

Chapter One

Present day

Airborne, approaching the island of Crete

Adriane Ducote inhaled sharply. The first glimpse of the Greek island from her window seat sent her pulse racing.

The *Fasten Your Seatbelt* light came on with a ding. Hypnotized by the scene below, Adriane vaguely heard the Captain's voice announcing their imminent arrival. Snow crested mountains in the distance contrasted sharply with the sandy beaches along the shore. The island topography grew larger as the plane made its descent toward the capital city Iraklion.

Her fingers inadvertently brushed the book on her lap and drew her attention away from the scenery. She touched the distressed cover with reverence, savoring its musty antique odor. *Golden Labrys*, published in 1912 by a woman archaeologist, turned out to be one of the most interesting volumes she'd ever discovered in New Orleans on any of her visits to the used bookstores there.

Page after page of tantalizing descriptions of ancient Minoan frescos and the people who created these fabulous works of art prompted her to drop everything and catch the next available flight to Crete. She could hardly believe she was actually here. In a short time she would set foot in a land where myth became part of history and the past and the present merged into one.

The plane touched down on the runway with a jolt and rolled to a stop at the terminal. Adriane drummed her fingers on the arm of the seat while her seatmate retrieved his items from an overhead compartment at a turtle's pace. *Not very Zen to be in such a hurry.*

She needed this getaway badly and didn't want to be rushed through palace ruins and museums like a sightseer on a guided tour. Why should she be in such a hurry to get off the plane anyway? The island had been here for centuries. It would still be here in another fifteen minutes. Let the man take all the time he needs. She took several deep breaths to calm herself and tried not to stare at him.

This man never uttered a single word to her or anyone else on the flight from Athens. He kept his nose buried in several different Greek language newspapers, only glancing up when a flight attendant came by to check on seatbelt compliance. Although the flying public had long since abandoned the custom of being dressed to the nines for air travel, the man's shaggy black hair and rumpled clothes somehow seemed out of place.

He wore a gold ring on his left hand, displaying an odd insignia, the meandering lines of a labyrinth and a small owl superimposed on top. Perhaps this was the emblem of a Cretan organization or the design might even signify membership in a cult. She knew the owl was associated with the goddess Athena and logically the labyrinth represented the infamous Minotaur's lair. Finally he gathered his belongings and shuffled down the aisle to the exit.

About a dozen other passengers made their way past Adriane, all looking expectant of the touristy adventures ahead of them. At last she slipped into the aisle.

Standing on tiptoes, she tried to reach her carry-on bag. Her silent seatmate had boarded late and hastily shoved his bags into the compartment. In the process, he managed to push hers all the way back. She would have to stand on the seat in order to retrieve her bag.

She carefully set the antique book out of the way next to her purse and her laptop. Clutching the rim of the compartment, she prepared to step up onto the seat. A deep male voice stopped her in mid-action. His words were recognizable as Greek although she didn't understand them. Turning her head, she gazed upward into the commanding green eyes of an extremely

good-looking blond man. She should have paid more attention to the Greek part of her college Classical Languages course years ago. Latin had been her forte.

His tawny gold hair, curling slightly over the collar of a red polo shirt, and his broad shoulders immediately made her think of Brad Pitt as Achilles in the movie *Troy*. She visualized him in a kilt and bronze armor wielding a sword. He repeated his question in the same foreign tongue.

She frowned. "Excuse me?"

"Oh, sorry. Your Mediterranean coloring threw me off. I mistook you for a Greek," he said. "Let me try this again in English. Do you need help getting your bag?"

"Yes, thank you," she said. "It's terrible being short. Besides, I would've fallen on my face, and I hate making a fool of myself."

He laughed. "Good thing I can prevent such a scene." He grabbed the bag with no problem. "Being tall does have its advantages."

A smile touched Adriane's lips. "Tall and you even speak Greek. Thanks for your help." She reached for the book and her other items on the seat.

"Looks like a real old volume," he said, studying the cover with narrowed eyes.

"It is, published in the early 1900's. I found the book in New Orleans hidden away in a dark corner of a store. It was pure luck."

"Pure luck, was it?"

His rugged face reflected a subtle change of expression, one Adriane couldn't quite decipher. Suspicion, maybe, or distrust? Yet his voice remained friendly. Perhaps she only imagined a change.

"Are you planning to take in the sights at Minoan ruins?" he asked.

"Yes, but I'd also like to get a real taste of local flavor instead of touristy places while I'm here."

"That's my intention too. There are a lot of great photo opportunities on the island," he said, scrutinizing her face.

"Just from what I've seen out the window, I believe you're right. Are you a photographer?"

He nodded. "Mostly freelance work. This trip I'm doing a spread on Crete for a new travel magazine. This is my third trip to the island in the last couple of years to take photos. Crete is more down to earth than the tourist destination islands like Santorini."

Photography, a Pisces occupation, she thought. But his eyes are definitely Scorpio.

His gaze both fascinated and frightened her. Those Scorpio eyes were as deceptive as calm seas. Any secrets lurking within lay hidden by the smooth still surface. Studying his face made her pulse race. Although his conversation sounded relaxed and casual, an aura of danger surrounded him. Dangerous and alluring, what a risky combination.

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