to further emphasise that I had really conducted the break-in. To leave me with the stolen goods so to say. With your grandmother's death the crime was even worse. There I was, in possession of the tablet, having made progress with the deciphering of Linear A using the tablet. I hadn't been very cautious. I had failed to take enough care. I had told a couple of colleagues about my progress and I would say it was probably obvious to them that I had had some help. I was afraid that they had guessed that I had the tablet. So when I found out that I was wanted for the break-in, I panicked. I even threw my mobile phone out of the bus window," he laughed. "The evidence was stacked up against me." Suddenly he looked sad but when he didn't get any sympathy from Emma or Erik he continued. "I was wanted by the police. I couldn't think straight. I knew I had been stupid and careless. I suppose I was angry with myself—and scared. Getting caught for arranging a burglary that resulted in the death of an innocent bystander would not only ruin my career but most certainly land me in jail, if I didn't manage to prove that I had been set up and that I was innocent. I expected the University would expel me for even being implicated. Everything I had worked for over the years was hanging by a thread. When Erik's mum called at the bus station in Beirut and said the burglar had been caught I was already in panic. I'm sorry. I knew I abandoned you all at a very difficult time."

Emma looked down at the breadbasket, avoiding looking at him. "But where on earth did you go?"

"I left Beirut immediately by ferry and went to get the yacht in Rhodes. From there I travelled to Cadiz. I abandoned the yacht to create a diversion, having made the decision not to go to the police. I was still carrying the second photo of the tablet and desperately wanted to get rid of it safely, and make sure that you would get it somehow. I could have posted it to you but I was sure they would monitor your mail. I was considering my next step when I walked past the Hotel Las Cortes de Cadiz. I had stayed there once before when I visited some colleagues in Cadiz. I suddenly remembered a book that a friend of mine, a professor at the University of Cadiz, had written a while ago about the Cortez de Cadiz. It was probably one of the least popular books in the country, poor guy." He once again laughed. Emma smirked a little as well but Erik stayed quiet, wishing Paul would stick to what was relevant. Paul continued: "Anyway, an idea started to form in my head. If I could set up a trail that only you would understand," he nodded in Emma's direction, "to lead you to the photo, you would secretly get the tablet whatever happened to me. I left the photo in an envelope in the reception of *Hotel Las Cortes de Cadiz* and addressed it to you. I asked the man in the reception to keep it safe and give it only to you, if and when you came to pick it up. I reckoned it was safe enough. He didn't know my name. I started to plan a trail for you so that you could get the tablet. I dreaded to think that the police would find out about my bank safe in London where I had left the other photo of the tablet as well as some of my notes. I needed to get to London quickly to destroy the photo, or otherwise hide it. I took a fast ferry over to London. It was quicker than expected

but it took the best part of a day. It was worth it to avoid flying, although at that stage I appeared to be able to travel relatively freely. I even showed my passport once when I arrived in the UK. The ferry-ride gave me time to plan the trail I was going to set up for you in London. Upon arrival in London I took the tube to the bank first. I then walked to the British Library. On route over there I made two phone calls. I gave you a call, as you know.”

“I had no idea you were in London when you called me!”

“Yes, I was; but not for long. I rushed to get the trail set. I had already planned it all so it wasn’t difficult. I went past a post office on the way and arranged to send the ‘Computers for Dummies’ library book over to your flat in Oxford with the anagram that I had added when I was on the ferry...” He fell silent for a moment. “Oh god you should know I felt guilty for not having told you about the tablet but I didn’t want to tell you straight out. I wouldn’t have blamed you if you’d gone to the police or told someone if I had. The fact that I had the tablet would have indicated to you that I was indeed the perpetrator; that I had arranged the burglary. I wanted you to think that I was completely innocent for as long as possible, so that you could help me to find the person who set me up.”

“Thanks for the confidence,” Emma said sounding offended.

“Well, if I had simply told you about it you would have had to carry my burden and it could have incriminated you too. I couldn’t send you a letter to tell you as it could have been confiscated by the police. I entered the British Library, using my normal library card, and hid the photo of the tablet in my colleague’s book. I knew roughly where the book was on the shelf so it wasn’t necessary for me to request it. The risk that someone else would look in it was slim, given its past popularity record. It was a perfect hiding place. I made a note of the reference and went over to the British Museum nearby to leave the note in the museum collection book next to the picture of the half Torpa tablet. I planned to simply write it in roman numerals but it seemed too obvious. I decided to use Linear A values, to make it more difficult and tailored to you. As I said, my aim was to make the path particularly difficult to follow and personal so that only you could find it.”

“You certainly managed to make it difficult, that’s for sure!” Erik added with a dry laugh.

“I know. I was worried at one stage that it was a bit too difficult. Did you even get my first message on page thirteen in the ‘Computers for Dummies’ book?”

“We found the message but the anagram.... It wasn’t easy!” Emma rolled her eyes. “...But I solved it eventually!” she said proudly.

“But where have you been hiding these last couple of months?”

“I wanted to continue my work on the tablet. It was the only thing that mattered to me at that point. I felt I was very close. This I couldn’t have done if I had gone to the police. And I couldn’t remain in Oxford for obvious reasons so I decided to go away for a while, something I have done many times before as you know, but for very different reasons of an academic kind. After London I went down to France, hiding in a lorry, and then hitched a ride on a boat bound for Morocco. After that I went to Cairo and contacted one of my colleagues working on the remains of Avaris in the Nile delta, the old Hyksos capital and the city of Ahmose. That’s where I’ve spent my time since Beirut. Avaris is at the heart of everything we have found. Luckily the team there weren’t aware of the burglary or that the police were

looking for me so I was able to continue my work relatively undisturbed. They're serious academics over there and don't really pay much attention to current affairs."

"You said you made two phone calls in London," Erik asked standoffish. He had been listening intently to Paul's story, pretending to be aloof but he could not avoid wanting to hear more.

"I also called Oxford University. I told them I had to take some temporary leave of absence and asked them to contact Professor Mary Brown to cover my role while I was away. I had told Mary some of my initial thoughts which I knew would be of help to you."

"She took over your role for both mine and Laura's dissertation."

"Just as I hoped! I would suspect she was rather helpful after what I told her in Athens..."

"She helped me a lot, yes but she didn't give me any new angles on decipherment theories. For a long time you left me to panic about not making any progress on the decipherment while you were sitting there with all the cards to hand. That's just cruel Paul. My time would have been better spent if I had the full tablet and didn't have to worry about you!" Emma stood up and went over to the fence looking over at the old house. Erik was glad that she finally voiced her anger.

"I'm so sorry Emma. I understand why you're furious but I needed you and Erik to help me to clear my name somehow. As it turned out, you succeeded."

"I had no idea you were so selfish, Paul." Emma muttered from where she was standing. "I was hoping you had a better explanation." He remained quiet for a few moments before responding.

"You know me. I get totally caught up in my work. I wasn't thinking straight. I had to get to the bottom of it." Emma turned around looking at Paul with a mixture of curiosity and anger.

"Tell me more about your work on the tablet Paul," she said looking away again.

Paul seemed to be deliberating for a moment but then obliged: "When I started to work on the decipherment it was more difficult than I imagined. The text was simply not long enough so I had to test various theories and formulae, which was very time-consuming. I had a bit of a breakthrough when we were working on the cuneiform text in Byblos. It was there I realised a certain link with the old Berber language. Then using this link I managed to develop a rather impressive Linear A dictionary which far surpasses that which is known up to now. Linear A also shares many trade-related words with ancient Egyptian, Greek, as well as Arabic which helps. It's not yet complete but what I've achieved is enough to understand large parts of the, to date, un-deciphered Linear A texts on Crete."

"That's amazing Paul. Congratulations." She said it with disappointment. Still, Paul looked pleased with himself. "And there's more."

"As if that wasn't enough," Erik commented absently. Paul ignored him.

"I have read Laura's Atlantis theory in full—Laura sent it to my email address and I took the chance to open it. What you have already worked out, which I gather from Laura's dissertation, corresponds to my conclusion." He looked immensely selfsatisfied. "But there's one more thing which you have not thought of or at least not focussed on."

"What's that...?" Emma and Erik said in one voice.

“Well, some very interesting new ideas about succession in the New Kingdom which I and the team in Avaris now lovingly refer to as *‘the tenth plague’* as it kills the significance of the first born son at a time which fits so incredibly well in with the ten plagues of Egypt.” Paul put his cup of coffee on the table and leaned back in his chair. He hesitated, unsure how to explain his findings in a comprehensible way. “I’ve come to the conclusion that the introduction of the Minoans in Egypt at the beginning of the new kingdom actually had a profound impact on the ruling power of Egypt. It changed the order of succession in the eighteenth dynasty. It became a matriarchy for generations! My colleagues at the dig in Avaris are all very excited about this.” He looked at them, waiting for their reaction. “According to what you’ve found previously, Ahmose, as the grandson of Tetisheri, was of Minoan descent and through the Donation Stele he gave more power to his sister-wife Ahmose Nefertari through the gift of the office of the ‘God’s Wife of Amun’. I’ve found through my initial readings of Linear A texts that this priesthood was formed with the Minoan priesthood as its basis. Amun’s wife is the goddess Mut; the all-powerful mother goddess – and the Egyptian equivalent of the Minoan mother goddess. A new office was instated in Egypt, driven through by Queen Tetisheri through her grandson Ahmose. It’s well-known that after that the office of God’s wife of Amun remained a great source of power until after Hatshepsut’s death many generations later. As you know, Hatshepsut was both Pharaoh and God’s wife, basically merging the two. But more importantly, I’ve found from readings of Linear A texts that it determined the order of succession in Egypt! The God’s wife of Amun determined who would become the next pharaoh of Egypt! This explains why the Egyptian pharaohs of the early new kingdom were not necessarily father and son. Remember that Hatshepsut’s father Thutmose I was not the son of the preceding pharaoh, Amenhotep I. Tutmose I was a common soldier and his entitlement to the throne was his marriage to Hatshepsut’s mother Ahmose; the then God’s wife of Amun. This change in order of succession also explains why brother-sister marriages became common in the eighteenth dynasty. It was a way to follow the new order of succession but still remain faithful to traditional ways. The real ruling power was nevertheless with the queens.”

“You know, this actually all makes sense!” Emma said enthusiastically.

“Well, it revolutionises our way of thinking when it comes to the order of succession in ancient Egypt. It means that the queens are likely to have been even more influential than many historians of today believe. It turns our whole understanding of ancient Egyptian history upside down and it certainly gives an explanation to a lot of points which up until now have been something of a mystery. The team leader at the Avaris dig is convinced that I’m right in my conclusions, based on a couple of things they have found there.”

They were all quiet. Erik noticed that the wind was sweeping through the trees nearby. His findings would likely make Paul famous in academic circles.

“That’s very interesting,” Emma said with empathy. “By the way, did you notice the reference to ‘capital island’ on the Egyptian side of the Torpa tablet...? I suppose our tablet contains the world’s only known genuine Atlantis reference!”

“Yes, I’ve never seen such a clear reference to Atlantis ever before. From memory the tablet actually says that the capital island of defeated foreign invaders

disappears under water to leave only mud... You can't get closer to an Atlantis reference than that!"

"At least not in a text carved in 1550 BC," Emma added before she gave Paul a dazzling smile which surpassed any smile that she had ever given Erik.

Paul stood up, walked over to Emma's chair and squeezed her shoulders from behind, massaging them as he spoke. "You couldn't believe how I've wanted to tell the world about this in the last few months but of course I couldn't tell a soul about the tablet. God, it feels good to be able to talk about it freely!"

Emma bent her head back and looked at Paul smiling. To Erik it looked as if she had forgiven him, something he was extremely surprised about. He had certainly not forgiven him. Paul's behaviour had cost Erik time, irritation and perhaps even a partner promotion. Although he was amused by Paul's findings and the news about the tablet, Erik had had enough. Without a word he went inside the house. They didn't seem to notice he had left. Unsure where to go he wandered over to the library. He sat down in the chair. In front of him on the wall was his wedding picture. Anna was smiling happily, looking ravishing in her white dress. She had been so beautiful that day. It had been the happiest day of his life. It was strange to think that Anna had worked out that his biological mother had been buried in the space in the wall. Why else had his grandmother left her that message in the old Bible: *'You are right. The wall is hiding what you are looking for. Do not disturb her.'* How had she done it? He would never know. She had tried to tell him... Painful memories of their last day together in Thailand came back to him. He wanted Anna back, so badly. He wasn't sure why he was crying all of a sudden but he didn't try to stop the tears streaking his face. Emma entered the room. He stood up and wiped his cheeks with his sleeve by pretending to stretch.

"Where's Paul?" he asked.

"He's still outside. I wanted to talk to you."

"What about?" He pretended to be oblivious.

She walked up to him, looking straight at him. "Erik, I love you. Paul's return hasn't changed that. But..." She looked over at Anna's picture on the wall. "I understand. You still love her don't you?"

"Emma, I will always love Anna but she's gone and I've moved on. You know how I feel for you. Of course I love you! I'm yours. Forever."

His melancholic deliberations of a moment earlier evaporated. He walked over to her and took her in his arms. The happiness that overwhelmed him came suddenly and resulted in a smile which made it almost impossible to kiss her so he decided just to hold her tightly. He didn't intend to let go. Not even Paul's shout of goodbye from the library door made him loosen his grip. They heard a taxi arrive and drive off. He looked at her and saw that his shirt where her head had rested had a small mascara stain.

"What's the matter? Don't tell me you've changed your mind already?" Erik asked jokingly. Emma gave him a half-hearted slap on the shoulder where her mascara was ruining his shirt.

"No, I'm just wondering why I suddenly have this strange feeling of coming home..." Her voice was thick from emotion. She didn't elaborate but he knew that whatever it was it must be a good thing as she was smiling. He tenderly kissed away her tears. It tasted of salt. Embracing, they both looked outside to see the

large white building against the clear blue sky. In the corner of his eye Erik saw movement in one of the dark tower windows, although it was probably merely a reflection of trees. It seemed less frightening now with some of its dark secrets exposed but he was sure that this wasn't the end. There was more to that old castle than bricks and mortar. It had been his biological mother's resting place for three decades without anyone even guessing she was there. He suspected there were other secrets hidden within it. In his mind, the events of the Stenbock family's six hundred year old history were reverberating throughout the building, almost as if long dead relatives were all still there, trapped somewhere between life and death in an aimless existence inside the cold stone walls of Torpa. He decided he liked to keep it that way; no more walls to knock down if he could help it... unless Emma asked him of course.

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[**Note:** The numerous errors from translation have not been corrected.]

