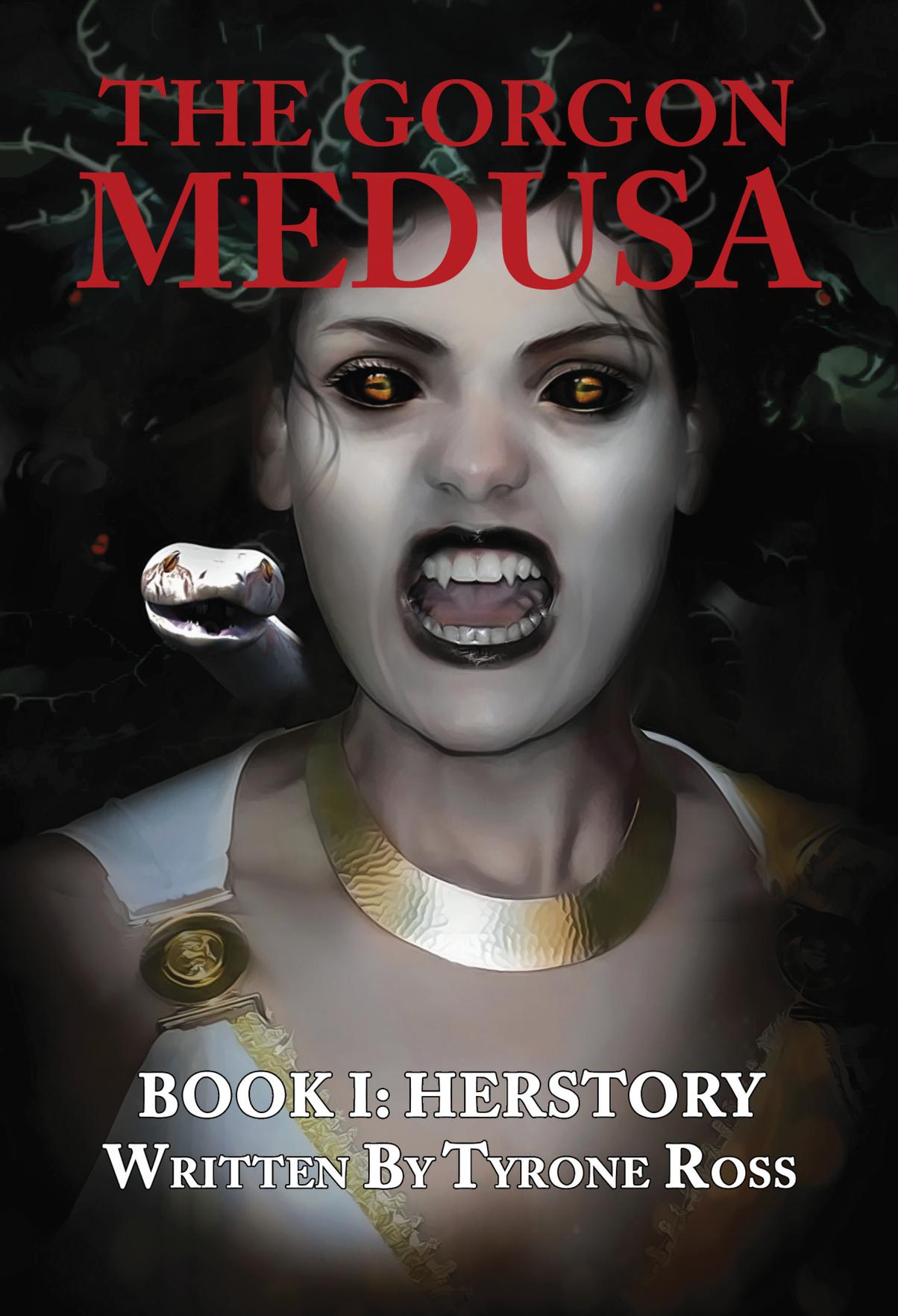


THE GORGON MEDUSA

A detailed illustration of Medusa, the Gorgon. She has pale skin, dark hair, and glowing yellow eyes. Her mouth is open in a scream, showing sharp teeth. A white snake is coiled around her right shoulder. She wears a gold necklace and a gold brooch on her white dress. The background is dark with green, vine-like patterns.

BOOK I: HERSTORY
WRITTEN BY TYRONE ROSS

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PROLOGUE

North African Island Group, Realm of Hades, 1545 BC

In the caves of a North African island far beyond the Greek empire in the ancient days, there existed three horrible monsters whose gaze brought a swift and painful death to any who trespassed on their island. These monsters were known in both history and mythology as the Gorgons: three sisters of horrid power that brought hundreds of men to their deaths! However, on this day, death was brought to the one known as Medusa, beheaded by Perseus. As the story and estimates go, this myth has never been fully explained. Throughout history, this battle had been nothing more than a few lines in a paragraph depicting Perseus's victory over the Gorgon Medusa. No other recorded accounts have explained what became of Medusa's head or of the two other Gorgons, (Stheno and Euryale) at the time of her death. The story, as told by Medusa, will now be revealed...

* * *

Over 3,000 years ago (roughly the time of 1545 BC), a horrendous murder took place! The Gorgon sisters stood in shock and revulsion having witnessed the brutal slaying of Medusa, their Gorgon sister. A large blade aimed from Medusa's back landed a brutal strike from over her right shoulder, severing three snakes from her mane of serpents and blood vessels in her neck. Hot red blood exploded into the air spraying the stone walls of the cave entrance. The severed snakes writhed, coiled and ceased moving. Medusa reached up her right hand to keep her head on her shoulders. On her face was a look of pain and shock. The Gorgon tried to turn and face her attacker but was not afforded the opportunity. From the left side, the blade sliced through her neck,

making the wound uneven and jagged. Her head was then pulled off of her shoulders and disappeared.

Euryale shrieked as the headless body of Medusa fell to the ground convulsing, bronzed fingers clawed and reached for a head no longer there. Stheno hissed and roared at the murderer, cursing him and the gods. None of them could possibly imagine any mortal to have the courage to attempt this, let alone succeed. For over 150 years, the Medusa, Euryale and Stheno have slain hundreds, thousands of would be warriors foolish enough in a vain attempt to take the Gorgon's magical powers for their own means. Such quests sent men to their doom and provided amusement to the Gods of Olympus. However, this errand of murder was successful. Impossible to fathom, but a death of a Gorgon was a reality.

Tugging at the decapitated body, Euryale cried out. "Someone has slain our sister!" She stood on her hind legs, wailed in anger and sorrow, her face buried in her bronze, clawed hands weeping.

Stheno, the most vicious of the three Gorgons, coiled up on her serpent body. From the right side of her face, her fanged mouth spoke. "We shall avenge our sister!" The left side, a mouth with no teeth also spoke. "Who dares to murder our sister?! Vengeance will be ours!" Stheno's face looked as if two faces were attempting to merge into one. Although she has two eyes, one nose, she possessed two mouths on opposite sides of her face, capable of speaking two different thoughts at once. Stheno raised up her body in preparation for pursuit. Her forked tails beat the ground of the cave viciously. Her wings extended for flight.

Euryale raised her head from her hands and sniffed the air. She caught the scent of the assassin. She cocked her head to the side and listened. The sound of frantic wings flapping filled her ears and renewed her thirst for vengeance. Small wings, to her understanding, made a panicked and hurried escape from the cave.

"I hear someone fleeing, Stheno!" Euryale cried out. "He will not escape!"

“To flight Euryale,” Stheno bellowed as she started slithering toward the cave entrance, past the now still body of Medusa. “We will grace this male foe with the pleasure of our gazes! And I will feast on his eyes as he burns to ashes!”

Despite modern mythology, the Gorgons were different in their appearance and particular power of the damnation gaze. If one stared at the face of the first Gorgon Stheno the naga serpent, the body, save for the eyes would be reduced to a frozen, charred skeleton. Stheno took great pleasure incinerating men and feeding on their eye as if they were boiled eggs.

Gazing upon the deformed face of Euryale will cause the internal organs and flesh of the body to burst from within and expose the bones. At times, Euryale fed on the flesh of the deceased or plays with the entrails, watching organs quiver and cease moving. Sometimes, Stheno would join in on the flesh feeding frenzy. Only Medusa had the power to freeze a being in their tracks by turning them to stone. She was considered to be the most powerful of the three.

* * *

The boy Perseus, protected by the armaments provided by the Goddess Athena, used the enchanted sandals of Mercury to fly fiercely from the cave and island of the Gorgons. Although the helm of Hades made him invisible or more precisely cast his form into a shadow realm of illusion, it did not cover his scent or the sound of his flying sandals. Pressed not to look back, Perseus flew directly away from the island and into a large cloud bank. Fast on his trail, the two Gorgon sisters pursued him into the clouds. Sensing the stench of the Olympic gods, killing him would assuredly bring the wrath of the gods to their island. With the murder of Medusa on their minds, they welcomed a battle that would most likely shift the power of world to their favor. Whether it would transpire or not, the remaining Gorgons would be patient and see. Knowing the gods, they would send their armies of men to

the island and there they would all meet their fate: DEATH!

As he raced through the clouds, he clutched the fractured sword that beheaded Medusa and the purse in which her head rested. Tightly gripping them with such force, the knuckles on both hands turned whiter than snow. He heard the desperation of the Gorgons fast behind him. He thought to use Medusa's head on them, but as he observed in the shadows and in the reflection of his small shield, the Gorgons were not affected by each other's gaze. With the mist of the clouds covering his escape, he prayed to Zeus for his continued protection. In the midst of his prayers, the snarls of the two Gorgons grew louder as they closed in on him. It would be a matter of minutes before they caught up and ripped him apart. But with Zeus' godly and timely intervention, the clouds parted, revealing a calm course back over the sea and back toward the islands of Greece. Zeus heard his prayers!

However, the King of Olympus was not so kind to the Gorgon sisters, for which he foiled by causing the clouds to erupt with lightning and intense winds blowing them off course. They fought the winds as best as they could. The pursuing Gorgons, no match for the might of nature, lost their quarry in the sudden maelstrom. The two Gorgons righted their course and being a bit disoriented, continued to pursue Perseus in the opposite direction. Perseus was safe from pursuit. He was able to escape to the east as the sisters were forced into the lands of the west and south.

Taking a precautionary look behind him, Perseus saw the shadow outlines of his pursuers fly in the other direction. For the first time since starting on his "adventure", Perseus relaxed. He was able to make off with the head unscathed (more or less) and if fate was with him, he would be in time to stop the wedding of King Polydectes and his mother. A sense of pride and accomplishment filled the young son of Zeus when he suddenly felt something moving within the purse. The head of his trophy, the head of Medusa, was still alive in a sense. The snakes moved as if they were searching for an escape from the enclosure of purse. The feeling of pride was replaced with dread and fear. He half expected

the purse to burst open and the eyes of Medusa to be set upon him. Thoughts of death by petrification certainly terrified him.

Medusa attempted to speak but it was impossible since her vocal cords were cut and blood dripped from her severed neck and snakes. Her mind was slipping in and out of consciousness. She could not maintain a thought or realize how she could have been beaten so easily by a boy of all beings. Additionally, who was responsible for sending this boy to carry out the death sentence? She already knew that answer; the Goddess Athena! One hundred and fifty years prior, Medusa served the goddess of wisdom loyally and faithfully until, that night, Poseidon paid Medusa a visit under the guise of captain of the guard, Theron. What appeared to Medusa as a forbidden sexual encounter with someone she admired and secretly loved became an act of assault and rape by the god of seas. The high priestess never invited Poseidon to the temple or to her body, but found herself fighting and pleading for mercy. None came from either Poseidon or Athena. Medusa was punished, cursed, banished and became a demon scourge of the ancient world.

Another thought crossed her fading mind. How was it possible she was still alive, or better still aware that she was not yet dead? She knew her soul would either be confined to the realm of Hades or blessed to be sent to the Elysian Fields, paradise for a hard life. Instead she found her consciousness stuck in between life and death. Could this be another aspect of her cursed powers? To linger between worlds, conscious and never die? At the very least she wished to die and not linger as an undead trophy in the possession of this mortal young boy.

A presence, never felt by Medusa since being cursed, spoke within her mind. “Stay alive! Stay awake! You must take your revenge! We cannot die! Stay alive!”

This voice shocked her at first. Then Medusa thought this voice came from deep within her mind and resigned to the fact it could be suffering a form of delusion being decapitated and stuck

between realms. However, with her vast studies of various topics (medicine, astrology, mystic arts and psychology), her analytical mind dismissed the notion of madness. She would have done so years earlier when she looked into a mirror and watched her beautiful black hair turn into hissing vipers. Weakly and cautiously she inquired the voice. "Who are you?"

"I am from damnation itself! Stolen from the realm I call my home and joined to you by those who claim to be gods. They are the fallen, lesser deities who claim to be the Alpha of all. Perversion!" The voice paused and then continued more calmly. "You must survive! I will do all I can to keep you alive!"

Medusa, in more shock than medical science can measure, replied to voice. "How can the head survive without its body?"

"The body will find you. You will be whole again! Until then simply stay alive!" The voice grew silent.

Medusa could not have fathomed what had transpired but that voice was very powerful, very strong, insisting she needed to fight! If anything her emotions were turning from fear to revenge. Not so much for the killer, the boy named Perseus, but for Athena. It was not enough to be violated and accused by Athena, but to make Medusa into a hideous monster, to live among horrible monsters on a ghastly land far from her former home. Death would not be granted to her nor would her soul be allowed to travel into the afterlife, wherever it may go. With her luck, she may find her head in the possession of Hades in the underworld. Fitting as Medusa and the other Gorgons guarded one of the entrances to that dark, lost realm.

Her thoughts began to cycle in an endless loop: jealousy from Athena toward Medusa, raped by Poseidon, cursed by Athena, exiled, destroying armies of men who would claim her head and finally succumbing to the blade of Perseus. She forced herself to break the cycle and focus on a single point of thought. That thought was now directed at Perseus. She moved her eyes in an

attempt to penetrate the shield that granted the assassin invisibility. But she was unable to do so. However, she was able to ascertain other facts about the boy. Gathering what strength she could she moved her lips and spoke. “Boy...they are using you. These gods, they are using you to do what they fail to do themselves.”

Perseus nearly dropped the purse as he heard a faint female voice come from the bag. His heart raced faster than when he traveled to the isle of the Gorgons to kill Medusa. He almost looked into the bag to check if the voice came from the purse, but doing so was foolish not to mention deadly.

“If you defy the gods, you deserve your fate,” Perseus replied harshly.

“I was abandoned and cursed by them. I was once a beautiful high priestess, loyal and steadfast in my obedience, and my reward was your blade. What do you think will happen to you if you defy or merely challenge their authority?”

Perseus began to think for there was a long silence. He mentally commanded the sandals to fly faster. Over the seas and onto rugged shores of Greece, Perseus would soon be at his destination to present his prize to the King and his court to save his mother.

“I don’t have a choice. Your head will save my mother and stop an unholy marriage,” he sorrowfully replied.

“If you found the courage and strength to cross the seas, surmount impossible odds and face me and my sisters, you could have saved your mother. Instead, you chose to end my life and set events out of control.” Medusa’s words trailed off.

From where ever she got the strength and ability to speak was now exhausted. She pointed her eyes downward and saw the land of Greece. She didn’t know if she was dreaming or seeing things to come to pass. Her mind’s eye saw the faces of kings and queens

being petrified. The faces of people wearing strange clothing dying by her gaze. She saw a land in turmoil; people were running in all directions fleeing from fire and strange creatures. And then the vision that horrified Medusa the most came into her mind; Athena sitting on a golden throne with dozens of people kneeling at her feet. She appeared to rule not only the Greek Empire but of the entire world. The vision faded into darkness as she heard the words of Perseus drift into her thoughts.

“I regret the series of events that have befallen you.”

The world went dark...

End of Prologue

CHAPTER 1

The Gala

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, October 15, 2012, 7:35PM

The autumn in New York City was always something to be appreciated. Many citizens took to the streets enjoying the events that celebrated the season and the upcoming holidays. For some, they either cling to the warm summer days or embrace the brisk cool winter days approaching. Whatever the activity or holiday, this day in mid-October was a special event for many New Yorkers and for many of those who have lived in the city for numerous years.

The reopening of the Metropolitan Museum of Art was seen as an essential part of New York City coming back to life. Since 2008 the museum had suffered similarly the same fate as many financial institutions across the country: financial mismanagement. Who in the city could have imagined the financial backers of this institution would have allowed this landmark museum to close? For years, a committee of patrons, private contributors and city officials met to reopen this museum and to determine a new management structure. Unfortunately, the committee failed to reach an agreement and the ones who lost out were the avid museum goers, school children and tourists from around the world. Tonight however, the New York icon would come back and is all thanks to someone whose citizenship is from another country.

Life in and around the museum seemed to spring up overnight. Workmen appeared and began assessing the grounds around the

museum. First, it was an effort to restore the museum building, pavement, fountains and walkways. At the behest of the new benefactor, a new carport was added to allow celebrities, school children and even press to disembark and enter the museum with ease. This was also created to ease the traffic on Fifth Avenue, which went over very nicely with the city council. Next to arrive were dozens of art restorers to evaluate the condition of the artwork, sculptures and dozens of pieces of work either still in their displays or locked in storage. New Yorkers gathered for days and weeks just watching the people work on their museum, waiting for the Opening Day. Word got out that a sole private concern bought the museum, the surrounding property and was in charge of the artwork the museum contained. Concern spread over the possibility the Metropolitan would now be a private museum and everyone will have to pay enormous entrance fees to enter. Luckily, the new owner heard the “cries of the people” and released a statement claiming the museum will operate close to how it was in the past. “Going to the museum should be an enriching experience. Not a financial, crippling, incident,” a posted on the revamped website and submitted to the news outlets.

The people were relieved and a renewed sense of excitement settled around the museum. As the time of the opening drew, the mysterious benefactor/owner allowed more information to be released about the upcoming events the museum was to sponsor: floating art galleries for various artists from various walks of life, school tours during week, more exhibitions for public and private concerns, music ensembles and mini concerts, and more international artwork displays.

The name of this new owner was Madame Cynthia Petrakis of Greece. Arguably one of the richest women in the world, she was the reclusive philanthropist who stepped in to save this icon from oblivion. Until this evening, Madame Petrakis was rarely seen in the public and spent most of her time championing for the archeological sciences for study, not for profit. Her vast wealth influenced many to preserve the artistic efforts of the human condition and to understand the history of mankind. She owned

numerous museums and perseveration centers around the world, even donated items from her personal collection for display. But rarely this persona of wealth and beauty has made a public appearance. For nearly twenty years, Madame Petrakis sponsored many charity events, educational programs, scholarships, artistic sponsorships, archeological explorations, humanitarian efforts and an investor for the development and exploration of newer and better technologies.

Many have incorrectly labeled her as an industrialist, in which she has replied, “Industrialists means to change the world by harsh and/or extreme means. I consider myself to be more of a servant to the people, anywhere for those who wish strive for a better life.”

Upon hearing this, people around the world and in New York City assume this was a political statement and she was seeking office. Political analysts even determined this was the case since the nation of Greece was in turmoil and she would use her vast wealth to fund a new foundation of a government. Even this analysis was untrue.

With all of the new renovations Madame Petrakis added to the museum, most notably additional parking and car port space, more individuals showed up for the Opening Gala than originally anticipated. Mostly were bystanders who, with their cell phone cameras, wanted to catch a glimpse of the celebrities, officials, artists and other influential people gathering for this sneak preview of the reopening of the museum. Police and museum security worked feverishly to control the crowds, maintain the flow of traffic and manage the dozens of news crews showing up and disembarking their cameras in the area creating an additional traffic bottle neck. Rumors circulating around the news reporters that only one news team will be allowed into the museum to cover exclusively the opening and any announcements from the chief benefactor of the new Metropolitan Museum of Art. Some of the news crews were so desperate for a chance to be chosen that a few producers and news anchors attempted to bribe the museum security in the hope of getting better noticed by this reclusive

philanthropist. Unfortunately for some of the overzealous news crews, they were flatly turned down and told to retreat to the designated areas for the press.

Indeed, it would be a night to remember! Persons of interest slowly made their way to the museum; some greeted fans and spoke with the news casters on the stairs leading into the museum. Others simply waved and made their way into the gathering area, searching for the wine and hors d'oeuvres. The weather was perfect for the evening, the people were happy and excited, even the stars in the sky appear to shine brighter despite the light pollution of New York City. All that was left was the arrival of the mistress of the evening's ceremony.

* * *

In a white stretch limousine several blocks away, slowly cruising down Fifth Avenue approaching Central Park, Madame Cynthia Petrakis sat in a regal position, still as a statue! She was nervous and she could not account as to why she felt so. Madame Petrakis had spoken in front of crowds before, the few times she's made public appearances, even to her staff members on various projects which inevitably lead her to the status she currently enjoyed. However, Madame Petrakis felt that the night's festivities had the impression of impending doom, or more embarrassing, that she may fail entirely and fall flat on her face. Her precognition foretold the evening will be marred by some incident, yet the vision/feeling failed to reveal the nature of the circumstance. She had the notion to withdraw and cancel the event but so many people looked forward to not only the museum opening but to see the infamous Madame Petrakis as well.

She wrenched her hands together as she gazed out the window toward Central Park. A few weeks prior during the final stages of museum reconstruction, she decided to take a walk through the park and find her own way back to the building she owned on the Upper West Side. It was a lovely day but would soon give way to rain. She surmised that a quick walk through the park and she

would beat the rain home. How wrong she was. Three teens decided to mug her with the intention of sexually assaulting her. Even after she pleaded with them, offered them money to leave her be, they decided to rough her up, pushing her to ground. For a moment during the assault she played the victim, allowing them to assume they were in control. When skies grew dark and heavy with rain, she showed them who was in control. The three teens went missing that day and only Cynthia Petrakis knew for sure what happened.

This unnerved her. “They deserved their fate! If they merely let me be...”

Slowly she inhaled and tried to relax. Too many circumstances depended on the night going forward and it would be a bad mark on her reputation to cancel without explanation. So many people depended on the museum reopening; New York City was depending on it! Failure was something she will not easily submit to.

Sitting straighter in her plush limousine seat, she looked at dozens of newspapers sprawled about the passenger cab. Some were international newspapers written in different languages and some local papers. The last paper she was reading was a Greek newspaper called the Greek Tribune, International. On its front pages showed the images of continued unrest and decay of the Hellenic Parliament’s influence in all of its cities. Images of fire, blood and people suffering conveyed more of the message than words ever could. She was beginning to tear up when the voice spoke in her mind.

“Maybe you should cancel tonight’s opening if you are so moved by what is occurring your native homeland.” A voice deep in her mind pointed out.

Cynthia inhaled and then smiled to herself. “No,” she thought firmly. “This night is very important to those here and abroad. I

will not abandon these people to save others. Our purpose is to help those in need, not to harm them.”

“Were we thinking that when those teens came at us in the park?” The voice fired back. Cynthia’s demeanor changed, anger started to boil inside of her.

“I have very little regret for those who chose a path of evil and destruction. I was taken against my will once, never again!” Cynthia’s hands started to tremble and as she looked at them, they seem to be drained of their natural skin tone. Her finger nails started to grow outwardly. She quickly grasped a mirror in the passenger visor and looked into it. Her face began to gray slightly. Cynthia started to panic but quickly regained her composure. She began to breathe deeply and meditate on the words that will bring her “condition” back under control. After a few moments, her hands returned back to normal and a glance in the mirror showed her beautiful face. Without looking away, she reached for her small makeup bag and reapplied her red shade lipstick to her full lips.

“Is it your intention to antagonize me before the Reopening Gala event? I thought you were the helpful one in my life?” Cynthia asked internally as she finished her makeup application.

The voice sounded a bit annoyed and hurt when it replied, “Certainly not! But this is your first, huge public gathering in years. Since I have watched hours of television and the Internet, I know there will be individuals that will say and do things to make you lose your composure.” It paused while Cynthia sat back on her seat and straightened the newspapers. “In our case, losing your composure will be disadvantageous for our ultimate goals. I am aware you are nervous, but rest in the knowledge that you are accomplishing a great deed for the people of this age.”

As the limousine slowly made its way down Fifth Avenue, Cynthia looked again at the park where she was attacked. “You are right! We are doing great thing!” She accidentally said aloud. From

the driver seat, the Salvatore responded to his employer's comments over the limo's intercom.

"Yes ma'am! We are on time for the event despite the traffic. I called ahead to the museum and everything is going well." Salvatore reported.

Cynthia responded. "Thank you Salvatore." She felt embarrassed that she was not aware she was speaking aloud. "Take it easy on the streets."

"Yes Madame Petrakis. We are now less than ten minutes away and just about all of the guests are there."

Cynthia nodded and muted the intercom. "I'm hoping there will be no problems tonight. But if there are, we will have to let others handle it."

"That is what we pay them for," the voice shot back. "In the meantime, let's see who is giving us the best coverage of the reopening. We still need to pick one news team remember?"

Reaching for a touch screen specially installed in the limousine, Cynthia tapped the menu to select the broadcast TV function and twelve tiled windows appeared on the twenty-four inch monitor. Simultaneously she viewed and listened to all of the news casts. She admired the professional performance of the anchors who patiently waited for the arrival of Madame Cynthia Petrakis. However, all of them lacked emotion, a sense of anticipation and eagerness reflecting the significance of the museum opening. She was about to decide not to let any of them in when she focused on one news broadcast. Touching the window for that particular anchor, she not only felt this female news anchor had the right qualities she was looking for but it was the person she was standing with.

"This is Samantha Reid of Channel 6 News and I am standing with archaeologist Jerimiah Clarke who may be able to shed some

light on what we can expect from the reopening of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.”

Speaking into the microphone offered to him, Jerimiah Clarke spoke. “Well Miss Reid, you can expect to see the museum restored to its original splendor as well as new exhibits from around the world. Madame Cynthia Petrakis cares about the arts and the people...or the peoples who create them.”

As Cynthia’s limousine drew closer to the site, she made a decision whom to invite for the gathering in the museum. “I think that is a good choice seeing how he was a big help to us in the past,” the voice said.

“Did we send him an invitation?” she asked quietly.

After a minute of thinking, both Cynthia and the voice sighed in a negative tone. “I am glad he showed up in any case.” Cynthia remarked. “Looks like he will be joining us.”

Cynthia agreed with the voice in her head and decided to invite Jerimiah Clarke and the Channel 6 News Team into the Reopening Gala!

* * *

Minutes earlier, standing across the street from museum stood a tall African American man with a dark brown trench coat, black Kangol cap, white button down shirt, black pants and shoes. Over his left shoulder he wore a well-worn brown leather saddle bag. He leaned on the lamp post, surveying the crowds around the museum. It seemed to him that the people gathered around the museum were looking to get in would fail in their attempt; security was tight enough to allow not even a squirrel. Still he surveyed the area. Jerimiah Clarke was a well-known archaeologist and an adjunct university professor of history/archaeology. It pained him at first that he was not invited to this gala event. Deep down he was happy the museum will be opening after many years being closed; he

relished the idea of going inside this evening and seeing the old exhibits as well as new ones Madame Petrakis added. Difficult to do without an invite. At times he worked for Madame Cynthia Petrakis or rather through intermediary concerns; in so doing he felt that an invitation would not be a big concern. Still, his chances of getting into the private museum ceremonies slim to none, not to mention meeting Madame Petrakis herself.

He frowned and rubbed his face. His hands told him that he should have shaved at 6:15 when his five o'clock shadow appeared. No matter, he wanted to meet Madame Petrakis face to face and share with her some concerns about a possible theft in her museum. For the past several weeks, Jerimiah had been tracking a rash of museum robberies across the country. Many of them related to Madame Petrakis in the way of her owning the museums or had exhibits on display at other institutions. The items stolen were more of the academic type than of monetary value. Ancient texts written on tablets, parchment or other media were taken in favor of objects made of silver, gold, diamonds and other precious metals. This is what baffled investigators, however, Jerimiah understood the robberies to be a part of a more elaborate, sinister plot unfolding. Strange, he thought to himself as Madame Petrakis had to be aware of these robberies and yet still open the Metropolitan Museum with little or no concern. He deduced a robbery may spoil the gala if the criminals were bold enough to try a theft. Knowing Cynthia Petrakis' reputation, the robberies will not deter her from opening this museum.

“With all of these people, guards, and police, it seems a perfect time to do so,” Jerimiah whispered to himself. Most of the robberies took place during the day while people and security were present. It appears that these criminals like to use the crowds as a cover for their burglary. It was the perfect night to attempt such a crime. Still looking for a way in, he knew he had to try to meet Madame Petrakis and explain his findings. If not, there would be very little Jerimiah could do to prevent any larceny.

His hopes were renewed when he saw the news van of the Channel 6 News. “I think she said she will be covering this museum event tonight. I hope she is.” Jerimiah referred to his girlfriend Samantha Reid, news and field anchor for the local news. If she was there, maybe he could persuade Samantha to get close enough to Madame Petrakis when she arrives. It was worth a shot. Looking both ways on Fifth Avenue, Jerimiah stealthily made his way to the news van.

* * *

“So we are expecting a great night from seeing this icon reopen and I know everyone in New York City has been anxiously waiting for a while!” A celebrity movie star, a man in his forties sporting a short blonde hairstyle with a slightly graying beard, talked excitedly into the microphone of Channel 6 reporter, Samantha Reid. The lovely African American woman who herself was beaming at Hollywood’s newest power couple also felt the excitement. His wife, a tall, athletically built woman, star of many action films smiled into the camera widely while holding onto her husband’s arm.

“Well we thank you for stopping by and talking with us. Enjoy the Reopening Gala!” Samantha Reid wished the celebrity couple well as they both smiled and walked up the stairs into the museum. People cheered, clapped and snapped countless photos of the two as they made their way into the museum to join the other gathered invitees.

“We had the pleasure of talking to the celebrity invitees who are calling this the event of the year!” Samantha Reid reported as she turned in the direction of the museum stairs still teeming with spectators, camera crews from other stations and the private security firm owned and operated by Petrakis Security. “As the hour draws closer to the 8:00PM, we still see no sign of the host of this Gala, Cynthia Petrakis. As many of you know she has single handedly saved this New York museum from being the latest casualty of financial ruin and foreclosure. But as you can see from

all who have gathered here and the guests to have arrived, I imagine the future of this museum will be long lasting this time around.”

She paused, smiled and gestured to the museum. “I am Samantha Reid with Channel 6 News at the Gala Reopening at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, still waiting for the host of the evening. Back to the studio.”

Cameraman Raphael Castel and onsite producer Estelle Briggins both sighed as Samantha put down her microphone and walked over to the camera. “Well guys, do you think there is a chance?” she asked as Estelle handed her and Raphael cups of hot coffee.

“Nope,” Raphael said taking a long gulp. Samantha frowned in agreement.

“There is a chance,” Estelle started as she adjusted her thick rimmed glasses and brushed her long black hair out of her face. The crew shared a moment of silence. “At least we got a good spot and some good interviews but who knows if we will be the ones going in. But I imagine it will be the larger network crews who may get a chance. Local news will be left out.”

“I love your enthusiasm Estelle,” Raphael expressed with annoyance.

“I am only being realistic Raphael. It would be great to go in. However, I think she has made up her mind long ago as to who will be shooting from inside.” She turned toward Samantha. “She is rich! The larger network crews have rich owners. Rich people tend to stick with their own.”

Raphael was about to protest but knew deep down he knew she was right. It was an honor to cover as much as they could since they camped out on the Metropolitan’s front door step. Samantha finished her cup of coffee and looked at the museum doors. She

had seen many other news crews attempting to make their way into the museum only to be turned away by the security guards. Rumors circulated more and more that only one news team would enter and anxiety was building. For the Channel 6 crew, hopes were dwindling.

“If we don’t get in, it is not the end of the world,” Samantha surmised. “We have lots of footage to share and I for one will be back here tomorrow morning talking to the patrons as they have their opening day.”

Both Raphael and Estelle traded looks. “No problem. I will give you the number of the camera crew that will be available and you can go in the morning with them,” Estelle announced. Raphael nodded his head in agreement and finished his coffee.

“Come on guys. Where is your sense of adventure?”

“At home, in bed, waiting for me,” Raphael laughed. “But I won’t be mad if I find it asleep.”

Samantha’s shoulders heaved a bit as she looked at the older camera man. She wished he and Estelle would be eager enough to wait until the possible end, but being stationed at the museum since 5:00PM was tiring. This crew had covered many stories and received numerous awards in their five years together. Prospects of their being picked were shrinking and Samantha relented.

“Maybe you guys are right. Let’s call the station and head in.”

“You don’t want to wait for the main attraction? She should be here soon.” The comment came from a tall man wearing a saddle bag and a snap cap. Raphael shook his hand as he approached while Estelle simply smiled at him. Only Samantha had an unwelcoming look on her face as Jerimiah Clarke approached. He stopped just outside of arms distance, sensing the lukewarm reception.

“Greetings, my lady. Such a beautiful night is it not?” Jerimiah said with an accent of romance. Both Raphael and Estelle made themselves scarce and waited in the news van.

“I thought you told me you would be out of town. I thought you would call me. I thought of you more than you of me!” Samantha said firmly.

“Well,” Jerimiah started carefully and looking directly into her light brown eyes. “I was starting to leave for Chicago to follow up on those museum robberies when I remembered the Metropolitan Museum was opening today. I went to my office, gathered my notes and figured I could get in or get a few minutes with Cynthia Petrakis. I unfortunately did not get an invite.”

“And in all that time you never thought to call or text me?” Samantha’s arms were crossed and she was tapping her shoe on the pavement. That look, the one that said, You are in trouble! was written all over the reporters face for Jerimiah to read.

Clearing his throat, the archaeologist answered, “I knew without a doubt you would be here!” A big grin played across his face.

Samantha burst out in a small laugh and hugged Jerimiah. “I miss you. I wish you would stay home more often.”

“I will give up my night job and you your day job and we can stay home together all the time,” Jerimiah commented sarcastically.

The two looked at the crowds when Samantha looked up at Jerimiah and then her eyes widened. She banged on the van door, signaling for Raphael and Estelle to come outside. The two jumped out and looked at Samantha. “What’s up?” Raphael asked.

“One more interview, with Professor Clarke here!” Samantha was reaching for the microphone and getting herself ready and moving Jerimiah into a good position.

“Are you serious Samantha? I thought we are calling it a night,” Estelle protested.

“Yup! Very serious!” Samantha grabbed her microphone and stood next to Jerimiah.

“I don’t think the station will preempt any more time for this museum coverage,” Estelle attempted to explain. “We are flying almost solo here.”

Samantha continued to ready herself and gave Estelle the look that said, Make sure the studio is ready for another live feed. As she put her earpiece in place, she was once again plugged into the studio via wireless feed. She could hear the chatter in the background as Channel 6 News manager relented to accept the additional live coverage. Estelle talked into her headset to help clear up the confusion about the final interview for the evening.

“Chief says this is the last one. The network is on the hook for its programming for the prime time hour. If we don’t get in the museum, it is a wrap for the tonight!”

Samantha nodded moved the new interviewee into the view of the camera.

“What a cute couple!” Raphael remarked as he set up his camera. Estelle waited for the cameraman to get ready and then held up her hand to silently countdown Samantha to start her interview.

“This is Samantha Reid of Channel 6 News and I am standing with archaeologist Jerimiah Clarke who may be able to shed some light on what can we expect from the reopening of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.”

Speaking into the microphone offered to him, Jerimiah Clarke shared his opinion. “Well Miss Reid, you can expect to see the museum restored to its original splendor as well as new exhibits from around the world. Madame Cynthia Petrakis cares about the arts and people...or peoples who created them.”

“So you say there will be much of the same art work as before?”

“Yes and no. From what I know of Madame Cynthia Petrakis, she is an advocate of the preservation of the arts and showcasing the human expression. I am sure she will encourage people from all walks of life to come and share in her passion as well as influence others for sharing their artwork. I know from personal experience that she is also a staunch supporter of archaeology, which is my field of experience.” Jerimiah smiled at the camera and continued. “From all over the world she has sponsored excavations and other programs to unearth, so to speak, the past of human history.”

“History and the preservation of it seem to be one of her great passions, wouldn’t you say?” Samantha asked.

“One of her passions, yes! But our host is into education, humanitarian efforts, you name it, she will have some association with it.”

With a sly expression, Samantha asked the obvious question. “Professor Clarke, you don’t happen to have an invitation to this Reopening event do you?”

“Sadly, no. But I came down to show my support and to also get a glimpse of the lady of the evening.”

Just as Jerimiah finished his comment, a hush and then a sound of elation swept through the crowd. Everyone turned to see the white limousine driving into the carport. Police and security made

sure all of the area was clear for the arrival of the lady herself, Madame Petrakis.

* * *

Cameras were rolling, snapping and recording the limousine as it cruised to a halt. The driver exited on his side and moved swiftly to the passenger side. He waited for a minute until Cynthia Petrakis signaled that she was ready to exit. He opened the door and offered his hand to assist the lady of the evening. Cynthia Petrakis stepped out and absorbed the moment. People gasped at her beauty and elegance.

Taking another deep breath, Cynthia looked out at the crowd and news vans searching for Channel 6 news crew. She spotted them and told herself, "Showtime."

The voice in her head replied, "Don't turn this into a wild party! You know these New Yorkers will party all the way to New Year's Day!"

Cynthia Petrakis stood five feet, nine inches tall. She wore a long white shimmering dress with no sleeves and collared at the neck. A silver shawl was draped about her shoulders and she carried a small white purse. Her hair was dark, long and worn pinned back, highlighting her eyes. It gave her a romantic look. Her brown eyes were dark and inviting, flawless skin peaked through the dress. Her nails were painted a dark silver color which matched her toe nails in her flat, open toe shoes. Everyone was taken with her! So much so, flashbulbs lit up the carport outside of the museum. The first major public appearance of the reclusive billionaire Madame Cynthia Petrakis in New York City was the highlight of the fall night.

Her beauty was such that people murmured to themselves about her age. Some said twenty, others said between thirty or forty years of age. In actuality no one knew how old Cynthia

Petrakis was and she was not going to reveal her age to anyone, since no one would ever believe her.

As the cameras continued to flash, applause started and grew into cheers! For a moment, Cynthia took the moment and in return, smiled and waved at the crowd politely. Salvatore closed the door to the limousine and drove away slowly into the garage, taking care not produce a rush of air and dirt to blow onto his employer.

Looking about, she located the Channel 6 news van and saw the individuals that caught her attention. With grace, she slowly walked over to them.

“Raphael, tell me you are still shooting,” inquired Estelle as she stared open mouthed at the approaching museum curator and owner. Cynthia Petrakis was as lovely as Estelle thought along with the fact that her career may take a turn for the best.

Raphael on the other hand was calm, collected and felt as if he was at a peep show displaying a classy, intelligent woman. He found himself drooling a bit as he hid his face behind the camera. “Of course you silly girl, now look professional!”

Cynthia approached Jerimiah Clarke with a hand extended. “Mr. Clarke, so pleased to make your acquaintance in person.”

Jerimiah grasped gently but noticed at once her hand was cold but immediately warmed. Odd, he thought to himself.

“I am honored to meet you.” He wanted to say more but thought better of it.

Cynthia turned her attention toward Samantha. “You must be Samantha Reid of Channel 6 News. I admire your journalism and news reporting.”

“Thank you so very much,” Samantha beamed. “Would you care to say something to our viewers at home and online?”

“Now don’t ham it up or take too long, we have a party to go to,” the voice shrieked internally. In Cynthia’s mind, she sent an emotional bolt of thought that basically told the voice to be quiet. She, however, heeded the advice.

“Briefly. And if you please, you all must come in with me to attend the ceremonies,” Cynthia gestured to Jerimiah and the news crew. “I want to thank the people of New York for supporting my efforts to the reopening this institution. I want it understood that that this not my museum; I am merely the caretaker and will provide the best I can offer to the public. Tomorrow, the city will be able to see their museum reopen more magnificent than before.”

She took Jerimiah by the arm and said casually, “Care to escort me into the new Metropolitan Museum of Art, Mr. Clarke?”

The archaeologist smiled, looking back briefly at Samantha and winking as he escorted Madame Petrakis up the stairs to the museum. Samantha Reid stepped in front of the camera to share the good news. “This is Samantha Reid of Channel 6 News. By special invitation of Madame Cynthia Petrakis, this crew has been invited inside to the Opening Gala festivities. Please stay tuned for additional coverage!”

Raphael, Estelle and Samantha gathered up their gear, locked up the van and headed up the stairs behind Madame Petrakis.

Raphael spoke to himself but out loud. “I hope there is more than just wine and cheese being served.”

Madame Petrakis overheard him and replied, “Yes, I believe olives and crackers as well!”

Raphael didn't think that she would hear him but he knew women generally have amazing hearing. She smiled back at him to let the cameraman know there were no hard feelings. Estelle did

not share the sentiment and shot him a look and mouthed “Mind your tongue!”

As they walked up the stairs, Estelle briefly turned around to see other news crews frown at her. One or two held up a profane gesture to her while others simply packed their gear and drove away. Channel 6 was chosen out of everyone else to come in and view the event, due to no small measure of Jerimiah Clarke.

The newly invited guests were ushered by the guards to the reception area where the other arrived guests shared conversation, wine and hors d'oeuvres. Estelle and Raphael took in the large hall and decided on a spot where they could shoot to get a good view of Madame Petrakis. Cynthia walked among her guests where she heard numerous accolades. She looked at the faces of the people gathered and smiled warmly.

“They all love you! If they only knew your secrets, maybe they would change their minds.” The voice bellowed from deep within her mind. Cynthia was about to chastise the voice, but understood its purpose for speaking out. The deadly sin of vanity played about her. She was like a queen coming into her new palace. Every brick, stone, tile, and curtain was overseen by the Madame herself. Why should she not feel like a queen? Humility was the best play for her but still, it was an honor to be so welcomed and appreciated. Cynthia left Jerimiah Clarke for the moment and turned to the crowd, held her hands up and blew out a kiss.

“Thank you all for coming! Thank you for your support of this fine museum. I promise you will all see the hard work it took to bring back this institution of art and preservation.” The crowd cheered loudly as Raphael caught the reaction of the gathered guests and every motion of this beautiful woman.

Inside the grand structure, many people who visited this museum before always found it to be a colossal place. However, several years without care and restoration would dull its

magnificence. Madame Petrakis made sure this place was inviting and welcoming to all who would visit. Normally, the entrance hall would be setup to receive public visitors. Tonight it was transformed into a reception and gathering area. To the right, a stage, chairs and large display wall was setup for the speech and announcements made by Madame Petrakis later in the evening. In the center area, food from the finest caterers in the city was serving the numerous celebrities and other influential people. Wine and other “light” spirits were also served. Many of the guests took to the wine more so than the food, but the general feeling was that no one should over indulge and get drunk. The museum security officers kept a watchful eye over the guests and saw to it that no one got out of hand to spoil the event.

Jerimiah looked at the hall admiring the restored architecture. “You really don’t appreciate something so beautiful or magnificent until it is taken from you. I wished I’d visited this place more often,” Jerimiah thought out loud as he walked with the woman who brought life back to this great institution.

“That is why I bought this place and made it available to all who truly cherished it. It is sad we have to say goodbye to those things we love but do not take the time to appreciate it,” Cynthia replied. She turned back to Samantha and her news crew. “Please take a moment to get set up over in the Announcement Hall and enjoy some food. I will mingle with our guests for a few minutes and then its onto to the show.”

“If you have a moment Madame I wish to show you something rather important,” Jerimiah asked with urgency. He pleaded with his eyes. Biting her lower lip she nodded. Jerimiah then went into his saddlebag, withdrew his tablet and in a few seconds had information of the museum robberies on the screen. Cynthia, with a serious expression on her face, looked at the images and notes Jerimiah collected.

“Are you seeing these?” she asked the voice in her head.

“Yes, I am able to see and remember all of the images, you can speed through them and we can process this later,” the voice answered. Moving through the slides of information, Jerimiah noticed that her eyes were wide open and unmoving as Cynthia slid her finger very quickly across the screen.

Can she possibly be reading everything that I am showing her, Jerimiah wondered to himself. Once she reached the end of the presentation, she quickly opened up Jerimiah’s email and then another window for programming. After a minute of working, she handed the tablet back to Jerimiah.

“I skimmed through your information,” she said in an even business tone, almost emotionless. “And rest assured I will be reviewing it in the back of my mind. I created a special protocol on your tablet to instantly forward any information directly to my digital access points. Email, phone, my private server network, et cetera. Any data you find useful to me or my endeavors I would like for you to have unrestricted access to my information network.” She paused and then flashed a sinister yet playful smile. “But don’t dare spam me!”

How happy he could be having almost direct access to Cynthia Petrakis, anytime anywhere. He was speechless for a minute until he found himself back in the real world. “I take it then I am working for the Petrakis concern?”

“Yes, you are,” she answered warmly. “Now if you will excuse me for a few minutes, time to play the hostess.”

Cynthia walked slowly and began the long ritual of smiling, hand shaking and greeting all of her guests. Everyone invited scarcely knew Madame Cynthia Petrakis but did not refuse the prestigious invitation; conversely she knew everyone in the museum hall.

Jerimiah reviewed the program Cynthia created on his tablet. All of the information about the museum robberies was copied and

transferred into her network as she said. The more Jerimiah slowly explored the mystery of Cynthia Petrakis, the more he felt drawn to her in a supernatural way. Fortunately, it was not only a physical attraction; Samantha would kill him or at the very least stop speaking to him if it was anything like that.

“At least I will get a show and some food out of this night,” he said to himself as he checked his coat, kept his saddlebag and headed toward the food tables. He spotted Samantha and headed in her direction.

* * *

Assessing the lecture/announcement area was easy. Finding the best location to shoot the upcoming announcement from Madame Cynthia Petrakis was no effort at all. Deciding what to eat at the elaborate spread of food was the tough part. Samantha and Jerimiah spent their time wandering the hall among people who could be considered some of the most powerful and influential people in the country and perhaps the world. They stopped to speak to a few of these persons and had a pleasant time. For Estelle and Raphael, they had never seen an elaborate spread. With empty plates in hand they toured the tables of food. After a second time around the six, long tables of food, a blonde haired female chef intervened in their food tour.

“I don’t want to rush you guys, but I have good information that the lady of the evening will soon be calling the guests into the next room for the announcement in ten minutes, at 8:45PM,” she whispered. “Don’t feel bad, some of the people were here even longer and only ate salad!”

Estelle laughed and then said, “Thanks, sweetie. We will take a little bit of what you got there.” She gestured with her hand and held out her plate for servings. Raphael simply nodded his head and held his plate forward as well.

“This is why she is the boss and I am the cameraman,” Raphael smiled as the girl piled up his and Estelle’s plate high. The caterer laughed and complied with the request.

The guests in hall were still talking and holding numerous conversations, many about Cynthia Petrakis herself. She continued to greet and meet her guests, all the while being admired by many from up close and from afar. As she walked through the people, Cynthia sensed the gathered guests were eager to hear what the evening had in store for them. No need to delay any further, besides, it was time. She signaled to the new museum director, Francesca Terceira, to come to her side.

“Francesca, please call the guests into the conference hall and have security escort Mr. Jerimiah Clarke to the reserved chairs in the front row. Also, have the Channel 6 News team take their position for the recording.”

Francesca Terceira, a middle aged Spanish woman and well known international curator, nodded her head and withdrew a wireless microphone device from her navy blue suit jacket. After making some adjustments, she attached an earpiece with a microphone and walked into the crowd. Cynthia Petrakis made her way to the hall and sat in a large chair on stage facing the rows of empty chairs.

“Everyone, may I have your attention please,” Francesca announced as the noise of the excited guests died down. “Thank you. I am sure we are all enjoying the food, wine and company provided by Madame Cynthia Petrakis on the eve of a monumental undertaking. She thanks you all for attending and hopes she can count on you for continued support. So without further delay, let us gather in the conference hall. Please, feel free to take you food and drinks with you.”

Security guards began to usher everyone into the conference hall where rows of plush red leather chairs were waiting for its guests. A few guards escorted Samantha, Raphael and Estelle into

the hall to allow them to setup their camera and microphone. Another guard escorted Jerimiah to the front row center aisle chair, where he had an excellent view of the stage and speaker. Behind the stage was a large display wall and slowly the images were becoming visible on it. The lights began to dim a bit as the projection wall brightened. The overhead projector displayed a series of images of the old Metropolitan Museum of Art in the days before its closure. To the left of the stage, he saw Madame Petrakis sitting quietly as Francesca walked up on the stage and took her place at the podium.

“Good evening again. And welcome to the Reopening Gala of the Metropolitan Museum of Art.” Everyone applauded and Francesca waited until they quieted. “I want to introduce our guest speaker for the evening but she has asked me to say a few words first. As many of you know, one of the worst tragedies to happen to this city is the closure of this fine museum. We allowed history and culture to fall prey to politics and corruption. If these occurrences were to continue, more museums here and around the country will follow the same fate.”

Images on the display wall showed the final days of the museum closing and the police taping the front doors. Days after, work crews hired by the city boarded up all of the windows as if the museum was an abandoned apartment building. Some of the guests whispered to each other in awe and shock.

“Tonight, Madame Cynthia Petrakis will speak to you about the future of this museum and how we all fit into this plan.” She turned and held her hand out to Madame Petrakis as she rose from her chair and approached the podium, “Ladies and gentlemen, Madame Cynthia Petrakis of Greece.”

Applause filled the hall as everyone stood on their feet and gave Madame Petrakis a great ovation. With a smile she took her position and waved for everyone to be seated.

“Now be honest, you are applauding the wonderful catering and the great work of those in security detail and restoration teams. Correct?” The people clapped in acknowledgement, “There are many people involved with this night and the days ahead for the future of this museum. Their work should be acknowledged and recognized.”

The audience murmured and some clapped. Madame Petrakis stood straighter and allowed the images on the screen behind her to sync as she began her speech.

“Throughout human existence, even from the most ancient cave paintings, we have documented and recorded our history. When I say our history, I simply mean human history; not just his story or her story. Unfortunately time and disasters have wiped away many different documentations or adaptations of thoughts and feelings of the human condition. But modern-day archaeologists, such as Jerimiah Clarke and many others from the Archaeological Association,” she gestured to him with the raised hand. “They have worked tirelessly to preserve these works of art. Not just for the private consumption but the education of all mankind or I should say humankind. It is not always a man with a pen and paper to create an idea. Women have been part of his history as well. In many cases women have inspired men to paint and express themselves.” She paused for a moment as images behind her transitioned from the simple cave paintings, to classics like the Mona Lisa and the Sistine Chapel and to other well-known to works of art.

“The purpose for tonight’s ceremony is to announce the new foundation that will ensure the protection and inspiration of art in all its forms. The Noble Petrakis Foundation is launching a global effort to preserve, life, history and human expression.” The screen behind the speaker dissolved into a logo of the foundation, a simple line art tree with twelve branches, inside of a twelve sided polygon with the words, “The Noble Petrakis Foundation: Nobly preserving the human condition.”

As the logo appeared on the display, members from the museum staff walked along the inner and outer aisles handing out eight by ten, full color publications detailing the mission of the foundation. Many people took them and quickly flipped through the pages with interest. An usher handed several publications to the Channel 6 crew. “These really look like coffee table pieces,” Raphael remarked.

“Say what you will, Cynthia Petrakis is serious about her foundation. And we are covering it!” Samantha whispered in excitement. Estelle placed her hand on her anchor’s shoulder and calmed her.

“Please don’t get us kicked out here. I still want to go back to the buffet table and sample more food.” Estelle adjusted her glasses and then asked, “Do you think they will let us doggy bag any of the food?”

Samantha shook her head in amusement. She looked at the front row at Jerimiah who was busy looking through the information Cynthia Petrakis distributed. His fingers flew across the tablet screen in avid joy.

“I only wish he would use those fingers on me tonight with the same passion,” thought Samantha.

After several minutes of allowing her audience to flip through the publication, Cynthia Petrakis continued her speech. Behind her, the screens reflected the same vibrant images as those printed.

“My foundation is called noble because its sole mission is to support endeavors that will protect true human expression; whether it is art, music, education, research to name a few. My family has privately supported such causes for decades, but I feel it is time to come into the light and make known our calls for support.” She paused and allowed her eyes to sweep over the gathered supporters. “Tonight is not a simple call to open your wallets. It is a call to open your eyes, minds, hearts and think: What is

important to me? How can I serve humanity, locally or abroad? In these times of declining values and collapsing governments, can we afford our history to fade away forever? What are we leaving for our future generations; is it not the proper to prevent the mistakes we have made?"

The final image showed a collection of young children of various cultures and races walk through a museum showing artwork from around the world. The audience responded to the final images with slight applause and speaking softly amongst themselves.

"I thank you for your attention and I will now open the floor for questions." Cynthia shoulders seemed to relax a bit as the tension of the speech was over and the people began to clap for the efforts of Madame Cynthia Petrakis and the Noble Petrakis Foundation. Ushers walked around the room with wireless microphones looking for individuals with questions.

The first came from a platinum blond woman in a striking red dress that was more revealing than imaginative. "Madame Petrakis," she spoke with a European accent. "I see in your magazine and in your slides, images of public defacement which many of you would call graffiti. Are you advocating the preservation of such work and support the defacement of public property?" She had a sneer to her last comment and even drew a few whispers of repose.

Cynthia looked her straight in the eye. "I do not, nor ever will, advocate the destruction of public or private property. I added these images because the minds that created those images had a message reflecting their emotional state, their community or simply expressing their talent. It is the history of the young people, of any era, that must be recognized. Whether or not it may be too urban for some."

The woman sat down embarrassed. She was an heiress of some rich family in Europe and had the perception of art being only

valuable to the selected wealthy of the world. Cynthia purposely shamed her in front of her peers of potential supporters. Again applause rang out and Cynthia scanned the audience when she saw an eager hand shoot up from the side. It was the hand of Channel 6 reporter Samantha Reid. She smiled and acknowledged her. “Miss Reid of Channel 6 News. I want to say thank you to you and your team for covering our event.”

Jerimiah clapped the loudest and again the hall was filled with applause. An usher handed Samantha a wireless microphone and she approached the stage for everyone to get a better view of her and for camera angles for the shoot.

“Thank you Madame Petrakis for having us here. I have two questions if I may.” She paused as Madame Petrakis nodded her head. “I have noticed there are no members of the political arena, city, state or Federal attending tonight’s gala. Was this by design? And two, your foundation will have international impact, how will you deal with the different governments, many of them going through their own political strife?”

Cynthia knew she made the right decision in bring Samantha Reid to the Reopening Gala. For someone to work on the local level, she had the intelligence for a national news network. “Mental note, consider Miss Reid for opportunities in the near future,” she thought to herself.

The voice responded unexpectedly. “Will do!” She was startled at the response since the voice been so quiet during the presentation but decided to turn her attention back to Miss Reid’s questions.

“I purposely did not invite any politicians to this event because many of them would sacrifice creative expression for whatever reason they deem fit. In so doing, they have caused the problems in society to boil and explode. If they are balancing a budget, what is the first to go? Art, music, and other creative activities. This impacts first the children and then all people of various ages.

“The closure of this museum is the proof of that. I will rely solely on the people to keep this museum and make the foundation a permanent fixture in their communities around the world. As for the different governments around the world,” she drew in a breath and let it out slowly. “I will appeal the United Nations in their efforts of securing and protecting art in all forms from areas that suppress human initiative to create freely and to express themselves. Too often I have seen many works burned, destroyed or hoarded in private collections through criminal means.”

Silence gripped the hall as Cynthia gripped the edges of the podium. “Look at the foundation as an artistic amnesty for those objects or persons wishing to explore their abilities. It is no different from parents displaying their children’s artwork on their office walls with pride. But with a degree of higher stakes.”

“So will you exclude dealing with politics all together?” Samantha asked.

“With politics, I and my foundation will not have any part. But to deal with government agencies on humanitarian efforts, that will be the open path I will take,” she answered honestly and fully. It seemed to answer the question to Samantha’s satisfaction as she passed the microphone back to the usher.

“Madame Petrakis?” Jerimiah raised his hand to be acknowledged.

“Professor Clarke, your question for the evening.”

“Do you have limitations on grants for archaeological and exploratory research?” he asked with a grin.

Cynthia face became serious. “Yes. The Foundation will grant scholarships, grants, and other resources for projects as you described. We even will entertain environmental studies. By the way,” she held up the foundation publication. “This was printed on

recycled paper, environmentally friendly toner and energy saving machines. I should thank the representatives of AM Exclusive Business Machines for doing so.”

Admiration was heard throughout the audience as they examined the publications more closely. “There are legal obligations for applying for grants but to not bore you with the details. Simply put, the foundation must have a detailed plan of action, what the result of the project is to be and the time for completion of the project. The funds from the foundation cannot be used for profit generating activities, legal or illegal, and will not be given out without background checks. You must understand the errors of other charities and foundations were zero accountability. The Noble Petrakis Foundation requires one hundred percent accountability. Otherwise the true meaning is lost.”

She looked at Jerimiah Clarke. “So Professor Clarke, no requests for discovering Atlantis, it was found already and the people inhabiting there hung a do not disturb sign on the front gate.” The hall erupted in laughter as Jerimiah smiled and took his seat.

“I will take two more questions and then I want to conclude tonight’s ceremonies with a brief tour of the Metropolitan.” She scanned the crowd and found a middle aged white man with balding hair and gold rimmed glasses.

“Madame, I was looking at the donation section of your brochure and wanted to ask about the donations. Does the foundation accept monetary donations only?”

“The Foundation,” Cynthia started. “Accepts all forms of donations. Money, artwork, materials and even time. If you want to assist the Foundation or any of its subsidiary projects, we will be happy to accept. There is no limit; anyone can donate anything anywhere, hence the website: www.NPFoundation.org. The foundation will not share your information with any other organization and what you give can either be a one-time donation

or annually. And yes, each donation, no matter in what form, is tax-deductible!" The tax-deductible comment drew cheers from more of the wealthy guests, hard looks toward them from others.

"One last question and then we shall have a light dinner and then the tour."

"Excuse me, Miss Petrakis." A young white male with long dark hair, a rock star sensation, raised his hand and taking the microphone a tad forcefully. "You talked about more of the physical art than you have non-physical work. By that I mean music. What are you doing about preserving music? Will there be a showcase for all forms of music?"

"A new building has been erected for music history. It is an archive and amphitheater for groups of people to enjoy musical selections of all genres that are featured for the exhibit or to select any the group one wishes to hear. Do most of you here remember music stores in which you can listen to music selections before purchasing the album?" Most of the audience shook their heads with an affirmative nod. "Listening kiosks have been setup within the amphitheater so a patron can browse any music genre they wish. Also, the can plug their own headphones in and browse to their hearts content." She looked at the young man, recognizing him. "And Mr. Heavy Fusion, I loved your last album. With your permission I would like to add it to the museum collection."

"Righteous!" He yelled as he sat down all smiles.

She smiled and held up her hand. "And now ladies and gentleman, if would like to—"

"Madame Petrakis, I would like to ask what treasures from your Greek collection you will be donating to the museum." The inquiry came from an old man in the back of the hall. He was tall with a long graying beard, piercing blue eyes. The man wore a simple long sleeved shirt with slacks of the same color of white. Something about the gentleman rubbed Cynthia the wrong way,

something about his eyes. She was more annoyed with the interruption than with the question. The abrupt question drew a few stares from people closest to him. Then Cynthia remembered who the individual was, someone who helped with the restoration of the artwork in the museum. Still she answered with obvious annoyance.

“Mr. Abraham Cromwell ladies and gentlemen. He and his group of workmen from Cromwell Restorations worked tirelessly to restore the countless art pieces in the museum to get them ready for exhibit.” People clapped at his contribution and then Cynthia went on. “The collection I have donated will be on display in the Ancient Greek Corridors. It is an assortment of weapons, literature and artifacts from multiple ages. Many are from my personal collection and heirlooms handed down in my family for generations.”

She paused and composed herself. “This is what I am referring to in donating to the foundation and its overall cause. It will be labelled the Petrakis collection. One of many I have premiered around the country and the world in well-established museums.”

Noticing she was now damaging the podium by gripping on the sides to hard, she stepped from behind in and stood in front of the screen with the logo of the Foundation. The old man smiled and returned to his seat in obvious delighted at the news.

“Now if there are no further questions, I thank you all for coming. In the Gathering Hall we have set out small tables and chairs for a light dinner. This will give us all a chance to enjoy each other’s company and twenty minutes later, your exclusive tour will begin.” She bowed as everyone stood in an ovation cheering her. She slowly descended the stairs and shook everyone’s hand and led them slowly into the Gathering Hall.

Samantha grabbed the microphone from Estelle and stepped in front of her camera. “This is Samantha Reid. You at home have just seen the exclusive of the evening. Not only the reopening of

Metropolitan Museum of Art, but the announcement of the creation of the Noble Petrakis Foundation that will protect artwork from artists around the world. We will now take the private tour of the new exhibits and some old ones from the past, but we are not allowed to bring the cameras on this tour for tonight. However, we are assured we can take the public tour tomorrow with all of you who are eagerly awaiting return the Metropolitan. We will be signing off here from the museum. If there are any new developments, we will bring it to you. This is Samantha Reid, Channel 6 News, from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Good night.”

After counting down, Raphael shut down the camera. “This is great! Never thought we would get so much this evening. Estelle, how did they like it back in the studio?”

Estelle was on the phone with the producers in the station and they were giving her good news. “Excellent, everyone loved the shoot and the producers of the channel did not mind preempting our schedule tonight because we got the highest viewer rating!” Estelle’s smile and enthusiasm could not be contained.

Even Raphael sported a large smile but not for the footage shot for the evening. Pleasant smells of the dinner course offered in the Gathering Hall made Raphael smile and drool again. “I must see a doctor after tonight. I think I am overstimulated!”

Samantha and Estelle laughed at Raphael as he wiped his lips. With the equipment locked away and secured in a security office, the three from Channel 6 stood facing each other, happier than in weeks of reporting together. “So, back to the buffet tables for round two?” Samantha asked as she had a renewed appetite but soon spied Jerimiah speaking to several people after Madame Petrakis left the hall. “On second thought, I will catch up with you guys when we start the tour.”

Samantha weaved her way through the crowd toward her boyfriend leaving Raphael and Estelle to head for the food. Soon

after, she reached Jerimiah as he concluded his conversation with a few philanthropists gathered around him.

“Did you get any money from them? A few million to work in northern Europe on an excavation?” Samantha said with a smile as she held Jerimiah’s hands.

“A promise to consider my proposals and a call,” he said as he leaned in and kissed Samantha lightly on the lips. “They were in awe of Madame Petrakis, as I am. She is such an incredible woman, but there is something more to her I cannot put my finger on.”

“You mean that she is rich, obviously single and gorgeous?” said in a sly tone from Samantha.

“Really? I have not noticed that she is rich.” Jerimiah enjoyed fencing with Samantha even though one wrong word and it would lead to the deadly silent treatment. The last time it was issued, Jerimiah had not heard from Samantha for three weeks, it drove him crazy but it was part of the relationship. He knew deep down he will have to start taking a more serious role in their relationship. All in time, he said to himself.

“Come on, let’s get some food and then enjoy the tour. If you are not busy tonight, I can come by your place.”

Samantha hugged Jerimiah. “That sounds great. I think I will head to the station and then home. You still got the keys right?”

“Yes, yes I do.”

“Good.” The two of them walked hand in hand to the buffet tables past the small circular tables that looked like well styled patio furniture, to join the rest of the crowd, now energized by tonight’s speech. This was a spectacular evening, the two of them thought.

The guests were now occupying the tables and having a social gathering of the elite. Cynthia walked among them to look for the old man that rattled her during the questions. He found her and slowly approached. A waiter walked to Madame Petrakis and Abraham Cromwell with a tray of wine in well-crafted crystal glasses, where they both took one glass. “Mr. Cromwell, you and staff did an excellent job on the exhibits. My compliments.”

Abraham Cromwell smiled. “Thank you Madame Petrakis. I apologize for the abrupt question this evening. I found it an honor to work on such works of art. It was a great thrill and pleasure. The pieces from your private collection interest me. It has been many years since I have seen artifacts like those in your possession. I would like to know how they came into your family’s ownership.” the old man asked, with a flattering tone. His voice was not so deep but sounded as if he spoke in a purposeful low tone. Obviously not moved by his charm, Cynthia scrutinized the old man.

“I take it you were looking at the pieces not yet on display from my private collection?” Cynthia folded her arms.

“Please don’t be upset. I peeked and was impressed. In working in different arts centers, here and there, I have seen items from your collection on display. Quite impressive.” he stated as he took a sip of wine.

Cynthia ran through her guest list in her mind remembering, in more detail, the individual speaking to her. Abraham Cromwell of Cromwell Restorations, Incorporated came recommended by many art critics and collectors. In what appeared to be record time, he and his six person crew tended to the many of the paintings in storage and still mounted on the museum walls. Hundreds of paintings were restored to near original beauty and reframed where it was necessary. It could be reasoned that while he and his staff were in the Metropolitan, Cromwell had his own tour of all of the collections, including the ones from Cynthia’s collection.

“Something about him is not sitting right with us,” the voice warned deep inside the mind of Cynthia. She agreed with the voice. Something about his eyes, familiar and unwelcoming. Granted he did an excellent job at this museum, but something about him was very disquieting. Distance was the best she could do for now without losing her composure.

“I appreciate your curiosity Mr. Cromwell,” Cynthia started to say. “As for the tales of where and how got them, I believe I will let the mystery linger for now. All you need to know that the items were obtained without harmful means or through subterfuge.” Cynthia drained her glass in one gulp.

Abraham bowed his head in acknowledgement. He knew his inquiries obviously unnerved the hostess of the evening. As to not draw any more attention to his motives he changed his posture. “Working for you, indirectly as it may be, has afforded me a look into many different works. I would like to continue to work with you in your efforts for the foundation.” He went into his pocket and withdrew a business card, shaped like an oversized paint brush, and presented it to Madame Petrakis. “Please call on my firm to be of service to you in any way.”

Skeptically, she took card, observed it and placed it in her mini purse. “Mr. Cromwell, I will make sure you will have an opportunity to work on more beautiful works of art if you can restore them to their original splendor.”

“Well, I have always had an appreciation for the beautiful things in life.” He smiled at Cynthia and stepped a bit closer.

Removing herself from his immediate personal space, Cynthia gestured to the tables of food. “Please, enjoy the food.” She smiled awkwardly and left his presence. He stood there for a moment and stared after her and inside he knew he would be seeing her again. Looking at the buffet tables, Abraham walked toward them to see the new foods on display.

Cromwell gazed after her for moment and whispered to himself, “Time has not dulled your beauty. We will meet again and soon.”

* * *

Once Cynthia was out of his vision, she immersed herself into the crowd, politely responding to the guests, shaking hands, enjoying the complements and genuinely enjoying the evening. After the brief encounter with Abraham Cromwell, she began to relax. The voice had a few comments on the meeting.

“You were definitely tense during the short talk with him. First, he is putting off some really odd vibes. I think you should stay away from him. Second, I think we need to send some security guards to patrol the museum in case he has something to do with the robberies Jerimiah Clarke mentioned earlier. And three, we should eat some of this fine food.”

Cynthia had to admit, the voice was right. She was tense and noted the tightness in her shoulders. Cromwell was an interesting character but in some deep emotional ways, something about him made Cynthia anxious. The robberies from the other museums were also on her mind. Could it happen tonight? Unlikely, because all of the security measures she employed that would make any attempt impossible. Perhaps they will make an attempt after the Gala. Her instincts told her to do something or the very least, prepare for any unexpected eventuality. Cynthia’s mind was awash with so many different thoughts and by the reactions from her guests, the night was a complete success. Maybe she should relax a little.

Looking through the crowd she spotted Jerimiah with Samantha. She signaled for two museum guards to accompany her as they made their way through the crowd and found the couple in what appeared to be a personal conversation.

“Miss Reid, forgive me. May I borrow Mr. Clarke for a little while?” Samantha looked at Jerimiah and the two the guards at Cynthia’s sides.

“Is there something wrong?” she asked.

“No, I just need Jerimiah’s assistance with something he told me about earlier. I shall return him to you soon.”

Samantha looked at Jerimiah with a smile. “Go. And do not get into any trouble!”

“You know me,” Jerimiah replied.

“That is why I said what I said.”

Walking away from the crowd of guests and deeper into the unoccupied museum, Cynthia, Jerimiah and the two guards stood in an empty corridor between the Asian and European artwork.

“I would like for you to take Mr. Clarke on a counter clockwise tour of the museum. I have reason to believe someone may be attempting a theft tonight. Based on the information you presented me, Mr. Clarke, it looks like the theft may be in ancient antiquities. Please allow Mr. Clarke to take pictures, notes and investigate anything he needs to ascertain if there could be a potential threat.”

Both guards looked at each other and then back at their boss. They wanted to ask a few questions, but her posture said enough for them to understand and do what she told them to do. “Yes ma’am!” answered the older of the two guards.

“If I find anything, I will text you right away,” Jerimiah said and without further word, all three men set off into the exhibit halls the other guest would be touring through in less than ten minutes.

Once out of normal eye sight, Cynthia returned to her guests and headed for the buffet tables. “So, do you think Jerimiah will find anything?” the voice asked.

“I hope so, if not than all this worrying would be for nothing,” she said internally as she pointed to the trays of food the caterers were serving from.

“You know the higher you go in society, there will be people trying to bring you down...as we saw from the past.”

“True, but who will dare cross us knowing they may face a power unlike any they will ever experience.”

“Let’s hope no one tonight will have to find that out.”

As her plate was full of salad and other dishes, Cynthia traveled to the table where the Channel 6 news team sat and they had the pleasure of sitting with the host of night. As they talked and laughed, Cynthia ate her food and thought so far, the night has been uneventful.

CHAPTER 2

Party Crashers

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, October 15, 2012, 8:50PM

On the corner of Fifth Avenue and 82ND Street, a tall light skinned African woman with long, micro-braided hair sat in an old, two-door black corvette, looking at the museum in her rear view mirror. She was careful to park far enough away from the traffic and police presence to have a clear sighting of the crowds and of the situation she oversaw. An hour ago she saw the limousine delivering Madame Petrakis to the front steps and several minutes later the escorted broadcast team Channel 6 into the museum. She also escorted another man into the museum, who the woman knew from the live broadcasts. A smile came across her full lips as she knew all the pieces were in place. The announcement about the foundation was concluded with applause, light dinner and then a tour of the newly refurbished Metropolitan. Thus far, her inside man was in position at the party, the thieves in gathered among the patrons outside and the museum guard she paid off was awaiting orders from her. A buzzing from her smartphone prompted her immediate attention. After disabling her security lock, she read an incoming text message:

Sender: All is ready, now is the time to go.

The woman pressed a button on her phone to allow her speech to become text.

“Have you confirmed that Petrakis has her collection on exhibit?” She pressed send.

Thirty seconds later she got a reply:

Sender: Yes. Have your people focus on the artifacts I specified and the evening will be complete.

Her reply, “Will do.” As she put down her phone, a uniformed officer stepped to her window and tapped on the driver-side window, indicating for her to roll it down.

“Miss, you can’t be parked here. You will have to move your vehicle,” the officer ordered.

Slowly, she reached into her bag on the opposite seat and presented the officer with a wallet without saying a word. The young officer took the wallet and opened it. His posture changed immediately. “I am sorry Captain Williams. I didn’t know you were one of us.”

The woman, identified as Captain Janet Williams of the New York Police Department, took back her wallet without turning to the young officer, who was now standing at attention. “How is the event going? No incidents, to report Officer Ramirez?” she asked noting his name badge on his jacket uniform.

“No ma’am! We have traffic moving smoothly as you can see behind you and people outside here are behaving. Most of the news vans left and I imagine when the party is over in the museum, we will direct the guests out from the car port into traffic—”

“That is good officer, thank you.” She held up a hand to silence him. She opened the car door and stepped out. This woman easily towered over the uniformed officer as he was looking up into the face. She stood six feet, two inches tall and her long micro braids pulled into a pony tail. Even in the flat boots she was wearing, she was imposing and somewhat intimidating. Officer Ramirez only stood five foot, eight inches. Her black short light trench coat was pulled snugly around her curvaceous frame. Noticing she was

under intense observation, she brought the officer's attention back to the museum.

"Who is the detective in charge of this detail?" Captain Williams asked, motioning with her well-manicured hands.

"Detective Lieutenant Dylan Brenson from the Robbery Division, 19TH Precinct. He is working with the Central Park and 20TH Precincts for this security detail for the Metropolitan."

Satisfied with the information the officer has given she looked into his eyes with hers opened wide. He stared blankly into large white orbs that were the woman's eyes and lost his train of thought. Captain Williams placed Officer Ramirez into a brief hypnotic trance and spoke softly. "Officer Ramirez, you will remember nothing of me or of this conversation. You asked the occupant of the vehicle to move on and she did. When the car drives away, you will go back to your fellow officers and continue with your duties for this event."

"Yes ma'am," answered the bewildered officer. Satisfied that her suggestion took hold, Captain Williams scanned the crowd outside the museum and saw four individuals that caught her attention. She recognized them and was satisfied they were waiting for their opportunity to move in when she gave the word to do so. Her eyes immediately returned to their normal light brown eye color and she let out a short exhale. Officer Ramirez turned slowly back to the captain as she entered her corvette. The tall woman buckled her seat belt and turned over the car.

"Yes officer, I will move immediately. Have a good night." She put the car in gear and drove off down East 82ND street.

Officer Ramirez stood in the street for a few seconds before coming out of his trance. He blinked a few times as if he was distracted or waking up from a dream. He remembered he was speaking to a woman and then she moved her car. Thinking nothing more about it, Officer Ramirez walked back to the

museum and to the police command truck parked down the block from the front of the Metropolitan.

* * *

Detective Dylan Brenson stood in his beige overcoat inside of the Police Command Truck listening to the officers in charge of the scene at the museum report on the situation. After hearing from the last sergeant, he spoke to the officers. “Gentlemen, it seems whatever situations we were expecting won’t manifest this evening. The crowd has been quiet, the guests are not as unruly as we thought and we don’t have to worry about any other problems, just the guests leaving from the museum. It looks like we will be done by 11:00PM the latest.”

The officers clapped and cheered. Although many of them were happy to see the museum open on a personal level, crowd control duty was the least favorite in a police officer’s career. Still, this particular assignment no one minded, especially in anticipation of what was coming.

“Now guys,” the detective started with his hands raised to quiet the group. “Madame Petrakis has thanked us for our help in keeping the outside security and traffic manageable. No doubt she has made several sizable donations to charities here in New York City, but she took it a step further. She is going to feed us as well.”

Everyone was silent for a moment considering regulations and policies of the police department, not to mention the ethics involved. Then, as if everyone was connected telepathically, everyone smiled and shared an elated sense of joy. From a side entrance of the museum, six caterers walked out toward the main Police Command Truck carrying two large white bags in each hand. The lead caterer, a young man with blonde hair, used one free hand and knocked on the outer door. An officer opened the door and received the bags and passed them to another officer inside. The caterers then walked quickly back inside, presumably to finish with the dinner and then start to wind down for the

evening.

The smell of food quickly filled the police command center and everyone's mouth was watering with anticipation. All of the food was unpacked and set on a small table. Detective Brenson was about to start passing out the food and make arrangements for all of the officers to eat in rotating shifts, when another detective working under Brenson pointed out an obvious flaw in the plan.

“Officers, you are all in possible violation of ethics and procedures. Accepting and eating this food will warrant reprimands and possible suspensions.” Detective Gabriel Holmes came from a long line of dedicated police officers for over sixty years, all working for the NYPD. No officer in the Holmes line ever wavered from their sense of duty and could not stand corruption in any other officer they served with. Detective Holmes was respected and generally well liked. In this instance, everyone wished he would look the other way.

“Detective Holmes, in this scenario, acceptance of food is not a violation of ethics or procedures, merely maintaining the human condition,” answered Detective Brenson.

“I can't see how this is maintaining the human condition unless you are counting bribery and accepting gifts—”

“No!” Detective Brenson took his partner into the back area of the command space to speak privately. “Look at it this way. Are we not human beings on planet Earth? Do we not need food to live? Well Madame Petrakis is looking after the well-being of the human beings that are looking after her museum. So relax!”

The young detective thought about it for a moment and realized on that line of thought he was correct. But how he would allow this was beyond him. “I don't think I can take part of this, maybe I should go outside and watch the crowds or direct traffic.”

“Nonsense, we all worked hard and deserve dinner. If officers

are not focused or are concerned at finding something to eat, it makes for problems. If we all eat together, we can still maintain our perimeter and not have to worry where is officer so-and-so to report back to their posts. Besides,” Detective Brenson held out his hand and an officer placed an aluminum container in his hand. He smiled and handed the container to his partner. “I made sure they had a vegetarian dinner for you.”

He took off the plastic cover to reveal a spinach vegetable wrap with Italian dressing in small plastic cups. The young detective inhaled the aroma of the sandwich wrap and a small smile crossed his lips. “You planned this, didn’t you?”

Detective Brenson smiled. “You know I am good with details and I know my partner. Just don’t let this bother your conscience much.”

Between the vegetable wrap he was holding and the honor of his family, Detective Holmes wondered what to do. Part of him felt as if he was being manipulated but he knew his partner was right. He started to eat the wrap and was surprised it was so good. All the vegetables had the taste and texture of just being freshly picked from a garden. He admired it and his stomach thanked him. Swallowing a mouthful of vegetables he looked at Detective Brenson. “I hate it when you are right. I guess we can accept this humanitarian aid as a gesture for the officers who worked so hard this evening.”

“Glad to hear it, eat up, I will go and coordinate the dinner schedule,” Detective Brenson left Detective Holmes to eat his dinner in peace as he returned to the small table where the food sat and began to work out a schedule for the officers to go on dinner break. Knowing the number of officers still on duty and the general time for the event to be over, Detective Brenson ordered all officers a half hour break but staggered them in fifteen minute intervals. No officer would be permitted to leave the site and had to check in for dinner. Many were permitted to sit in the patrol cars or the command center to eat in some form of privacy. He also

knew that if any situations were to rear its ugly head, all officers will be ready to respond with the dignity and training they have all come to know.

“I hope that will not be the case tonight,” Detective Brenson said to himself.

* * *

As the evening wore on, many of the spectators gathered outside went home after spending most of the evening getting pictures of their favorite celebrities but also waiting for the off chance of mingling inside the Metropolitan. Rumors started to circulate through the crowd that the gracious hostess Madame Petrakis will allow some of the patrons into the museum. It was highly unlikely due to the presence of so many private security guards watching the Metropolitan inside and out. They made their patrols around the museum but most were focused on the front door, seeing that no uninvited guests would attempt to breach the security.

One of the various patrols, a three-person team, came to the front door to check on the status of the guard duty. The guards were easily identifiable: all wore dark blue jackets, black pants, gray shirts and white ties. Although they would be on-duty security for the museum, they were detached from the private security firm Madame Petrakis owned. She funded their additional training to work at the Metropolitan. Employing people from all over the world from the local areas, they were the best trained individuals money can buy. Nothing would spoil the event inside the museum and no one outside would be able to bypass these guards for any reason. Museum guards escorted the caterers back in to the side entrance of the Metropolitan, as patrols outside continued to monitor grounds and crowds of people.

This behavior was under the notice of four men who blended into the crowd waiting for their opportunity to enter the Metropolitan. A tall, Greek, bald man noticed the security and

made mental notes of their actions, his watchful green eyes catching every detail of the patrols. “Damn. Patrols are too tight for us to find an alternate route in. I would not try it even if we are getting paid good money.” The bald man, who called himself Demetrius Stone, rubbed his smooth head as he leaned closer to the leader of the group.

“I told you not to worry,” Marco Ortega from Spain said with ease as he looked at his tablet, scrolling through data for the upcoming operation. He scratched his goatee as he puzzled over the items on his list to procure. “Once we get the signal, we walk in, make our pickup, change and walk out with no problems.”

He looked at Demetrius with a grin. “This is the easiest job we have ever taken. So easy in fact we should have done this for free. But I am glad the money will change my mind about it.”

A young Chinese man in his twenties leaned in on a conversation he was not originally a part of. “One or two of us should be carrying just in case we need to make an impromptu escape. I don’t like going into a situation without some protection or insurance, if you get my drift.” Samsone Zee was the only one who felt this way in the means of establishing a more violent solution to the job they were on.

“How many times do I and the rest of us need to keep telling you? We are not killers. We will use guns if the situation calls for it. And here in the states if you are caught with firearms while on a robbery,” Marco said lowering his voice as he looked around. No one was paying his group any attention and he then continued. “Look kid, so far you have been on a couple of jobs with us, made some good money and nothing happened. We enjoy our money and freedom, our employer enjoys our plunder. Ours is a good outfit to be in and we don’t have anyone looking for us in terms of police. So if you are so anxious to use guns and to shoot it out with the police, there are tons of gangs for that type of stuff.”

Samsone met the hard gaze from Marco for a few seconds and

then backed down. If it were not for his ability for lock picking and computer hacking, Marco would not mind seeing this young hot head in police custody or better yet, at the bottom of a ravine somewhere isolated. His time may come, but until then, he could keep his place which would be quiet and out of the way.

The fourth man of the group, Robert Frankz, a German man experienced in concealment and extraction of guarded items, kept a casual focus on the main doors and the guard who will allow them access to their objective. His blue eyes made visual contact several times and each time she shook her head.

“We still have no word from Lian,” Robert said with a slight German accent. “Do you think the job may be canceled?”

Marco put away his tablet. “I hope not. This is the opportune time to get the items for our employer. Waiting for a later opportunity will put our job at risk. This is it. We just have to wait.”

Robert nodded his head and went back to observing the security guard as she spoke to additional museum guards who approached. Several feet from the main door, he could hear what was being discussed; he discerned that it was their normal operations for the security detail for the night’s gala. He casually monitored but drew not attention to himself or to his group as they waited for her signal.

* * *

“Everything calm here Lian?” asked the outside security patrolman as he approached the Chinese security woman. Her thick black hair was pulled into a short ponytail save for a few locks that caressed her face. Among the staff, no one could ever guess her age. Many thought she was barely eighteen; a few mean spirited comments drew an age closer to retirement and she only darkened her hair. Despite all the observations, Lian Zhou Zhu was only twenty-five years of age and had accomplished much since

working for the Petrakis security firm. She made the status of lieutenant in charge of operations, which meant she was close to command structure of the firm as well had chance encounters with the owner and operator, Madame Cynthia Petrakis. She enjoyed the privilege of being in charge and trusted for this detail in the museum. Lian was indeed proud of her status and even more so, proud that no watchful eyes would be pointed in her direction.

“All is well out here,” she spoke with clear a New York accent. “Several people pleaded with me for information or to even let them in for a few minutes but I turned them down.”

The security patrolman, Shawn Greene, asked, “So how much were they offering?”

“Peanuts and pitons. I told a few of them to go the nearest ATM and make a large withdrawal and then I would seriously consider it.” The six guards laughed quietly. All of them admired the young woman as she was known to be above reproach. Other security details would have let a few people sneak in. Patrolman Greene looked at the two guards with him and signaled with his hand to move out and continued their patrol. The other guards with Lian moved back to their posts and continued their watch over the slowly thinning crowd. The eyes of the German man caught her attention. For a few seconds they locked stares and then with a negative nod, Lian indicated the time was not right and they would still have to wait. Robert nodded and turned back to his comrades as they wait for the signal from their accomplice.

* * *

Three blocks away, the tall black woman calling herself Williams maneuvered her corvette into a semi-deserted side street and turned off her car. She pulled out her phone and was about to send a message to her internal contact at the museum gala when the phone buzzed in her hand. She looked at the caller identification and her eyes widened.

“I thought you would still be in your isolation chamber recuperating or better still preparing for your great mission,” she answered the caller.

With a tired raspy female voice, the caller spoke to her comment. “I would have been meditating and even sleeping until I had this notion you have used your powers. I remember forbidding you from doing so without my permission or if it is important to do so.”

“It was. I didn’t want my cover to be remembered or connected with our little enterprise,” she explained. “Besides, I wanted to test my powers of persuasion in the real world, not on some test subjects we find at random.”

A silence fell over them for a short while and then the voice spoke again. “I do not want anything to jeopardize this venture, my dear Ja’Meela. We are close to implementing the next phase of my plan. I will tolerate no failure if we can secure the museum pieces this Petrakis woman has on display.”

“I have been in touch with Cromwell and when he confirms the items, I will instruct our agents to move. Before the end of the night I will have in my possession the items you require.”

“I don’t doubt it my dear Ja’Meela. Proceed and we will speak soon.” The caller ended the conversation and left the woman, who identified herself as Captain Williams also, was known as Ja’Meela, to sit in silence. She is the majordomo to a very powerful woman who uses her vast wealth to achieve any goal, any items with any persons who are valuable enough to achieve them, but easy enough to dispose of. In Ja’Meela’s case, she is a great asset to her employer but also knows failure will make her expendable. In all of the years she has served her, Ja’Meela and failure rarely met face to face. This was on her mind as she sent a text to Abraham Cromwell. Cleverly planted into the museum by being a restorer of art, he was able to easily identify the artifacts for Ja’Meela’s mistress. All that was needed was a text or phone

call from the art restorer so they could get this job over and done with. Ja'Meela drove her corvette several blocks away to a pre-designated drop off point where, if all went well, her men would do the job and this night would be put behind them so she and her mistress could get on with the other plans. Monumental, as Ja'Meela thought to herself.

The information Ja'Meela waited for came via instant message texts:

Cromwell: Our tour has started and the Cynthia Petrakis is keeping a watchful eye over her guests, along with her security guards.

Ja'Meela: Are the guards well dispersed for our entrance?

Cromwell: Yes. Two guards escorted an archaeologist on a private tour, a number of them on tour with Petrakis and the rest are on patrol outside of the museum.

Ja'Meela: Have you identified the objects we have requested?

Cromwell: Yes, we have left the Greek exhibit and all of the items are here. You can contact your men and have them enter the museum. We are now in the central wing of the museum on the third floor. The Greek exhibit is on the second floor, east wing.

Ja'Meela: Well done. I will contact them immediately. Your transaction is now concluded.

A broad smile came across Ja'Meela's face as she sent the text to Security Guard Lian Zhou Zhu to play her role in this caper.

Front Main Entrance of the Metropolitan Museum, New York City, October 15, 2012, 9:30PM

Lian felt a buzzing in her pocket and she picked up her

company issued smart device and read the message displayed on the screen. It read one word, “Commence.” In anticipation of what was about to happen and feeling uneasy, Lian thought about her compensation and what she will be able to do with it. She settled into her new role and turned to the two guards with her.

“Gentleman, please unlock the doors. I just received word Madame Petrakis will allow the people gathered here into the museum for a sneak preview tour.”

The guard named Harris Browne looked at her in question. “What? That is nonsense! In the briefing this morning nobody said anything about letting people in off the street. It will ruin all of the preparations and not to mention put additional stress on our security procedures.”

The second guard, Michael Dale nodded his head in agreement. “Lian are you sure that this is coming from the top. This hardly seems like—”

“I have orders from Madame Petrakis herself! If you delay in carrying out her instructions, I can guarantee you won’t be working for the Petrakis Security firm.” With a stern look, Lian stood straight and stared both men down. Eventually, they looked to each other and began to unlock the main doors. Once they unlocked them, they slowly swung them open. Just inside, the caterers were just packing up the dinner course and preparing to serve dessert when they all felt the rush of cool air entered the main hall. All of them traded uncertain looks until they heard one of the guards make a dreaded announcement to the people outside on the steps.

“Good evening everyone. On behalf of the Metropolitan Museum of Art and Madame Cynthia Petrakis, we wish to thank you for your support and invite you in for a late night opening. Please enjoy the food and the museum reopening.” She gave a slight bow as she stepped aside with her right arm extended in welcome. At first the people behind the rope barriers did not know

what to make of it. And suddenly, as if everyone was waiting for the first brave one to cross the barriers, several people unhinged the ropes and walked up the steps. A collected cheer rang out as people made their way into the museum.

The four men, waiting for the signal, turned their attention to surging crowd spectators rushing through the doors of the museum. Samsone Zee made an observation as he watched the people make their way into the museum. "I have never seen so many folks rush into a museum. The only way you would get me or some of my friends into a place like this, they would have to be giving away free food."

"Lian did say there is free food being offered, perhaps you could go a grab a quick bite while we are in there," Marco remarked as he began walking with the crowd.

"Could we, I am starved!" Samsone drew angry stares from Marco, Robert and Demetrius and then realized he needed to stay focused.

All four men walked deep into the crowd as to lose themselves before the police would take notice of the sudden change in plans. Robert opened the bag and had his hands inside it. Luckily, the crowd infiltrated the museum and occupied the front hall, the first floor and was moving up to the second floor. The two museum guards stationed at the front door with Lian were cut off and on the inside being pushed into the museum. Lian pushed herself away from the crowd behind the columns in front of the museum. She quickly stripped off her jacket, shirt and tie. Robert reached her and handed her a light green jacket, brown colored wig and plain glasses to disguise herself as she entered the museum.

Some of the spectators approached the catering tables demanding food. None of the catering chefs would serve the people and as a result, arguments and fights began. The noise began to draw attention as well as the few guards from the front door. Immediately they began to call out to the other guards and

attempted to calm the situation down. What turned out to be a beautiful night of gala and art was now turning into mild chaos. Marco and his cohorts slipped deeper into the museum on their way to commit a robbery of the predetermined artifacts.

* * *

Detective Brenson and the officers on security detail for the Metropolitan had just finished their dinner, graciously provided by Madame Petrakis, and had brief meeting to discuss the wind down procedures for the night.

“All right everyone, I imagine everything will be over in about another hour and New York City can get back to its normal dull roar. Now all we have to do is coordinate the departure of the guests with the museum security and we can clock out for the night,” Detective Brenson was conveying the feeling to his officers when Detective Holmes burst into the mobile command truck breathing heavily.

“Lieutenant?! Are you aware that people are entering the museum? I thought this was a closed event. Everyone is going in and from what I hear, the guards let them in!” The officers in the command center were instantly on their feet and many of them dashed out of the door heading to the museum entrance.

Detectives Brenson and Holmes made their way through the crowd and into to the main hall of the Metropolitan, looking for any of the museum guards. They found three running up to meet them.

“Gentleman, please tell me this an impromptu publicity stunt that the esteemed Madame Petrakis ordered at the last minute,” asked Detective Brenson, already knowing the answer.

One museum guard was attempting to communicate with the security office over the walkie-talkie while the museum guard grimly shook his head. “Negative. All I know is someone at the

front door open the doors and let the people in.” He looked around in abject horror as to try to figure out where to start.

“Call all of your guards in to clear the hall and then we can sweep the museum for any who have wandered off,” Detective Holmes directed while calling into his walkie-talkie ordering other officers into action. The entire main hall was filled with noise, excitement and chaos from the incoming crowd of spectators. Officers and guards began ushering people out of the museum. Some spectators protested, were arrested and taken out to waiting police cruisers. Most of the crowd dispersed into the museum halls and exhibits away from the main hall. Guards worked their way through the first floor where as many as fifty persons spread deeper into the Metropolitan. After a few minutes, Detectives Brenson and Holmes with four Metropolitan guards gathered near the catering tables and sat to discuss the events leading to the chaos.

“It seems one of our people, Lian Zhou Zhu, has opened the doors and allowed the crowd in. No one authorized this and we are looking for her,” one of the guards stated. Two more guards joined the impromptu conference at the catering tables.

“Sir, Lian told us to let the people in and it was an order from the Madame Petrakis. When the crowd entered we lost sight of her, we don’t know where she is.” Metropolitan Security Guard Harris Browne recounted the events leading up to the chaos. All eyes were on him and his partner Michael Dale. Blame was going to be placed but now was not the time. Detective Brenson stood up.

“Okay, here is the plan. Our officers will continue to move the people out of the museum and secure grounds outside. We will carry the more outspoken party crashers down to the precinct.” He turned to the Metropolitan guards and spoke to them. “I want you and your men go through the museum round up the rest of the uninvited and escort them out. Has anyone contacted Madame Petrakis?”

“We called her group and they are moving the guests to the second floor lounge.” reported the guard.

From atop the balcony overlook, Madame Petrakis looked down on the noise of the crowd with a look that either meant disgust, anger or bewilderment. Detective Brenson could not tell which but it was obvious she did not like what she was seeing.

“Let’s get this under control immediately!” Detective Brenson motioned for everyone to get to their assignments and to get this turmoil out of the Metropolitan.

* * *

A clever distraction, Marco thought to himself as he and his cohorts broke away from the main crowd and headed straight for the Greek and Roman Art exhibit which was in the eastern most area on the second floor. With all the people in the area, slipping away was the easiest part of the night. Getting the items from their displays and slipping out would be the challenge. Marco kept it on his mind but did not let it worry him too much. Looking at his tablet, he brought up the list of items to be acquired and in the sections in which they are located. Lian was useful in maneuvering the group into passage ways and corners to make them undetectable during the erratic sweep of the Metropolitan guards. She knew, from her training and briefings of standard operating procedures, they only have several minutes before all of the guards are called in to do an intensive sweep of the museum.

Lian silently regretted taking this job, but the money was too good to pass up. With the payment from this job, she can finally relocate on the west coast to be with the man she long desired to call husband. Circumstances and other obligations kept her in New York City longer than she planned. If this job is pulled off successfully, she can be long gone before the police or Cynthia Petrakis would be able to catch up to her.

She looked along the wall to a security junction box. Alarm

and camera circuits ran through this connection and it was here the robbery would be made possible. Using her security keys, she opened the box, tapped a four-digit security code, and the system indicator went from red to green. Samsone came up behind her and worked on disconnecting the cables that connected the alarm and surveillance cameras. Once he disconnected them, he attached a device to the side of the box and plugged the various cables into it. The device indicator displayed a complex computer code and then went black. A red light on the top of the device started to blink.

“Good, the cameras and security systems are being scrambled,” the young boy said as he smiled in Lian’s face, hoping to get some favor from her. She simply nodded her head and closed the panel, ignoring Samsone’s gawking expression. She gave thumbs up to Marco and the group moved on.

The five thieves entered the exhibit area designated Ancient Documentation where dozens of Greek and Latin documents written on parchment hung on walls and placed in display cases sealed in plastic. Robert produced a large portfolio and a brief case for placing non-parchment items, that we also on the list. Marco pointed to the first case where it held Greek writings of the ancient spell casting, according to the display placard. Samsone went up to a display case and quickly looked it over as Demetrius Stone produced a set of lock picking tools. Samsone smiled as he went to his pocket and produced two circuit boards with small alligator clips attached to each.

“Alright kid, try this out on this case first before we open the others,” Marco ordered.

“No problem. If this works, my little gadget will loop the alarm signal so it will not go off. But it is temporary. Open the case, take the item, close it and disconnect the circuit boards. Simple.” Samsone was pleased with himself and also showing off to the others that he was not just a kid who didn’t know what he was doing. He attached the circuit-enablers, he called them, to the metal side of the display case. Demetrius picked the lock and

opened the case quickly. No alarm sounded. Everyone drew a deep breath and exhaled. It worked! Demetrius grabbed the four documents on display and Samsone disconnected them.

“As I said, simple!” He tossed a pair of the small boards to Marco as he and Robert went to work on another case as Samsone and Demetrius started working on the next case.

Lian, still dressed in her disguise, kept watch and monitored the radio conversations of her soon to be former co-workers, making sure to keep the audio low. She looked back and the four men doing their work. Within five minutes, they have already cleared three display cases moving with precision. In Lian’s view, they were moving to slow for her. Additional chatter could be heard over the frequencies as Samsone’s device was wreaking havoc on the security systems of the museum. The security guards were changing their strategies. Time was running out.

“Why don’t you smash the cases and we can make a dash for the side exits,” she asked in a panicked state.

Marco walked over to calmly explain their motives. “First my dear, smashing the cases will bring more attention to our little retrieval, thereby bringing the guards and police in sooner. Second, the police will be angry enough that we caused this crowd scene on a night the city needs this museum open. If we start vandalizing and destroying private property, it will tighten the noose around our necks if we can’t get away.” He paused and looked Lian in the eyes. “Keep it together. It will be a few more minutes and we will be out of here without anyone seeing us. You will be financially set.”

The former female guard relented but then turned her ear to the radio. Museum guards called a code 023, which meant to secure all emergency exits and to start closing off unoccupied areas with steel barrier gates. “We have to move faster! They will be coming this way!”

“What happened?” asked Marco.

“They have a procedure in which to either trap or prevent any intruders or trespassers from roaming the museum. They will search this area and then close off each section with these gates.” Lian pointed to the suspended steel gates above the entrance ways for the area. Marco frowned but kept his cool.

“This simply means we cannot duck through the exits as we first planned. We will have to go out through the front door. Guys,” he turned to the other three men working to store away the borrowed items. “How much longer? Do we have everything on our shopping list?”

Robert nodded his head. “We are almost done. We have six more cases and then we can leave.”

“What if they check your portfolio and the storage case when we walk out—”

“They won’t see a thing Lian,” Robert replied cutting her off. “We take the originals and slide them inside our portfolio here. If they check it, they will see only posters, not ancient Greek spells and incantations. Besides, they are looking for people and not checking on the exhibits. By the time they do, we are long gone.”

Marco returned to the group and finished opening the displays. Lian remained to keep watch and listen to the radio. From her estimates, they had three more minutes before the guards search the section and then lock it down with the steel gates. “Everyone, let’s wrap it up. Robert, Demetrius, start preparing the items for walk out. Samsone, gather up your toys and make sure the displays have no marks of tampering.”

Robert and Demetrius acknowledged Marco. But Samsone was nowhere to be found. “Where is that kid?” Everyone in the room looked around but saw he was gone. Marco got worried and then got angry.

* * *

Several minutes earlier in another part the Metropolitan, the African Art exhibit area, Jerimiah Clarke and two Metropolitan guards walked through the exhibit slowly. The guards escorted the archaeologist through the area as he worked feverishly on his tablet. He pulled up files and documents on the previous museum robberies across the country for the last few months. His research indicated the thieves would steal documentation, amulets and other articles pertaining to areas of mysticism, metaphysical and the ethereal realms. In short magic and how ancient societies would evoke incantations for whatever purpose of the user would deem fit. Ironically, more valuable items made of gold, silver, solid bronze were available for the taking; rare gem stones were also looked over as well. Items such as these would be stolen, sold to private brokers or ransomed for their return. However, the ancient writings that were stolen in other museums were valuable, not in the monetary sense but only to those versed in languages of the era. Many of those writings held deep, hidden message above the visible written text on parchment.

In the depth of his soul, Jerimiah knew if the ethereal forces were ever unleashed, it would be difficult to control. Only someone who possessed the knowledge of such occurrences can wield the power. For a moment, he wondered if Cynthia Petrakis had the ability or did she just want to display such works for the museums.

The archaeologist finished his observation of a piece titled, "The Shaman's Dreams" discovered in Ethiopia in the year 1580. Partially translated, the writing documented by an unnamed village shaman indicated his vibrant dreams and the possibility of the existence of the astral realm: a place where the soul can travel outside the human body and can either go forward or backward in time. This would give the shaman intimate knowledge of events past or future to guide his village toward a better life. Archaeologists and other scientists dismissed such writings as

fantasy or works of fiction. It could be suggested some of the visions were brought about by hallucinogenic drugs that could conjure up anything the mind wished to see.

“No way was every ancient civilization was high on drugs,” Jerimiah said aloud but to himself. The two guards turned and looked at their charge.

“What was that you said?” the guard named Tom Teige asked.

“Sorry, talking to myself.” Jerimiah paused and turned to the guards. “Do you guys believe in ethereal and mystical energies in which man has some ability to understand and use?”

The second guard John Patts, spoke to the inquiry. “You mean like the Force?”

“Yes,” Jerimiah laughed. “Like the Force. There is an energy that is present in all things and every object has their own internal vibration rate.”

“What are you getting at my friend?” asked Tom as he stepped closer to Jerimiah.

“What if you can harness and even command those dynamisms? Conjure spirits and demons, control the mysterious dark forces? Or even incur God's wrath? Everything from the Bible to the Koran speaks of such forces being wielded and unleashed.” Jerimiah noticed both guards were staring at him confused.

“So, our boss has put magical weapons of mass destruction in front for all of New York to see on a daily basis?” John asked in an uncertain voice.

Jerimiah felt he was losing the interest of his escorts and then decided to keep the conversation to a minimum. “No, I believe the good lady merely placed these items for education and entertainment. I don't think there is anything to worry about.” At

times Jerimiah can get carried away with himself and his enthusiasm. However, most people he has met don't share his deep appreciation for the strange, bizarre and unknown forces in the world. He has experienced too many unexplained phenomena only which the ancient ways could offer any explanation.

Tom was about to mention something about Jerimiah's views, when his radio buzzed with chatter. Undistinguishable from where Jerimiah and John stood, Tom's posture of suggested a serious situation had risen in the museum. Listening intently, Jerimiah heard the noise of people in the main hall.

"Would that be Madame Petrakis guests getting rowdy on a night like this?"

"No," Tom answered signaling for John to join him. "It looks like someone opened the front doors and let the people in for a night tour, a code 023. We are going to assist with crowd control. We are going to leave you here and come back for you once this is done. You won't be any trouble will you?"

"No. But what if I see anything occurring that should not? Jerimiah asked.

John pointed to a phone on the wall at the entrance of the African exhibit room. "Dial 2 and ask to speak to Daniela Harker, our chief of security. Tell her you were escorted by Tom and John and the nature of the call. She will get help to you if need it."

Tom turned to Jerimiah before they ran out. "Now stay out of trouble Mr. Clarke. We know where you are so there should be no problems." Jerimiah nodded as the two guards raced to assist in the ongoing troubles of the night.

He was all alone with all of the exhibits and he could work undisturbed for a time. He was about to turn to a display with more ancient writings when another exhibit area with no lights on and a sign that read, Petrakis Private Collection. His curiosity was

piqued, regardless of the promise Jerimiah made, he entered the dark room. Luckily he had his mini LED flashlight to help illuminate his way.

* * *

The subtle tour through the museum was quiet and uneventful, the way Cynthia Petrakis liked it. All of her guests were in awe at the artwork displayed. Some were presented from the previous administration but dozens of new works donated by private collectors held the attention of the special guests of Cynthia Petrakis. Much of the interior was reconstructed and restored, but to be a more modern museum, LCD screens of various sizes were added to the hallways, exhibit areas and suspended from the ceilings. Most were deactivated but some of the monitors were active showing maps, displayed upcoming events, and showed historical information for specific exhibits. It was truly a technological marvel.

"We will add more interactive touch screens in the common areas. People will be able to request information as well as sign up for special events. I want to fuse the old world with the ever changing new and modern world," Madame Petrakis declared as they stopped by one of the main stairs on the second floor giving access to the main floors of the Metropolitan. She smiled widely at her guests as she gestured to the monitors and saw a hand belonging to Samantha Reid go up. She acknowledged it.

"Would this be an attempt to attract a younger crowd to visit the museum and get them more involved in the culture of which you have displayed here?"

"Actually, it never really occurred to me. But that is a good angle. I think young people should spend some time in a museum and look at life beyond their smartphone and video games." She turned to the crowd. "I refuse to create a museum app so they can sit down and virtually tour the museum."

Some people chuckled at Cynthia's remark. Many marveled at the improvements she had made in the museum. In a shared feeling, everyone was astounded at how Madame Petrakis had taken a great institution and turned it into a grand place. Still the tour was half way done. They walked to the second floor private lounge where she allowed people to sit on the plush leather cushion chairs. Inside the lounge, the walls were lined with screens showing a panoramic view of the museum, interior and exterior. The guests of the party watched a short documentary of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. With Madame Petrakis' permission, security officers released their camera equipment to Samantha and her Channel 6 crew, setting up to film the reaction of the guests as they viewed the program. Once the documentary was shown, Cynthia left her guests to converse with the security guards who were not in the lounge but standing at the balcony overlooking the main hall.

"I am hoping they are not speaking of any problems," the voice in mind said with unease.

Looking at the posture of the guards and Cynthia's supernatural hearing picking noise from main hall below the balcony, she frowned. "There is," responding to the voice. "So much for a quiet night."

Cynthia walked over to the guards at the balcony; two of them were staring down at the small riot that has broken out in the main hall. The other two guards were on their radios attempting to understand all of the chatter.

"Give me the bad news gentleman," she said as she approached. The guard with white hair and a beard named Winston turned to Cynthia Petrakis.

"Ma'am it is not good. From what we have been able to gather, the guards at the front door let the people standing outside into the museum. Some of them spread out through the museum into the exhibits and other areas. There looks to be a few fights have

broken out. Our guys and the NYPD handled them.”

“The good news,” an African American guard named Winston added. “We have no reports of damage or theft. Unfortunately, from what we are getting from our central control office, our security system has been compromised. We will have to conduct a visual inspection of each exhibit to ascertain their conditions.”

Deep within Cynthia Petrakis, an angry feeling was slowly boiling to the surface. The emotion seeped through her skin like poison. All four guards noticed the change in her demeanor and uncharacteristically froze in their places. The voice in her head screamed an alarm. “Careful! We don’t want to show everyone your other face!” Noticing her incisors were sharpening in her mouth and her nails were stinging with pain, she closed her eyes briefly, as in prayer and let out a deep breath.

“Alright, this is truly a night to remember.” She focused on the guards. “William and Joanna, you will accompany me downstairs to get some type of control of this circumstance. Winston, you and Marvin keep our guests in the lounge until I return with news of our triumph.” She smiled and the guards could not help but to laugh. Despite the calamity broke out in the main hall, there was no need for further tension, unless it was called for.

The female guard named Joanna stepped to Cynthia’s side, flanked by William. Winston approached Cynthia. “What do we tell your guests?”

Cynthia poked out her bottom lip slightly to think. “The truth. An emergency has broken out in the main hall and I went to deal with it. Use the monitors to show video clips from the Petrakis Foundation.” The tall dark African American man looked puzzled. “Just play host until I come back. I will not be long.”

“Hopefully,” the voice said in a whisper. Cynthia agreed and then signaled for the guards to follow and they left to go downstairs to the Main Hall.

Marvin looked at Winston and smiled. “You get to make the announcement and play press secretary.” The ribbing comes as they are about to walk into the Lounge.

“It’s all good man, just one more thing to add to the resume and another to ask additional pay for.” Winston grinned back into Marvin’s face in reply.

“If we all have jobs after this. This looks big. I don’t know who could have perpetrated all of this. I hope it was not one of us.”

“Well,” Marvin started. “The good Madame Petrakis will get to the bottom of this for sure. Let’s deal with the guests for now.” The two guards entered the room as the guests just finished watching the previous video on the large panoramic screens. All of them turned to Winston and Marvin as they signaled with their hands for their attention.

“Everyone, Madame Petrakis has asked you to remain in the lounge and enjoy some refreshments as she went to attend a slight matter in the Main Hall,” Winston explained. Just as he finished his first statement, the noise of the ruckus on the first floor entered the room. Some of the people began to murmur and ask questions among themselves. Winston quieted the guests down and continued.

“For safety reasons, Madame Petrakis would like for you to remain here as she, our security and the NYPD sort this issue out. It appeared that some of the people outside of the museum made their way in the museum—”

“Obviously attracted to the good food being served to you all!” Marvin interjected. The people laughed as Winston threw a look to Marvin that read simply, “Thank you.” The people seemed to be more relaxed and calm.

Winston continued. “We will be serving coffee, tea and bottled

water. While you quench your thirst, I will show you another video of the exploits of the Petrakis Foundation.” Servers appeared and started serving the guests. Most people took coffee but a few took water or even tea as their choice. No one else challenged Winston or Marvin with questions as outbursts could be heard from downstairs. Instead they settled in and waited for the next video to be displayed. Estelle, Raphael and Samantha looked at each other as the museum waiter passed by with a tray with drinks and each took their preference.

“I wonder what is going on downstairs in which we can get an angle on,” Estelle pondered as she took a sip of her black coffee.

“The only angle I am interested in is providing Cynthia Petrakis a platform to speak about tonight’s activities, good, bad or indifferent. If we try to spin this any other way, she won’t look as favorable on us or Channel 6 ever again.” Samantha sipped her warm tea while looking directly into Estelle’s eyes. “We try any cheap shots and we all may wake up with hurt asses.”

Raphael gulped his bottled water down and nodded in agreement. “At the very least we won’t be eating good food anymore. I won’t be going back to canned food again.” The three nodded their heads, even though Estelle relented in agreeing with them. The room dimmed and another program on the history of the Petrakis Foundation began.

Everyone watched in fascination except for Abraham Cromwell who quickly texted on his smart device:

Cromwell: The job goes well. You should have what you want in no time.

Ja’Meela: Good.

Cromwell settled into his seat and smiled.

* * *

Jerimiah walked into the darkened exhibit half expecting some booby trap to be triggered. From the shine of his light, he saw many objects still in crates, settled on display tables and placed about on the floor. Many crates were still sealed but three of them were opened. Inside each of them were various objects: swords, daggers, shields, helmets, armor, spear tips and an assortment of weapons. The archaeologist marveled at how well these ancient weapons were preserved. Looking at them with care and scrutiny he noticed that these weapons were more than preserved but brand new. "They looked like as if they were crafted recently." Jerimiah thought to himself.

More puzzling, each weapon and armament were from different time periods, different cultures from around the world. Impossible for some of these cultures to have any contact with each other, but items from Greek, African, Asian and Indian societies were all in on collection. Perhaps Cynthia Petrakis acquired each of the items from various markets.

At the four corners of the room stood twelve foot statues, all different designs and carvings. Each one, the shape of some sort of a living creature all were facing the middle of the room, as if to guard the other treasures within. A shiver ran up and down Jerimiah's spine. He felt as if he was being scrutinized from the four giant statues. One statue that caught his eye was the one that looked the most human. Its face was carved to look like an old man with sad eyes. The light revealed as much when Jerimiah shined it up to its face. The eyes, with no pupils, seem to be staring at him. No that was impossible, he thought. But he was trapped in a staring contest with a statue. Its eyes flashed a warning: Do not attempt to steal anything from this room!

"Don't worry my friend. Madame Petrakis wanted me to make sure no one stole anything that did not rightfully belong to them. I promise not to disturb or take anything. In fact," he paused and stepped closer. "I am trying to prevent the robbery of these precious objects."

The feeling of observation and apprehension slowly ebbed away and then emptiness. As if the feeling understood Jerimiah and accepted his presence.

“Great, I am talking to statues again. Wait until Samantha hears about this. She won’t let me live it down.” Smiling to himself, Jerimiah continued his walk-through of the items in the room.

Sitting on a carved piece of marble in the center of the room, between the four colossal statues, was a medium sized bronze chest that bared neither markings nor even a locking mechanism. This chest was used for quick access storage, not to hide or guard valuables, Jerimiah surmised. Upon further examination, there were notches cut into the short sides of the chest, indicating a larger latching device was used to secure the top to prevent entry or even to secure it for transport. As Jerimiah made note of his findings, he heard the fast paced footsteps of someone approaching. An instinct deep within his being told him to hide and he immediately took refuge behind the statue he was holding a brief conversation with. He turned off his tablet and waited.

* * *

Samsone Zee made his way into the dark exhibit, knowing he should have waited with the others to make their escape. With the guards combing each area searching for additional intruders from the crowd surge, it was just a matter of time until they were caught. He knew this but since he was a young thief, he thought to steal something for himself and fence it to increase his cut of this job, which was not as much as he like it to be. He hated being treated like a child. Experienced or not, Marco was the current thorn in his side. If worse came to worse, he could slip out another exit and be gone before anyone could catch him.

As he pondered his new plan, the exhibit’s lights slowly came on and illuminated the room. Samsone took notice that the exhibit was under construction and transportation crates opened. He took a

quick peek in them to see weapons from different time periods of a variety of sizes. Although they were interesting, sneaking them out would be rather difficult. Samsone returned his attention to the bronze chest and taking note there was no lock as he reached for it.

“What do you think you are doing?” A hand grabbed Samsone’s shoulder as he whirled around to see the angry face of Marco. His other comrades in thievery joined them in the unfinished exhibit. All of their faces were the same as Marco’s.

“Relax man,” Samsone said attempting with no success to release the clamped hand on his shoulder. “I just wanted a souvenir from this caper. Besides, this is the best place to hide for the moment as the guards continue to search the place.”

Marco looked over to Lian who was listening to her radio. “He is right. Most of the guards are on the second and third floors. However, the police are on the scene and have most of the crowd under control.” She paused and then looked at Marco. “Madame Petrakis is on the scene as well.”

The color drained from her face. Lian did not want to confront her former employer for any reason. If she got out of this, she would run as far away as her money could take her. She remembered briefly being interviewed for the security position and meeting Madame Petrakis. Her warm smile and trusting nature would not be present if she was to know the guard she hired betrayed her in such a way. She did not relish the idea and threw Samsone Zee a look that could kill.

“All right, we move on your say so,” Marco declared looking over to Demetrius and Robert. They both nodded. “Lian, how soon until we can move?”

“Three minutes. But due to lock down procedure and the police presence, we cannot go out the side door. We have to get caught by the museum patrols and be escorted out. Hopefully, they won’t search us or the bag but if they do...” Her voice trailed off.

“That won’t be a problem,” Marco gestured with his right hand, releasing Samsone, Detmetrius, Robert and Marco began to take their coats off. Each of them had a plastic vest strapped to their backs and immediately filled the vests with the documents they stole from the Greek exhibit. Once filled, they would replace their jackets and dump the bag with their tools in the trash receptacle on their way out the museum.

“Well, while you three are stowing away the goods, I will be checking that handsome gold chest sitting on this rock over here,” Samsone announced as he walked over to the bronze chest.

Exasperated with the boy, Marco said firmly. “Kid, you don’t know a damn thing! It is bronze sitting on top of high grade carved marble!”

“Whatever, as long as it is worth something.” Marco shook his head at this young thief who drew stares from Robert and Demetrius. Looking at Marco and sharing the same thought, Samsone will be departing this group when the opportunity presents itself.

* * *

Jerimiah stood in the shadow of the stone golem carefully considering his next move. It is by blind luck he spotted thieves attempting to lift some artifacts from Madame Petrakis’ collection. To his estimation, they could be the ones who have perpetrated the previous robberies around the nation. The guard’s involvement made sense, to pull this crime off they would need an inside person. Tonight would be the perfect night to pull off this heist. Security focused on the guests inside, securing the grounds outside, spread thin throughout the museum. He cursed himself for not getting this information to Madame Petrakis sooner. His exasperation, though muted from his point of view, accidentally spilled from his lips. The sound attracted Samsone.

“Did you guys hear something?” he asked as he stopped just before going to the bronze chest. He walked over to one of the giant stone statues, the one Jerimiah was standing behind, and peered behind it. Jerimiah was looking straight in to the eyes of the young boy. Jerimiah smelled his bad aftershave and took note of his crazy hair style.

Samsone stared into the dark area for moment. He heard nothing, saw nothing and smelled nothing.

“I guess it was nothing,” he relented and went back to his focus.

“Keep it to together kid,” Robert said as he finished storing away his portion of the parchments they lifted earlier. “We are out of here in two minutes.”

“Don’t sweat it my man,” Samsone replied as he slipped on some gloves and opened the chest. “Jackpot!”

Out of curiosity, Marco, Lian Robert and Demetrius rushed to see what the excitement was about. All of them were looking at several dozen metallic amulets with crystal ornaments adorning the peculiar shape. Some the crystals on the amulets were the size of grapes. They could not tell what type of gem stones they were; all of them were priceless. Each amulet was made of different metals: silver, gold, platinum, bronze, iron and others that were not easily recognized. Some had straps made of leather, others attached to chains of the same metal. All of them, as far as they could see, had etchings of different languages. Another odd occurrence, at the moment from when the chest opened, there was a brief flash of light and then it dimmed. From a quick examination, there were no other light sources available. How did that light show occur? Hardly worth solving this mystery as all of them were taken by the sheer priceless value of each artifact contained in the chest.

“Focus everyone,” Marco uttered as even he was taken aback by the sight of these amulets. Even he wanted to take them but

every second they delayed will put them at the risk of being caught by the museum guards or the police.

* * *

Jerimiah started breathing again the moment Samsone walked away. How did he not sense he was there in the shadow? Jerimiah wondered but was thankful for not being discovered. He looked up at the statue and concluded that there is some sort of presence in this guardian. At another time he could investigate this guardian further. He was absolutely sure he would sit for an interview, but getting him to reveal his secret would take more than just tea and crumpets.

He saw the kid putting on gloves and preparing to open the chest. Using his tablet, he opened a video email conference line and put in the email address of Cynthia Petrakis. With a very strong Wi-Fi signal, he used his camera to record the kid of the group opening the chest and discovering the amulets inside.

* * *

Meanwhile in the Main Hall of the Metropolitan Museum, Madame Petrakis arrived on the scene with two museum guards behind her. She spotted the Detective Brenson, along with members of her security staff and other NYPD officers in a small group around a table and made her approached. The main hall was the scene of a chaos with the spectators coming in but the police and her guards got the area under control. People were being escorted out politely she observed and was thankful no one has been hurt.

“Detective Brenson,” she spoke as she walked to the detective and stopped only two feet from him. “Can you give me an account of what the hell is going on in my museum?”

He turned to the museum owner with a stern look on his face, but saw an angry expression on the face of Madame Petrakis.

Although she was beautiful, he knew he did not want to be on the side that would mean the other nature of this woman would be revealed. Most know Madame Petrakis as a kind, giving, firm individual. Very few people know of her darker side and that was not a pretty face to be seen.

“According to our police and your security staff, someone at the main door allowed the crowd inside. At first we thought you may have ordered the crowd inside to share in the event, but upon further observation, we noticed the people rushing in and becoming unruly,” the detective reported.

The two security guards, Harris Browne and Michael Dale who were stationed front door approached Madame Petrakis. Harris spoke first. “We didn’t want to put this over the radio but Lian Zhou Zhu ordered us to open the doors and then,” his voice trailed off. Michael finished Harris’ account of the crowd surge.

“Lian disappeared into the crowd. We know she has her radio and perhaps she and whomever she is with were able to avoid the security sweeps in the area,” Michael reported, unable to meet Madame Petrakis’ eyes. She took in a deep breath and let it out. Around her, order was being restored and the last of the people were leaving the museum. Even the caterers restored their food trays in preparation for the dessert course to be served once the invited guests would make their way back to the main hall.

“One misguided security guard does not make an incompetent bunch nor does it represent how we secure or museum,” Madame Petrakis spoke in an emotionless tone. She said this in order to ease the tension of the other security guards around her. Cynthia got the notion that after tonight, she would be firing a great many people for this break in, but the first person she should fire is herself. Had she not ordered additional guards and ramped up surveillance, this break in would not have happened. No, she thought back to conversation with her staff. She decided not to have the Opening Gala event feel like an overly guarded fortress. A welcoming feeling she remembered saying; now she is starting to regret the

decision.

“What about our security cameras? It should be an easy task of locating anyone else in the museum that should not belong.” Cynthia asked.

The guards shared a look that did not convey good news. Johanna was the one to break the bad news to a not so happy Cynthia Petrakis. “Harker released a code 023. Our surveillance system has been disabled. We do not know how but again, it points to Lian’s knowledge of the system. She or her cohorts may have bypassed the cameras.”

Again, anger seeped into her being but she kept her composure. She was about to speak when from her purse she felt a buzzing. For a moment she ignored the conversations about the details of the break in as she checked her smartphone. An incoming video call came in from Jerimiah Clarke. Curious as to why he would be sending such a call at a time like this, she tapped the receive button and viewed the message. If Madame Petrakis eyes could open any wider, they would have fallen out of her eye sockets, highly unlikely however.

“Gentlemen,” she said sternly. “If you want to get Lian, she is in my closed exhibit, along with her cohorts.” Showing her video call to her security guards and to the police detectives, everyone’s eyes widened and they sprang into action. William, the guard that escorted Madame Petrakis, immediately got on the radio.

“All guards, converge on the Level 2, Section 35 exhibit—”

“No don’t!” three of the guards, Detective Brenson and even Madame Petrakis yelled at the same time.

“If Lian still has her radio, she would have heard the alert and would pass the information to the other thieves,” Detective Brenson said in urgency. Detective Holmes directed police officers to block the exits. The other security guards, along with a few

police officers ran up the stairs to the exhibit where a robbery was in progress. Hopefully they would be in time to intercept and capture them.

* * *

Lian picked up the radio and heard the guards being ordered to the exhibit they were currently occupied. Jerimiah, still behind the statue and also heard the call. He was thankful the video call got through and Madame Petrakis responded. These thieves would soon be caught and the museum crime spree would come to an end.

“Dammit!” Lian cursed as she listened to her radio. “We have to go now!”

Marco slammed down the lid of the chest and looked to three other men with a mix of worry and anger. “Ok, now we have to make a run for it. We have to avoid capture as well as the use of unnecessary violence. Lian, how do we get out of here?”

“We have to get to the third floor, into the service corridors and then into the basement. From there we can exit into the park garage and disappear into Central Park. The only problem is we have to cross to the west side of the museum,” Lian stated as she readied herself to run.

“Why can’t we use these corridors on the South side? We are closer are we not?” Samsone asked. The other men looked at Samsone and then to Lian for an answer.

Lian walked up to Samsone, face to face and held up her hand as she explained, closing her fingers as she did so. “Parking lot. People. Police. Caught!” The middle finger was the last finger left exposed.

Marco intervened. “Enough! Lian, lead the way. The rest of us will be behind you. If you are caught, you stay caught!” Everyone

nodded and moved with speed into the hallway.

Two security guards spotted them leaving the exhibit and ran toward the group of criminals. “Hold it right there!” One of them shouted. The other guard was on his walkie-talkie to report their situation. He was not able to get in much of a report when Demetrius and Robert set upon the two guards and quickly knocked them to ground. They were not hurt too seriously, but stunned long enough for Marco and his gang to start their flight through the museum.

Lian led them running through the museum at a fast clip. The footfalls of guards and police were not far behind them. They made a mad dash across the second floor and past the lounge, attracting the attention of security guards Marvin and Winston. The first instinct was to pursue these people in the museum as Marvin was about to, but Winston held him back.

“No my friend, we stay here and look after the guests. We call it in,” Winston said as he pointed to his partner’s radio.

Nodding in agreement, Marvin used his radio and relayed the direction and actions of the intruders. The excitement alerted the guests to something going on and some rose from their seats to see. Winston politely blocked their path and ushered them back into their seats.

“Everyone, please. Whatever is going out there, the safest place for you to be is here. When the excitement has died down, we shall conclude our evening with some dessert.”

The guests began to talk amongst themselves as the Channel 6 crew began readying their equipment for additional coverage of the Gala Event at the Metropolitan. The general feeling among the guests was this evening was anything but boring. Everyone shared a particular excitement; all save for Abraham Cromwell, who almost dropped his tea cup when the thieves ran past.

“Damn fools,” he said to himself as he pulled out his smartphone and text Ja’Meela:

Cromwell: Bad news.

Ja’Meela: What?

Cromwell: The package will not be delivered tonight!

A long moment of silence attenuated before there was another response.

Ja’Meela: Understood.

Ja’Meela, disappointed and angry, turned the car over and peeled out her parking space so fast, she cut off two cars on the street. A third car skidded, lost control and slammed into a parked car. She did not care about accidents she caused. The fact the heist went south and she will not be benefiting from spoils made her upset. Worse, her benefactor will not be pleased about the night’s failure.

* * *

Detective Brenson, Detective Holmes, several police officers and security guards raced through the Metropolitan attempting to cut off the thieves as they fled across the museum. Two of the guards were in the lead as they deduced what would be Lian’s escape route. Running up the stairs to the third floor, the pursuing group managed to station themselves in the back corridors of the museum as to cut off any possible escape. Lian, still in the lead, saw the guards ahead of them and turned down another service corridor, the area near the offices that run the museum. Escape was now becoming impossible. Marco knew this as well as he reached for his gun. He did not want to shoot it out in the museum but getting caught was not an option he relished.

“This way,” Lian yelled as she made another sharp turn and

attempted to double back and try an emergency exit. The men followed closely after her but to no avail. Metropolitan guards blocked off the emergency exit and the police were coming up behind them.

All five of them stopped. Their luck ran out and now police officers were coming up behind them. Detective Brenson had his firearm drawn and approached the group cautiously. "All of you, get down on your knees, drop whatever you are carrying and place your hands on top of your head." He paused as more police officers flanked the left and right of him.

Detective Holmes also had his weapon drawn and pointed toward the suspects. "You will be placed under arrest, your rights read to you and the charges against you will be leveled against all of you."

Lian, Marco, Samsone, Robert and Demetrius looked at each other and then at the officers holding handcuffs at the ready. All eyes were on Marco as he nodded and the group did as Detective Brenson ordered and got on their knees. Marco removed the .38 revolver pistol he had tucked in his pocket with two fingers and placed it on the marble floor. Five officers moved in with cuffs and began locking them on the wrists of the assailants. Once they were disarmed and the items removed from their person, Detective Holmes stepped forward in an official capacity.

"I will now read your Miranda rights," Detective Holmes said with no emotion as he removed a card from his pocket. "You have the right to remain silent when questioned. Anything you say or do may be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to consult an attorney before speaking to the police and to have an attorney present during questioning now or in the future. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed for you before any questioning, if you wish. If you decide to answer any questions now, without an attorney present, you will still have the right to stop answering at any time until you talk to an attorney. Knowing and understanding your rights as I have explained them to you, are

you willing to answer my questions without an attorney present?"

Every one of the suspects shook their head in the negative. Marco looked at Samsone, who did not return his gaze, and simply shook his head in disgust. Lian looked as if she was about to cry. Not only did she betray her employer, but her coworkers with whom she has known for many years prior to being placed in the Metropolitan museum. The museums guards present on the third floor looked at her and were themselves disappointed. She heard a few of them whispering and the words traitor, thief, disappointment and low-life reached her ears as her head hung low. Detective Holmes noticed the brown wig Lian was wearing and removed it. She did not flinch or protest as Holmes tossed it to an officer holding the bag Demetrius was carrying.

When everyone was cuffed, Detective Holmes asked, "Can we take these suspects out a back way, since they were heading in that direction?"

"No," Detective Brenson protested with a hand raised. "Take them right out the front door. I want to assure Madame Petrakis that we caught those persons who disrupted tonight's affairs and to show the public the NYPD will not tolerate this behavior." Silence entered the hallway as everyone was a bit stunned at Detective Brenson's proposal.

"We have no problem with that," Johanna spoke for the other guards present. "In fact, it will be our pleasure to escort you out with the detainees." All of the other guards agreed and with no other word spoken on the fact, Detective Brenson and Holmes led the way back downstairs to the main hall where a police van will be arriving shortly to take the criminals to the nearest precinct for booking and processing. The museum guards followed alongside and behind the entourage down into the main hall.

* * *

"I apologize for temporarily imprisoning all of you in this

plush video lounge. I wanted to ensure the safety of all of my guests while my security and the New York Police Department rounded up some unruly visitors and some persons who wish to undo all that we have accomplished in the reopening of the Metropolitan Museum,” Madame Petrakis spoke to her guests who were in awe of this evening’s excitement. “I thank you for cooperating and being calm this evening. I know it is later than we planned to conclude our Gala, but please join me downstairs for dessert. Coffee, tea and water are not enough to end an evening such as this.”

The guests showed their approval with a quiet applause. Abraham Cromwell tried very hard not to let his anger show. He put on a false smile and clapped along with the other guests. Cromwell did not relish the conversation he will have later on the night with Ja’Meela. Not that he feared her, but it will be annoying at best. For he had plans for those documents the thieves should have secured. Time will tell if he will be able to get his hands on them before Ja’Meela.

“I think this yet another scoop of a story here. An attempted robbery during the Reopening Gala? I think this would be a great opportunity to get a juicy interview with the madam herself. What do you think guys?” Estelle asked eagerly.

Samantha and Raphael looked at her with stern looks. To them, Estelle seemed to be growing weary of an evening that was devoid of action or at the very least, news worthy events. The disruption in the evening’s affairs would definitely make a good news story in light of what should have been a dull museum opening, in Estelle’s opinion. Samantha could have sworn she smelled alcohol on her breath. Estelle was starting to get impatient and obstinate; it was definitely time for her to retire for the evening. Before Samantha could say something, Raphael spoke up.

“Estelle, this story is a huge opportunity for all of us. If you keep on wanting to ruin the experience for us, you can walk home and sleep off your drunken stupor.” Raphael spoke his piece and

did not hesitate to confront the producer of the news team.

“Well pardon me for wanting something of a larger story for all of us,” Estelle said in a huff.

You mean for yourself, Samantha thought to herself. Estelle’s jealousy was getting the better of her again. Estelle relished returning to her investigative reporting that would be the talk of the town. She will find a way to get her big break and one day, write her own ticket to propel her from local news to the national syndicates. Samantha knew if she let her insecurities get the better of her, she will never get out from the shadows.

“How about we talk to the Police, get some information from them first, and then allow Madame Petrakis to make some remarks without any preconceived notions of getting the story,” Samantha voiced her opinion. “We already got the story, so let’s just ride this out for the evening. My bed is calling me and I am tired of putting it on hold.”

Without another word, Samantha, Raphael and finally Estelle gathered up their equipment and with permission of Madame Petrakis, they left the lounge and headed outside to get some information from the police and then get a closing interview with Madame Petrakis. After they left, Madame Petrakis received a call on her phone from Jerimiah Clarke.

“Mr. Clarke. I have to thank you for your assistance in stopping this theft. I don’t know how to repay you.”

“Well for starters, you can have one of your security guards come and escort me back to your little get together. I fear if I walk out, your people or the police may mistake me for the sixth criminal,” Jerimiah requested as he sat at the base of the statue that harbored him from discovery. He wanted to come back at a later time to explore the items in this room more closely. For now, leaving from this exhibit suited him just fine.

Cynthia smiled. “Right away Mr. Clarke.” She hung up the phone and asked Marvin to escort Jeremiah from her private exhibit and bring him to the dessert area in the Main Hall.

“Everyone, please follow Mr. Winston downstairs for your nightcap and dessert of the evening. Thank you again for your patience.” Madame Petrakis left Winston to escort the guests downstairs as she headed to rendezvous with Detective Brenson and his detail escorting the thieves out of the Metropolitan.

She reached the Main Hall in time to see Detective Brenson, her security people and the contingent of police officers escorting four men and one Asian woman to the main doors. Cynthia recognized the woman as one of her staff and she almost stepped into her path to confront her. Detective Brenson, instead guided Madame Petrakis over the side to speak to her privately.

“From what I am able to gather, they had some exhibit items on their person along with tools they discarded in a trash bin and weapons. Ancient Greek parchment writings were all they have taken. They were able to bypass the security locks on the display cases. I figure one of them or even Lian Zhou Zhu was casing the museum while it was under reconstruction. I will need the names of all the people involved with your staff and reconstruction.”

“I can have all that information sent over to you in the morning if you wish,” Madame Petrakis said. “Is there any need to question my staff or my guests?”

“No, but I would like to have a list of all your invited guests sent over to my office.” Detective Brenson looked outside and he saw a police van pull up as well as spotting the Channel 6 News crew setting up for a report on the attempted burglary. He knew he would have to release a very guarded statement on the night’s activities.

“I know, the statement for the press,” she looked at Detective Brenson. “The good news is that the people from Channel 6 will

not take any cheap shots. I would have to say it's a good choice I made inviting them to the Gala." Cynthia sighed and rubbed her forehead. Frustration was getting to her and she wished this evening was over and she could crawl into bed.

"Don't worry, aside from this incident, you have done a lot for the city and I don't think anyone could have handled this as well as you. All in all this is an evening to remember." Detective Brenson suppressed an urge to be familiar with Madame Petrakis by kissing her on the cheek. He was so attracted to her and he knew she liked him in some way. But now was not the time or the place for such activities. Instead he offered his hand and she extended her own and shook. "Well time to talk to the press and take the trash down to the station. Good night Madame Petrakis."

The detective turned and walked to the curb where the police van pulled up and the suspects were escorted inside. The Channel 6 news group also was there as Samantha was trying to get a statement from the people caught in the attempted robbery of the museum. It was useless as the four men and one woman climbed into the van without saying a word or even looking at the camera. As the door closed Detective Brenson approached Samantha and gave his accounting of the evening.

Cynthia Petrakis has stood nearby waiting her turn with the camera and interview, when the security guard Tom Tiede escorted Jeremiah Clarke out to meet her. On Tom's arm was a white shawl in which he draped over Madame Petrakis shoulders. "It is getting chilly out here Madame Petrakis. None of us wants you getting sick a day after your successful Reopening Gala," Tom said as stepped back and looked at his employer. For an instant she looked innocent and vulnerable, perhaps thinking of how this evening will affect the fund raising and the continued support of the newly reopened Metropolitan Museum of Art. But in that same instant, Cynthia Petrakis stood a bit taller and looked at Tom.

"Thank you Mr. Tiede," she smiled and focused on Jeremiah. "I am glad to see you are okay as well as Mr. Clarke. We owe you a

great deal.”

Jerimiah shook Madame Pretakis’ hand and gripped it gently. “I am glad no one was seriously hurt or anything damaged. If anything, this should net you a few more million dollars from the investors. Culture and action at the Metropolitan Museum of Art! Only in New York!”

Cynthia smiled broadly. She knew he was fishing for something, a grant most likely! He did deserve it as well to be considered on another project she had in mind. She made a firm her decision. “Mr. Clarke, come by the museum tomorrow afternoon and we will discuss your reward in the form of an exploration/excavation grant.”

Jerimiah’s eyes widened and were filled with excitement. She continued, “But I think we should keep your involvement in this between us. In case the person or persons who paid these criminals to steal from the museum may take an unhealthy interest in you.”

“Not to worry, I have a few world leaders and tribal shaman looking for me,” Jerimiah laughed but took her meaning seriously. The police van drove away to the precinct to process the suspects and as a result of the robbery, the Police cleared the area around the museum. No one was allowed on the steps or on the surrounding blocks since the former security guard allowed all of those people in. Even the few remaining news crews were told to vacate the area and eventually went back to their respective stations. It was all quiet in front of the museum.

Detective Brenson concluded his interview and then entered an unmarked police car with Detective Holmes. Only the Police Command Van remained behind until the invited guests departed in their cars and left the museum. The additional police officers assigned to the museum detail returned to their duty stations, signed out and retired for the night.

Samantha spotted Madame Petrakis and walked over to her for

a final interview. The philanthropist motioned Jerimiah to stand off camera as Cynthia stepped closer to Samantha.

“Madame Petrakis, we heard from the police about an attempted robbery during your opening night gala. Do you care to comment?” Samantha placed the microphone in front of Cynthia and waited for her statement.

“First, I wish to thank my security guards and the NYPD for apprehending the criminals responsible. To my knowledge, no one has been seriously hurt and I am hoping once the police are done with their investigation, justice will be properly served.”

“Does the attempted robbery hinder your fundraising efforts?”

“I truly hope not. Because of a few persons who wish to steal something that is meant for all to see and share, it should neither deter anyone from supporting the museum and/or the Noble Petrakis Foundation. The public should also support and visit their museum, which will open at 8:00AM tomorrow morning,” Cynthia said while pointing back to the museum.

Samantha smiled and stood closer to Madame Petrakis to finish up. “I for one will be visiting more often and I cannot thank you enough for allowing Channel 6 to cover the Reopening. Thank you Madame Petrakis.” Shaking hands with the Cynthia, Samantha concluded her broadcast. “This is Samantha Reid from the newly reopened Metropolitan Museum of Art. Good night New York City.”

“And we are done,” Raphael said as he took down his camera and looked over to Estelle who wished the final interview was more controversial and impacting. Estelle stared at Samantha for few moments.

“Well that was a good night’s work. Now we all should get a good night’s sleep.” Estelle looked past Samantha at Madame Petrakis and Jerimiah speaking to each other. “For some of us, may

get a better night sleep than others.”

The insinuation by Estelle prompted Samantha to make no harsh reply but simply stare at her producer as she walked unsteadily back to the news van. Raphael watched and simply said, “I will drive, and make sure all the equipment is packed away.” Estelle didn’t care what Raphael was saying. She only wanted to go home and sleep.

As they packed the equipment away and entered the van, Samantha approached Jerimiah and Cynthia. “A moment if you will,” she said as she walked with Jerimiah away a few feet away. Cynthia smiled then spoke to Tom Tiede about the status of the museum.

“Listen,” Samantha started. “Will you be coming back to my apartment later?”

“Yes,” Jerimiah answered.

“Will you be long?”

“No, or I hope not.” Samantha looked up at Jerimiah.

“You answered very easily, what is going on?” Samantha waited for an answer which Jerimiah was somewhat reluctant to respond.

“I was in the exhibit hall where the thieves were. I shot the video of them contemplating to take more than what they were contracted to steal. Don’t ask me how, but they didn’t see or hear me in the room as I safely recorded and sent the video to Cynthia. She thought it best, for safety reasons, not let my name be known publically until we can identify who was behind tonight’s heist.” Jerimiah gently pulled Samantha closer to his body. “I want to stay for the closing and desserts. Also, I want to see if she will allow me to examine some of the artifacts in the museum that caught the thieves’ attention.”

“I know you think you are a detective where archaeology is concerned, but you are not a criminal investigator!” She placed her hand on his cheek. “Be careful and come home soon.”

She kissed him on his lips briefly and then she entered the front seat of the news van. It drove off down Fifth Avenue and disappeared into the night time traffic of the city. Jerimiah walked back to Madame Petrakis and Tom Tiege.

“So, what is for dessert?” Jerimiah asked.

“Vanilla, chocolate and strawberry ice cream. We ran out of money for all of this and ice cream is all we can afford to serve.” Cynthia grinned sheepishly and Tom chuckled. “Seriously, we have an array of desserts including ice cream for all pallets. But after dessert we will be asking everyone to leave as we do a damage assessment of the Metropolitan.”

Jerimiah frowned. “I was hoping you would allow me to stay, maybe help you do the assessment. I also wanted to do some research on the items in the exhibit that were taken as well.”

“Although I appreciate it, I will have to decline your request. I want to conclude this night and make sure the rest of museum is secure. Another time Mr. Clarke.” Cynthia’s voice was firm, even though she would have enjoyed having Jerimiah to do some investigative work, but it has been a long evening.

Tom Tiege escorted Madame Petrakis and Jerimiah Clarke back into the museum and into the main hall where all of the guests were sitting down and enjoying the dessert course of the evening. Jerimiah could not begin to count the different desserts being served. He did see ice cream of various flavors on several plates of the guests. He found an empty table and was served Green Tea Tempura Ice Cream, complete with flambé. As everyone ate their desserts, all with smiles, Madame Petrakis used a wireless microphone to speak to the crowd.

“You haven’t been the center of attention in years and now you relish it,” the voice from her mind said.

“You have been quiet lately,” she spoke back to it.

“Only to see how this evening would turn out. It had everything: Philanthropy, Art and Culture, Action and Adventure. All of that and a mystery to be solved later. It was better than prime time television,” the voice said amused.

“I am glad you enjoyed the evening. Now on to the final business at hand.” She cleared her throat and spoke to her guests.

“I want to thank all of you for attending this evening’s gala. I am sure we all gave this old place a great send off, despite the attempted robbery that has taken place this evening. I want all of you to consider what I have proposed in supporting the Foundation and the museum. The cultural exploits of our human society must always be protected on all fronts for our future generations. Even from those who will try to steal artifacts for their own personal gains.”

In response to her little speech, everyone filled the main hall with applause and cheers. Madame Petrakis took in the moment and reveled in it. She achieved a greater success on the evening than first anticipated. She also ensured the continued support of the Noble Petrakis Foundation, which was another goal for the evening.

“The accolades are well deserved, but I think is because of the dessert. They may be expecting free treats for their donations,” the voice chimed in her head.

Ignoring the voice, she continued. “I want to thank all of your for attending. Please drive home safely. Our security guards and the police will see to it you all get out of the lot safely. Good night and God bless.”

Again she was met with applause. She made her way through the crowd with many people stopping to shake her hand and offering congratulations. Once through the crowd she headed to the main stairway and spoke with several of her guards.

“Make sure everyone leaves and do a thorough sweep of the museum. Also, find out how our security system was bypassed. There must be some device they left behind. We will analyze it before we hand it over to the police. I will be in my office, report to me when all has been completed.” She did not wait for acknowledgement from the guards as she walked up the main stairs and then onto the fourth floor to her office. She needed quiet time to consider everything that had transpired in the evening.

From the Main Hall, Abraham Cromwell watched Madame Petrakis speak to her guards and then ascend the stairs like a queen would after she has retired for the evening. Presently, she was the queen and commanded so much respect that opposing her would not be a good idea. In fact, he would have to report to another woman and discuss the failures of this evening. Blame should not fall upon him; in fact, he provided all of the information necessary to pull off the heist without any hinderance. It was the men and woman hired to do the job that should get the blame. No matter, he stood up, collected his jacket and approached the guards at the front door.

“I wish to leave now,” he flatly stated to the two guards in front of the door.

Harris Browne and Michael Dale, the two guards stationed at the front door with Lian Zhou Zhu, watched him with curiosity. Cromwell’s posture expressed very little patience for being delayed or detained. With all that transpired in the evening, any further confrontations would not be looked on favorably.

“Of course sir,” Harris said as he opened the door for Cromwell.

“You did not come with a vehicle? The way to the carport is over—”

“No I walked,” Cromwell said as cutting off Michael. “Good night, gentlemen.” Without another word, the old art restorer left abruptly out door and headed north to 82ND Street.

Five minutes later, the other guests began to rise and suggest they wanted to go to their cars. As busy as it was in the beginning of the evening, security began to coordinate the guests’ departure in an orderly fashion. A few guards ran out and told the remaining police officers the guests were leaving and in accordance to the agreement for the evening, traffic would be slowed to allow the limousines and other cars to exit and merge with traffic. All of the guards in the museum focused on the front door, parking garage, and the main hall as to not let anyone wander through the Metropolitan.

Jerimiah waited a short while until he spotted the security guard Tom Tiede and approached. “Mr. Tiede. Do you mind if I run really quickly to the Petrakis Exhibit. I think I left my tablet in the room.”

Tom shook his head. “I can’t do that. We are about to close for the evening and no one is allowed into the museum.” He kept one eye on the crowd and one on Jerimiah.

“I understand. However I don’t retrieve it, a great deal of information I recorded from tonight, particularly dealing with the robbery, may be lost. I think Madame Petrakis and the police may need it for evidence.” Jerimiah hoped he was making a compelling argument to be let back into the museum, despite the fact he had an ulterior motive.

Tom looked around to a few other guards and for him, they could make an allowance. “All right, you have five minutes. You leave by walking out or carried out in cuffs, understood?”

Jerimiah hid his smile. “Yes, Mr. Tiege. I will not be long.” He jogged off and headed straight for the exhibit.

From the main hall leading to the garage, the place was abuzz with chatter from the guests as they were making their way down into the garage and then home for most of them, others to hotels in the city. Returning to almost the scene of the crime, he stopped in front of the golem that hid him from the thieves. Jerimiah would make the same plea to the golem again.

“Listen, my friend. I know you hid me from the thieves allowing me to record and send the information to the authorities, in which case they were captured. But I seek your protection again for this evening to hide me from the guards of this museum while continue to study these objects. I will understand if you say no.”

Looking inward to his feelings, Jerimiah felt a calming and even an inviting presence. A closer examination of this golem, as well as the others was definitely warranted. Of course he could ask Madame Petrakis for the time to examine them with no interruption from the public in the off hours, but his curiosity overrode his logic. Besides, he wanted to see those amulets again in the bronze chest.

The sounds from the main hall were dying down. All of the guests were nearly gone and soon the museum would only have the guards remain on patrol. Soon after, there would be no one inside. He wondered about his exit from the Metropolitan without tripping the alarms. He hoped he the strange power that shielded him from the thieves would grant him a safe passage of the museum. Jerimiah sat down behind the golem and waited. Hopefully, due to the evening’s excitement and the departure of the guests, Tom Tiege and the other guards would forget about him and assume he left for the evening. Crossing his fingers, Jerimiah waited patiently for silence and stillness to claim the museum.

CHAPTER 3

Old Revelations

Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York City, the Office of Madame Petrakis, October 15, 2012, 11:00PM

“No! I strongly disagree with this request, with all due respect Madame Petrakis. It will undermine the case we are building against your former guard and her accomplices!” Detective Brenson said while trying to keep his voice level. He rubbed his tired eyes as he sat in a comfortable red leather high back chair in the fourth floor office of Madame Petrakis. As a personal favor to Cynthia Petrakis, the detective returned to the museum to give his full accounting of the arrest and booking of five individuals who attempted a daring but foolhardy robbery during the Gala. He gazed upon the woman who single handedly brought this museum back to life after a few years of abandonment. On the one hand, this woman struck him as a powerful, competent individual not to be taken lightly. On the other hand, she was a stubborn woman who will not concede her point. Yet, she was gorgeous and intelligent enough to make some of the qualities attractive, as was the case with the detective.

“I understand that you need to all of the evidence and testimony available to build your case. You will have my full cooperation, along with my staff and the footage sent of the video. I imagine with this level of cooperation, none of these individuals should see the light of day,” Cynthia said as she sat up straight in a chair that was a bit more lavish than the seat occupied by her guest.

“True, but if we return the museum antiquities to you, the District Attorney will most likely down grade the charges from

grand larceny to attempted larceny, criminal trespass, criminal mischief, disorderly conduct, assault, possession of a firearm and a slew of minor charges. These will warrant possible bail and a court appearance to be determined at a later date.” He paused and shifted in his comfortable chair. “Their legal representative will then be able to fight to get more severe charges dropped and they will be able to go free with a slap on the wrist, if the judge does not set a high bail for them all.”

Cynthia Petrakis reclined slightly in her chair and thought for a moment. Sitting on top her lavishly carved oak desk was the portfolio in a black satchel bag in which the would-be thieves used to steal the ancient Greek parchment from their exhibit cases earlier in the evening. The exhibit was titled “Records of Olympus” and the artifacts detailed some of the thoughts and actions of the high gods of Mount Olympus. Some scholars who had examined the ancient writings, were able to translate some of the characters and words, attributed the documents as folk lore or the stuff of legends. Secretly, Cynthia knew there were more to the documentation than what is written on the surface.

As scrolls and other writings from ancient times continued to surface in the modern world, scholars, linguists and scientists worked to translate languages not spoken in the world for thousands of years. Some chronicle events history failed to capture. Others have deeper meanings: incantations into the realm of magic. Cynthia herself was a practical woman and believed in what she could identify with her five senses. Yet, in all of her years of living, she has seen many strange occurrences and situations to make her believe there is another realm beside that of Earth. Her scientific teams partially translated the scrolls the thieves attempted to steal and she, with her extensive knowledge of the occult, dead languages and history filled in what answers the scientists could not. Powerful incantations and spell lay hidden in these pages. Worse, it was incomplete as other pages exist somewhere in the world if they have not been destroyed. Cynthia Petrakis only had eleven pages in her possession. For now, she figured to display them on exhibit for the public to enjoy ancient

Greek writings. When she can acquire additional pages of this manuscript, they will be removed to her personal storage facility in Canada. Another in series of mental notes Cynthia made to herself to continue the search for the additional pages.

A couple of questions came to her mind: Who else could be interested in these ancient writings? Who could translate and understand its true meaning? These thieves served a purpose of possibly exposing the person or persons interested in such material. Leaving the pages in the hands of the police was a risk she was not willing to take. If they managed to corrupt Lian Zhou Zhu, paying off police officers was not beyond their influence.

Cynthia leaned forward and placed her elbows across the desk. "I appreciate that you have come here personally to relay this news to me; good, bad and indifferent. I also realize the predicament I am placing you in." She smiled broadly and then continued. "These pieces belong to my personal collection in which I have chosen to display here in the Metropolitan. I can't bear to think if they left my possession and were damaged or even lost in Police custody. What would be the ramifications of such an accident?"

Detective Brenson frowned as he knew where Cynthia was going with her statement. And what a situation he found himself in. With the evidence, he had enough to put the five thieves away for at least 10-15 years in federal prison. Without it, they would get 2-5 years in a minimum security prison. That may change when the criminal backgrounds on all of the suspects were concluded. A judge may grant them bail or remand them to custody. All will depend on the judge's disposition and their legal representative. If the charges get reduced and bail is granted, all of them may take flight and never be seen again. Perhaps this is what Madame Petrakis wanted, he thought.

"Okay. The NYPD will return the museum property to you," Detective Brenson said pushing the satchel closer to Cynthia Petrakis. "We will do all we can to hold these people in custody while the case builds against them."

“What if two of my security guards that were injured pressed assault charges as well?”

Detective Brenson rubbed his lower lip. “They can come to my office and I will personally take their complaint. I understand they refused to go to the hospital. If they did, it would be documented and that will make the case against the suspects stronger.”

“I will speak to them and see what they want to do. They are proud men. I think their egos are bruised more so than their persons.” Cynthia and Detective Brenson laughed briefly but understood the severity of the situation.

“I think we should look into who hired those men ourselves. Let the police do what they need to for their case. We can resolve the rest. Besides, who can stand against us?” the voice inside Cynthia’s mind urged. She agreed and would take care of the situation herself, ascertaining the identity of the person responsible for interfering with her evening gala. A plan began to form in the back of Cynthia’s mind.

“Detective Brenson, thank you for bringing back the museum artifacts undamaged. I trust you and the police department will do all it can to exercise justice on the five individuals.” Cynthia reached for the satchel and pulled it closer to her. As if they were playing a game of chess, she declared check and mate in her final move.

The detective relented and did not say another word about the pending case and stood up. Cynthia rose as well. “Then Madame Petrakis, we will keep you informed of the progress of the case.” Detective Brenson walked over to her side of the desk came within two feet of her.

“You know you still owe me a drink one evening. Do you know how many traffic tickets I had to fix for you and your staff as you restored this museum? And now me giving back critical

evidence of an ongoing investigation, which will warrant a dinner.” He smiled broadly.

Cynthia could not help but to admire the detective. Indeed he is a handsome man, aging very well to the point his looks were debonair, a term not even used in the 21ST century. So damn young, she thought to herself.

“Agreed. I will call you—”

“No,” Detective Brenson said cutting her off. “I will call you with the time, the place and the attire.”

He reached for her hand he kissed the back side of it. Yet another tradition lost to time. Cynthia was flattered, but still held her reserve. “Ok, I will keep my calendar open for you. But I insist we go somewhere private and have a nice, quiet dinner.”

She realized too late what she agreed to as Detective Brenson grinned. “Lucky for you I have a degree in making a good, private dinner. Until then.” He turned away and left her office in a rather slow pace, almost walking in a triumphant shuffle.

Detective Brenson was escorted by museum guards from the inner office of the fourth floor to the garage level where his department issued vehicle was parked. Thoughts of the conversation with Cynthia Petrakis replayed in his mind. Whether he thought it was eventful was a matter of point of view: he returned a key piece of evidence, but he had gained a closer relationship with Cynthia Petrakis. No one would ever believe he was able to secure a date with the wealthy, partially reclusive, and philanthropic billionaire. No one would believe it so he won’t tell anyone. Detective Brenson drove his police issued unmarked car back to the 19TH Precinct. At this late hour and the robbery attempt that occurred a few hours earlier, he hoped to be leaving before 1:00AM. One thing was certain, the night just became more and more interesting.

* * *

Cynthia thought about Detective Brenson since his departure from her office. Mixed feelings stirred within concerning the man with whom she has been taken with since they first met. She knew she was attractive and many men were attracted to her beauty. However, Detective Brenson, Dylan, was a man of some unique character and possibly worth exploring. Still, she would have to continue to practice reserve. Still the attention was nice.

“Now back to business,” she said aloud as she sat back at her desk. She pressed an area on the top the desk. The oak finish surface faded out and was instantly replaced with a multi-faceted display showing several different areas of the museum. Four screens closest to her at the bottom revealed information from the internet and other media sources. Ten minutes elapsed as she checked social media on the reviews of the night’s reopening gala. Many people had nothing but positive reviews about the evening, mostly from her guests. Other reviews were from the people who were outside and commenting on the excitement of the museum reopening, not to mention the invasion at the front door. Some people snapped images of the melee in the main hall of the Metropolitan. She frowned at that, but people will be people. Her main focus was on what the media outlets were reporting. The news reporters outside prior to the beginning of the gala reported the same thing: an electric buzz or spectacular showing of celebrities as they gathered for the reopening. Channel 6 caught her interest as she watched the entire footage of Samantha Reid’s reporting. It was the final report of the evening that Cynthia paused and studied her face for signs of stress.

“See, you are photogenic! Many would be jealous of your supernatural, flawless beauty!” the voice teased.

“True, but who would put up with an annoying presence as a trade off,” she whimsically replied.

After watching the reports and was satisfied, she turned her

attention to an image of Jerimiah Clarke and wondered about this unassuming archaeologist. Unassuming yet vaguely familiar to her. Deep feelings emerged about him as he was instrumental in bringing to her attention the museum robberies and thwarting this latest one. She made a mental note to have further meetings with him and maybe, establishing a deeper role in the Foundation. Cynthia even considered introducing him to her true self. She wondered if he would be able to handle it. Deep down she believed he could.

A swipe of her hand on the desk display causes all of the windows to be swept off the main screen. She brought up a digital keyboard in which she type in a few commands at the prompt for the Security Office. A moment later, the guard named Winston answered the video call at the chief of security's desk.

“Yes Madame Petrakis.”

“Winston, please have Daniela Harker bring all her security chiefs to my office so we can discuss tonight's events and lock down the museum for the night,” she ordered.

“Yes ma'am, we will be right there.” Winston terminated the video call. Cynthia sat in her office in silence for few minutes until the security officers came for a final meeting of the night.

* * *

Sitting quietly in the closed exhibit, Jerimiah slowly and cautiously extended his legs to relieve the cramp that developed in his left leg. He had been sitting behind the stone golem being protected by its “shadow” for nearly an hour since he bluffed his way past the security guard Tom Tiege. Several guards passed through the area, not looking for him but following their lock down procedures. For several minutes he listened to the footfalls of guards checking through the exhibits, radio transmissions between each other and their central command post, and conversations of events of the gala party. Anyone involved with event will have

some stories to tell. None more interesting than Jerimiah's because he was experiencing a supernatural phenomenon. Twice guards have entered, scanned the room and moved on. The aura the golem projected was a blessing to be sure.

The golem was his best friend at the moment. He wondered about the other three golems; just as large as the guardian but not as gentle. The guardian had what appeared to be a staff in its grip dressed in a simple robe and his face is appeared to be Native American, of the Cherokee tribe he surmised. Another possessed two heads shaped like a snake; resembled an Egyptian deity as it had long arms and stood up like a man. The third golem looked as if it is an armored female knight. She carried a long sword and gothic shield at its side, and a helmet revealing determined eyes for battle. The last one appeared to resemble a giant werewolf. A big hulking presence and if he were alive he could smash through any barrier or army set against him. This would be best accomplished not only by his great size but its large hands or paws to be politically correct.

Jerimiah could not figure out significance of the stone giants before him. Each one's origins appear to have come from different corners of the world and the craftsmanship was unlike anything he had ever seen. But the real prize was examining the chest. He waited a few more minutes until he was certain no more guards patrolled the museum. Inwardly he questioned the sanity of this idea, but he told himself a thousand times before he had been in worse situations.

* * *

Seven security officers sat in Madame Petrakis' office giving their final reports on this evening's Gala and the security measures. Eight chairs sat opposite her desk, noticeably absent was former security guard Lian Zhou Zhu, who was now sitting in a cell at the 19TH Police Precinct. None of the other security officers made mention of her, or of the part she played in the robbery. For the most part, Madame Petrakis would most likely speak to that affair.

The last officer reported on the status of the lock down and waited for their boss to speak.

“Ladies and gentleman, I will come right to the point. I am very upset at Miss Zhu for betraying her commitment to all of us. However, that is no reflection on all of you. I believe I have assembled a great staff, but as you know to err is human.” Her words seem to relax her staff as they nodded their heads and agreed. “I will have to take the blame for the overall security measures. I did not foresee this level of difficulty when throwing this party for the reopening. I wanted our guests to feel secure but not under constant, strict surveillance. Such a hindrance would have tightened the flow of donations into the Foundation. Well, live and learn. From now on we will practice more visible security measures for all events, including normal operations. And we will have the central command center fully manned at all times.”

Daniela Harker spoke up. “I think I can speak for all us here to say that we appreciate you having confidence in us. However, with the increased security measures and the absence of Lian, will you be sending more security officers to this location?”

“Yes, I have requests for some security officers to be transferred here because they live closer to the museum. This will work out for them as for everyone else,” Madame Petrakis answered.

“Since they said they live close, let’s put some cots in and let them sleep over night,” Joanna said with a laugh. Everyone in the office joined in as well.

“I have considered that, but I would have to agree to provide cable TV, refrigerators and other comforts of home,” Cynthia joined in on the joking. After a several moments of jovial delight, she turned her attention to Harker. “Harker, our system went down this evening. How did this happen?”

Harker leaned forward and placed a metallic bag carefully on

the desk. She unwrapped the bag to reveal the sophisticated device Samsone Zee installed on the junction box. Everyone in the room expressed interest and fascination with this device.

“This is how they were able to scramble the surveillance systems in the command center. They connected the video and ethernet feeds to send alternating signals on both feeds. Sometimes the image would freeze, replay the last few seconds or go black.” She picked up the device and turned it over for additional examination. “I have ordered newer security locks on the junction control boxes throughout the museum. When you approved the order, I will have it in place in less than twenty four hours.”

Cynthia raised her right eyebrow in fascination. “Good. And how did they beat the alarms on the cases?”

“Similar to the device here, they managed to bypass the alarm by continuing the circuit into a microchip or some other device. Again, we can redo all of the cases and exhibit security systems in a few days so this will never happen again.” Harker was about to take the device when Cynthia stopped her.

“Leave this with me. I will have the police analyze this,” Cynthia declared but deep down she had no intention of bringing it to Dylan’s attention.

Harker nodded and took her seat. “When we upgrade the security protocols, do you want to close the museum for a few days so we can test it?”

“Check the calendar, we can do it after Thanksgiving. Everyone will have returned by then and we can afford to be closed a few additional days.” Harker and the other security officers made note on their digital tablets.

“All right everyone, if there is nothing to report, please place these artifacts back in to their display cases and we can retire for the evening.”

Tom Tiege stood up and took the satchel from the desk Madame Petrakis pushed it toward him. The other security guards rose from their chairs and headed for the door. Madame Petrakis walked over to the guards before they left through the door and asked a final question. “Tom, did you or anyone on your staff happened to see Mr. Clarke, the archaeologist I invited, leave the museum?”

“The last time I saw him was earlier this evening. He said that he left something in one other exhibits and I allowed him to back for it when we started escorting the guests out.” He turned to the other guards present and they shrugged their shoulders as to not confirming if they saw him.

“I am sure he is long gone. Thank you ladies and gentleman. I will remain here and do some work. When I am done I will use the service elevator and have my driver take me home.” Madame Petrakis made herself look busy as the guards left her in the office alone.

Looking at the displays on the top of her desk, two guards replaced the ancient Greek documents carefully and correctly in their display cases. Several minutes later, she saw the last of the security personnel take a service elevator to the parking garage and left the Metropolitan. At long last the museum was empty and Cynthia Petrakis was ready to get on with the work she mentioned. Only it would not be worked confining to her desk. And finally, after a long eventful as well as stressful evening, she can let herself go.

Cynthia Petrakis stood behind her oak desk with her fingertips caressing the surface and she concentrated. Or more to the point, she just released. Her skin went from a nice olive tone to a dark gray color. The tips of her fingernails grew from their original manicured length to an inch and a half. These nails were not your normal human female nails but made of sharp, harden bronze. She also began to breathe more freely as she opened her mouth as fangs

protruded. These fangs were well taken care of, not jagged or broken, well-manicured for the type of being she was.

Cynthia then carefully reached into her eyes and pulled out the contact lenses. Everyone who has spoken to her looked into eyes would think they are the prettiest brown eyes ever seen. If the only knew what truly laid behind those fake eye lenses. She reached into her desk draw and placed the eye lenses into a shiny silver monogrammed case. Blinking several times, the feeling in her true eyes calmed and then settled from being behind false lenses for so long. These new eyes are black as night, save a jagged, yellow slit in each eye. These eyes were could be considered the most ghastly weapons of destruction. These eyes were sought after by many in a past life to stop armies in their tracks and can bring kingdoms to their knees.

Finally, the individual strands of her long black hair began to come together and form tentacles but not tentacles, snakes! A writhing mane of snakes! All of them had yellow glowing eyes and looked like black vipers, twisting and hissing in agitation of its wearer. One snake, white in its color and extending from behind the right ear, turned back toward the snakes to calm them down. The being known as Madame Cynthia Petrakis was gone. What stood there behind the desk was what history referred to as a Gorgon.

With her transformation complete, she walked out from behind her desk began to looking at the walls of her office. Her eyesight afforded the ability see in complete darkness or through any object; therefore making her the most dangerous hunter known. Man, woman or beast would be stopped in their tracks by turning to stone if they gazed into those eyes. No one could hide from this creature of myth. Even her other senses were dozen times more powerful than an ordinary man. She used these senses to peer into every corner of the museum and then to inspect the area in which the would be thieves stole the incomplete manuscripts of Olympus. Afterwards she would inspect the chamber in which she had her private collection on display. She did not have the time or the

vision to determine how she wanted to present these artifacts for public display. She merely used the area as a storage area and instructed security to make the exhibit off limits. She was thankful nothing was taken as a terrible price would have to be paid if even one item was removed.

The Gorgon was about to leave her office when her senses picked up someone in the same area she was to investigate. Using her vision, she was able to look through floors of concrete, steel and other material to identify the person who managed to slip through all of her security.

“Jerimiah Clarke. I thought he left the Metropolitan earlier. What is he doing here?” she asked out loud. The reply came not from within her mind but from the white snake in her hair of living snakes.

“Let’s go and ask him. But you should be more diplomatic. He was instrumental in preventing the robbery this evening,” the white snake responded. Before when it was hidden, it spoke to the Gorgon as an internal voice. Now revealed, the white snake can respond either verbally or internally. Only the Gorgon can hear the entity voice an opinion.

“I intend to find out why he is here, diplomatic or no,” she said with a bit of annoyance in her voice.

The white snake replied, “Well, consider that the Old Chief has been hiding him during the sweep of our security staff. You know he will protect truth and reveal lies. So why did he protect Jerimiah? This is what we need to know.”

Without responding, the Gorgon removed her stylish heels, revealing toes with bronze tipped nails, and walked swiftly to the Petrakis exhibit on the first floor. She arrived there in less than a minute.

* * *

“Amulets with crystal cores, scrolls, bound tomes, sealed wooden boxes and stone carvings. These are peculiar objects to place on display, but this assortment does not suggest a particular theme for an exhibit,” Jerimiah summarized as he spoke quietly into his tablet and documenting his findings. “There is also a kite in the shape of a bird. It looks ancient, based on the materials used to make it. I cannot determine if this was someone’s keepsake chest or a storage container. The larger question is this: Does this truly belong to Cynthia Petrakis? Did she inherit these all of these items? Or did she simply acquire them for various sources?”

Jerimiah looked at the other crates in the dim light and decided to examine their contents. He stopped when a golden amulet with a clear crystal center caught his eye. His hand hovered over it and he felt a tingling sensation. Curiosity compelled him to touch it and that moment, a power like none he ever felt surged through him.

Within the span of seconds, Jerimiah’s mind’s eye absorbed thousands of images and sounds. From where they came he did not know. The rush of mental stimulus would be enough to place someone in a coma for months, even years; yet the archaeologist barely managed to breath during what appeared to be memories flooding into his mind. He saw images of mountains, fields, people and animals. Some of which he could identify from his own memories and research, but most was unknown to him. However, it felt as if he knew them personally. He heard people talking in different languages, incoherent at first, but then was able understand each and every one of them. Finally, he saw an island in the Mediterranean; it looked to be deserted at first but then he saw people arriving in ships. Refugees of some sort, they made a life for themselves and thrived at doing so. But there was a mountain that rose from its shores, a large cave entrance. Someone or something lived there and it led a solitary life. Jerimiah, immersed in the vision, strove to see who or what was in the cave. Slowly the image brought him closer. He could swear he could hear the wind blowing, feel the ocean spray on his face, but it was the sound of snakes that caught his attention. Dozens of them

hissed in alarm but still he could not see anything. And then he saw the origin of the snakes...

* * *

The Gorgon moved very swiftly through the Museum and within less than a minute, from the fourth floor down to the second floor, she was standing at the entrance of the Petrakis Exhibit, where Jerimiah was going through the contents of her bronze chest. She sharpened her hearing because he heard him speaking, recording his findings on his tablet.

The Gorgon was about to enter but stopped short. Jerimiah's hand touched one of the amulets and a brief flash of light filled the dimly lit room. She knew what that meant.

"He could not be a descendant from the island of Ieró. I thought all of their descendants, have died through the ages. Is this possible?" She asked the white snake internally.

"It is indeed possible," it answered. "That would explain why the guardian shrouded him. He was protecting the descendants, like you created him to do in the first place."

The Gorgon smiled. It was true, on an island hundreds of years ago, escapees from a young Roman Empire settled on an uncharted island in the Mediterranean Sea. For generations, the people were able to live a life happy free from tyranny. Unfortunately, these escaped souls could never return to the country of their origin for fear of being recaptured or death.

The light from the amulet died down, as if it was complete in doing whatever it was tasked to do when Jerimiah touched it. She moved directly behind him.

Jerimiah blinked a few times and shook his head to clear it. The rush of mental stimuli was almost too much for his brain to handle, yet he was glad he was still upright. He noticed he was

now holding the amulet in his hand, clutching it intensely. As if his whole body had to restart every system one by one. His hands slowly obeyed the command to place the amulet back in its original position. Then his vision began to clear. His ears, unfortunately, kept hearing a ringing noise. No, more like a hissing noise. In the vision he heard the same noise, snakes hissing. He shook his head to clear it again, but the sound was still present in his mind. Or he thought it was. Perhaps it is a side effect of the shock to his brain.

Looking at other amulets, he decided best not to touch them. The other items in the chest, the armaments and even the golems took his new focus. He would have to make an opportunity to examine them when he would get Madame Petrakis' permission. Coming up with a plausible explanation would have to be ingenious. Jerimiah made sure all of the items were back in its original place when a feeling of dread came over him. The sound of snakes was louder than before. He soon realized that the sound was not in his mind, but coming from behind him and growing louder. A feeling that someone else was in room made him freeze. It was not coming from the golem but right behind him. Another guard he thought. He was about to close the lid of the chest when he looked into the reflective surface of the lid and saw something that could literally turn him to stone.

The Gorgon approached slowly. Her face was expressionless as she moved into view of her reflection and stopped arm's length from the trespasser. Jerimiah was horrified and fascinated at the same time. Could it be that when he touched the amulet he unleashed a guardian curse? Why didn't golem protect him? Was this an illusion, a side effect of the amulet's power?

"Why did I let my curiosity get the best of me," Jerimiah groaned. He looked at the reflection again. Something that was considered a myth was less than five feet away. If he could move a muscle, he would run as fast as he could to get out. However, running through the museum would only set off alarms, bringing the police back to the museum. Circumstances of Jerimiah's

actions would lead to escalation in which he would not be able to explain. Additionally, this creature would either try to hide and wait to strike or just destroy any who would look into her eyes.

Her eyes, he thought. He looked at her reflection and strangely enough, there were no eyes in the reflection. Jerimiah remembered the myth about Gorgons, how if anyone looks into their horrible eyes, they would be turned to stone. But the reflection of a Gorgon would not harm you.

“Thank God that part of the myth was right,” he said to himself.

Not sure if the creature behind him heard what he said, its facial expression changed from an expressionless face to a common feminine face of disappointment. She stepped a bit closer.

“I thought you went home Mr. Clarke. It disturbs me that you would hide here in the dark like a possible thief. I hope you are not planning on stealing from me,” the Gorgon spoke in a deep, throaty voice.

“How do you know who I am,” he responded in a barely masculine voice. He could not believe he was panicking so much, but then again meeting a monster was not an everyday occurrence.

“Really, you don’t recognize me? You greeted me earlier this evening. You made me aware of the other museum robberies. And you sent me the video evidence that led to the capture of the five people who attempted to steal museum property, my property!”

Jerimiah looked hard at the reflection. The face, although grayish in color and the snakes are about her head, looked familiar. His eyes widened even more in astonishment.

“Cynthia Petrakis?” he asked.

In a voice he was accustomed to hearing she responded,

“Madame Cynthia Petrakis.” She smiled and her face took on a more human look, blank eyes and snakes notwithstanding.

Jerimiah could not believe the creature behind him was Madame Cynthia Petrakis! She was mingling with people, talking, smiling and enjoyed being center of attention; now she stood behind him as a Gorgon.

“I think it be best if we continue this conversation in my office on the fourth floor, room 400A. Come there in five minutes and we can make sense of this whole situation,” the Gorgon urged. She turned and started to walk away.

Jerimiah watched in the smooth reflective surface the Gorgon walking away. Still in imminent danger, he decided not turn around to watch her walk away. The best move for him is to keep staring into the reflection.

“Why five minutes? Can I not walk behind you?”

“One, I have to turn off the security system and provide you with a safe passage to the fourth floor. Two, you need to get calm and pack up my bronze storage chest the way you found it. Three, I need to put on a fresh pot of coffee so we can talk.” She stopped and turned her head slightly but not to reveal her eyes. “Besides, you won’t be able to keep up.”

Then she disappeared, running fast through the museum, fast enough not to trip the motion sensors and other monitoring devices. Soon the Gorgon was back in the office and at her desk. Looking at the display on her desktop, she brought up the museum security protocol and a floor plan of the Metropolitan exhibit lighting grid. Within a minute, a lighted path showed the way from the Petrakis Exhibit to room 400A. The cameras linked up to monitor Jerimiah and to follow his progress. While she waited, the Gorgon moved about her office and prepared fresh perk coffee as promised.

Jerimiah wondered if he was going to die a horrible death. Certainly, this creature will kill him for trespassing. If not by her, Samantha, waiting at her place, will definitely kill the archaeologist and bury him so no one would find him for a thousand years. What started to be a fascinating adventure was turning out to be a dreary epitaph. Lights came on in the exhibit, illuminating for the first time the Petrakis exhibit. The room was larger than he thought, but then again it was dark. He noticed more unopened crates along the back wall. The lights did not come on because he could inspect them; his host was waiting for him. He gathered his belongings, closed the lid of the chest and made his way to the office.

It was strange to see the museum at night after hours. A strange quietness hung in the air like a graveyard. The museum was split between light and darkness as an uneasy feeling began settle over him. Jerimiah tried not to think of any terrible things that could be awaiting him. He made his way to the fourth floor, via a stairway access, and entered the outer office leading into Madame Petrakis inner office. The smell of coffee brewing caught his attention as he slowly entered.

Madame Petrakis, the Gorgon, was seated behind her desk waiting for Jerimiah. She wore a thin, light blue cloak and the hood covered her hair of snakes. Her eyes were also covered with designer shades. The lenses appeared to be blackened as to not allow anyone to catch a glimpse of her true eyes. From what he knows of the myth, a glimpse was all it took. On the desk were two mugs, one that read, "I heart NY" and another that had the logo of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He guessed which one would be his. Additionally, a small bowl of brown sugar and pouring jar of creamer were placed should desire cream and sugar. She beckoned Jerimiah to enter and take a seat in one of the two leather chairs in front of her desk. The sound of a stainless steel coffee pot churned and bubbled as it prepared a special blend of exotic coffee. The smell was pleasing to both.

Once Jerimiah settled and got comfortable, the Gorgon spoke.

“So, Mr. Clarke, we have ourselves over a barrel, sort to speak. You have been caught trespassing in my museum, attempted robbery and criminal mischief.” She paused and realized she sounded like a police officer. She changed her tone. “And you know something deep and personal about me only a few people on this planet know. I cannot get rid of you as that will pose too many questions and I remember how you have been instrumental in helping me this evening. So what are we to do about this?”

Jerimiah took a long time to answer. He made sure that his choice of words would not land him in any deeper trouble. And he also wanted to sound confident in his reply. “Well, I figure that since I was instrumental in capturing those would be thieves, perhaps I could help you determine why they targeted the Metropolitan to steal documents in the ancient Greek exhibit. Then I think I should have the honor of knowing who you are and what is going here.”

He paused, swallowed and continued. “Before you turn me to stone.”

A puff of steam blew out from the coffee maker, a sign indicating the process of coffee brewing was done. The Gorgon rose from her chair and retrieved the pot. She poured for Jerimiah first and then for herself. They added the desired amount of cream and sugar to their coffee and tasted. Ironically, both were satisfied and set their mugs down.

“Jerimiah,” the Gorgon explained calmly. “First, I have no intention of turning you to stone. That would be cruel. Second, I considered revealing this part of myself to you but at a later date as I was not prepared for this meeting. I have suspected from the efforts you put forth this evening you are a man I can trust. I wanted to introduce you to some of my other projects and ambitions slowly but it seems that is not the case now. Still, I feel I can trust you with more of my secrets.”

“Anyone who brews the best coffee I ever tasted in the world

can't be all bad," he commented jokingly. "But you can trust me to keep your secrets." The archaeologist did not want to add the fact that she held his life in the palm of her hand and can extinguish it with a mere look.

"Fair enough. I guess I should grant you an impromptu interview so you can ascertain the information you seek," the Gorgon said as she took another long sip of her coffee.

Jerimiah brought out his tablet and worked on it for a minute, moving files into encrypted folders and opening a new folder for the Q&A session he was about to undergo. So many questions ran through his mind, but he needed to sort them out. The Gorgon sat back in her leather chair and watched Jerimiah work. Using her special vision, she was able to peer into his body and see his respiratory and circulation was calmer than before. She feared the sudden appearance of her true form behind him would cause him to collapse from sheer fright. She has been known to do that to her enemies before petrifying them or doing worse to them. Luckily, Jerimiah was healthy young man and seemed like he could handle anything thrown at him.

"My first question I have for you is this, who are you?" he asked as he set up his tablet to video record the interview.

The Gorgon did not mind in the slightest. She took a long moment to answer and then, as if the words would slide out between her lips easily, very calmly she said, "I am the Gorgon Medusa!"

CHAPTER 4

Herstory, Part One – The First Death

The truth hit Jerimiah Clarke square in his face. He could not believe what he had just heard. He could not believe his eyes as to who was sitting across from him.

Medusa, the Gorgon!

All of the literature, movies and recreations were true to the fact that this creature, supposedly to have lived in the ancient times of Greece, was now living in the modern world of the 21ST century. Jerimiah could not believe it, yet the evidence was sitting right across from him, in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, in New York City, in the year 2012, serving him very good coffee. She took another sip of her exotic, blended coffee where Jerimiah took another large gulp and gently set the mug down. He looked at her and simply said, “This cannot be true!”

Medusa smiled, “I assure you Mr. Clarke, I am the Gorgon Medusa. I’ve been alive well over 3000 years, counting the years from when I was born, cursed, beheaded and restored to life.” She paused for moment and rubbed the base of her neck. “When I was murdered, some of my memory is a bit, I would say, dark. It is like fragments of a nightmare. I remember seeing faces of people I have petrified, but not recollecting who they were. My head was used as a weapon; hence the reason why many sought to kill me. In a sense, I was the weapon of mass destruction in the ancient times.”

“Even today I imagine,” Jerimiah surmised. It was true. All of the technology, smart bombs and chemical warfare cannot compare

with the eyes of the Gorgon.

Medusa nodded in agreement. “This is one of the reasons why I have hidden my true identity. Can you imagine what would happen if it was generally known that a Gorgon walks the streets of New York City? The destruction can be only parallel to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.”

Silence passed between them for a few moments. She used her vision to see into Jerimiah’s body and realized he was calming down from the initial shock he had experienced and the polite conversation they were having. A thought blazed in her mind about the amulet he touched. With the power that flowed through him, he should have been unconscious but he was not. This archaeologist was an extraordinary being, worth investigation as he was investigating her. A mutual sharing of facts and information would benefit them both.

“More coffee?” she asked.

“Yes please,” Jerimiah answered. Both mugs were refilled, mixed to acquired taste and conversation continued.

“So where would you like me to begin?” Medusa asked from behind her raised mug.

Jerimiah thought for a moment, not knowing how to answer the question. And then it hit him. “Well, the depictions in the movies and television shows, they were not at all accurate as far as the visual accounting of your form and demeanor were they?”

Luckily, Medusa’s eyes were hidden from Jerimiah’s eyes. They flashed yellow in annoyance and her snakes hissed. She calmed herself down and even laughed. “No, they are incorrect. These movies make it easy to dispense with me by walking up behind me and taking my head. It is very difficult to sneak up on me, with several dozen eyes watching out over every direction possible. My skin, although soft to the touch, is hard and nearly

impenetrable.”

“Like stone?”

“No, more like marble,” she responded with a smile. “More like a tough hide. Swords, axes and any other edged blades would not be able to cut, much less sever any part of me, including my mane of snakes. It would take a well forged blade and someone with out of this world strength to lacerate me, much less sever any part of me.”

“What of enchanted or vortal blades? Do such things exist?” The question slipped out of his mouth as he realized such a question was foolish. A mystical being is sitting right across from him.

“Yes they do exist. They are difficult to make and the blades are only good for one or two strikes. Such blades don’t exist in this time and I thank God no one has the knowledge or power to do so.”

“But such knowledge is obtainable if you can find any ancient scrolls and other texts that have survived the centuries,” Jerimiah surmised as he scratched his chin to think.

Medusa smiled again. “And if you have the ability to translate the ancient knowledge, you can be extremely dangerous. One could change the course of the world if they had all of the right ingredients.”

“Are you saying magic and mystic arts can make a comeback in this age of technology?”

“What is magic? If you take a smartphone to any ancient culture, they would label you a god, a shaman or devil. Magic is the ability to reshape the physical reality to suit your needs. Alchemy is the basis of all magic, as it were. You see me sitting before you, this is alchemy. I am the combination of a human

female and a demon from Hell. The so-called gods used their knowledge to create this creature you see here before you and thousands of other mutations. Many more such creatures exist in the world. But many of them are not as you may think they are. For example, some of the movies portray me as a dragon demon. That is closer to my Gorgon sister Stheno than me.”

“Wait, there are three of you? Mythology got that much right.” Jerimiah asked.

“Yes, myself, Stheno, the eldest Gorgon was the first experiment if you will. Euryale was next. Both are hideous creatures and best used as sentinels and guardians. But you need someone to control them.” She gestured to herself. “And this is where I came in. My task was to control my Gorgon sisters while guarding one of the entrances to the realm of Hades. Long ago, on the island we inhabited, there were temple ruins. It had long since been abandoned, transformed by the earthquakes and erosion of the seas, a combination of caves and manmade structures. It is the perfect environment to welcome trespassers who dare come to our home.”

“I think you are scaring Jerimiah again,” the demon said within the mind of Medusa. “His heart rate is increasing. I don’t think coffee and an interview with a Gorgon is a good combination.”

Medusa looked at her guest and the demon was right. Jerimiah was indeed nervous and his vitals were steadily on the rise. She had to relax him in such a way he could live past tonight.

“I must apologize. Sometimes, I revert back to the demon guardian when I did not mind killing those who foolishly came searching for my head or the items I was guarding.”

“And when you were murdered, were you guarding treasure or your life?” Jerimiah boldly asked.

“Ironically, I was guarding my life, but that incident did not

happen as many would think.”

“How so?”

Medusa leaned back in her chair and with her bronze nails, tapped the mug mindlessly as she recounted the events prior to her death. She turned her head toward Jerimiah who was on the edge of his seat waiting for a good story to be told.

“I will tell you if you promise to keep these secrets about me to yourself. Not even your loved ones must ever know about my existence. I have worked so hard to keep it a secret, let alone make sure any clues did not point back to me. In this day and age of technology and information, such things in the wrong hands can be more deadly than my eyes.”

Jerimiah nodded at the statement. She was right, what would the government do, or any government do, if a monster from Greek mythology was alive and well. A whole new arms race may materialize and the world may suffer for it. He then frowned for a minute.

“What is wrong?” Medusa asked.

“Nothing, just that my girlfriend is the same woman you let into the Metropolitan this evening and had those incredible interviews with you.”

In genuine astonishment, Medusa’s eyes widened. Luckily the shades still covered her eyes. “I thought there was something between you two. How long, may I ask?”

“Five years. She is incredible but our careers keep us, sometimes, at different ends of the world and even in our relationship at different points of view. But still, we love each other and I can’t think to keep this from her.”

Medusa nodded and then said simply, “Treat it as a non-

disclosure agreement. She will understand that.”

“I guess, but I would like to share this revelation with her, but I do not know how she would react.”

“I am sure in time, we can tell her. It is that I do not trust her. I do not trust her profession completely.”

“Is that why you have done so few interviews under the guise of Cynthia Petrakis? Concerned someone may want to investigate more than they should?”

“Sort of like yourself Mr. Clarke?” Medusa shot back.

Jerimiah shrank into his chair embarrassed for a moment and then perked back up. “I understand. This will remain between us.” He shifted in his seat to get comfortable.

“What you have to remember about history, mythology and religion, facts are often distorted to suit the intent of the person who is entrusted with the information to pass on to the people. Whether they are servants, village inhabitants or for future trustees, guardians of information are often times tempted to omit or distort events as they have transpired. I have never done so nor will I ever. What I will tell, in all things, will be as they have happened. Besides, I have a photographic memory. Even before I was cursed and driven from the temple of Athena, I can remember all the way back to my family in a small village when I was three years old. This memory I have can be a burden and a blessing. I can remember every day when I served as high priestess, the time with my Gorgon sisters, the years since the island to five minutes ago. I have so many stories to pass on and recount, except for the time of course my head was severed but I do remember the faces.” She leaned forward. “Which do you wish to hear about first?”

The archaeologist had a moment of pause. Over three thousand years of history from a being that may have experienced some of mankind’s pivotal moments. But only one event came to mind.

“Tell me about the day you were murdered, the day Perseus severed your head from your shoulders.”

“Of course, that would be an ideal place to start, since any information about me centers around that incident. First let me say that Perseus was not a powerful demigod or some fearless warrior. He was a scared boy and did not have any skills as a warrior. His help came from the Zeus and Athena. That part is correct, but the events and circumstances were far different.” She paused, took a deep breath. “On a dreary day off the coast of North Africa...”

North African Island Region, Realm of Hades, 1545 BC

In the ancient days of Greece, the Olympic gods held dominion over the realm of Greece or more specifically the kingdom of Greece. However, most rulers and warlords would like to believe they were the ones who could decide the fate of their subjects as easily as the gods themselves. Such thought was blasphemy to the gods of Mount Olympus and were dealt with accordingly.

One such case of blasphemy was the case of the Medusa, former high priestess to Athena. She was once a beautiful woman sworn to a vow of chastity and to perform the duties of high priestess in her temples. Not only was she exiled to the desolate isles of North Africa, but cursed with the ability to turn all living beings into stone by looking into her eyes. Hissing snakes replaced her once beautiful black hair; cold gray skin replaced her flawless soft, skin and bronze nails protruded from the tips of her fingers; truly a monster to behold with deadly results. This has been the consequence of the curse and exile for 150 years; a curse Medusa wished it would come to an end day by day.

Living in banishment on a desolate isle, she considered it could be worse torture a being could endure, had it not been for the company of the other two Gorgon creatures who were just as deadly as Medusa: Stheno, the first Gorgon created by the lesser gods of Olympus. She was the exemplification of terror! She partially looked like a human female from the neck down to her

stomach. Below she possessed the body of a serpent with a split tail and stingers at each end. Her hands were gnarled and the tips of fingers sprouted bronze claws capable of ripping flesh from bone in one stroke. She also possessed a mane of hissing, poisonous vipers. The difference between her and Medusa is Stheno was capable of flight due to her large wings with a span of twenty feet. Her eyes had the ability to kill, but not turn one to stone. When someone looked into those hateful, burning eyes, the victim would burn from within, spontaneous combustion of the flesh leaving the charred remains of the victim frozen still in pain. Only the eyes, which Stheno happily feasted on, remained in the ashen remnants of the skull. If this deadly monster did not have enough defenses at her disposal, her skin, smooth as marble, excreted acid from her pores and burn as fire to any that was foolish enough to touch her. Stheno also possessed two mouths on her left and right side of her face. Both can speak two different thoughts at once, mostly thoughts of death and battle.

The next Gorgon, just as deadly as Stheno, was Euryale the malformed. The distinguishing feature of this Gorgon is the shape of her head: the right side is larger than the left. The right eye was the size of an almond whereas the left the size of grapefruit. These odd eyes caused the flesh of those who look at them to boil, blister and melt off the bones, leaving a bloody, motionless skeleton. At times Euryale will crawl on all fours, her hind legs shaped like that of a wolf, her forearms shorter than her legs, giving her the natural ability to walk upright with ease. Her wings resembled bat wings and she was capable of sustained flight. Euryale's tactic when attacking trespassers would be to barrel into them, knocking them into the ground and engaging them in physical combat. More animal and brawler than her other two sisters, but none the less deadly, Euryale was considered to also be a gentle creature, if not encouraged or antagonized into violence.

Medusa, regarding her sisters, stirred a large boiling pot of vegetables. Since being exiled, her eating habits drastically changed. As a human high priestess, she was used to eating the best cuts from wild and captive game animals, fishing in the seas

near the temple. However, with her ability to turn anything or anyone to stone by looking into their eyes, eating meat was not possible if she prepared it herself. The only animals that dared exist on the island with Gorgons were insects and rats. Fish were scarce along the shore and Medusa refused to take up eating vermin and pestilence. Those delicacies were reserved for Euryale and sometimes Stheno when she desired to eat.

“One hundred, fifty years,” she muttered to herself as she stirred and added herbs to the boiling mix. It was one hundred years since Athena banished Medusa from her temple and forced her to be the guardian of these other Gorgon monsters. One hundred, fifty years of relative solitude as anyone who dared come to the island was mutilated, incinerated or turned to stone. The courtyard of the Gorgon’s lair littered with the bodies of hundreds of men coming in search of a Gorgon’s head as a prize, monuments to their futile efforts.

Medusa shrugged her shoulders and considered it could be worse as she could have been all alone with no one to speak to, except for a graveyard of statues. But she took her company in stride. For she knew with her curse came with outwardly powers of savagery, the ability to stop anyone in their tracks was a power even the gods had to envy. But it begged the question, why would they give this power away and not keep it for themselves?

“Why do the gods exist only to be curse on all things?” Medusa muttered over boiling kettle. She woke a sleeping Stheno, who uncoiled herself, yawned with her to vicious mouths and looked over to Medusa.

“Are you still pining away about the gods, dear sister? I would think after a century, you would come to grips with it,” Stheno hissed from her right mouth, her left mouth cackled.

“Yes Stheno, it has been over a century since I came here to be steward over you and Euryale. What is to become of the greatest destructive power this world will ever know? Is it to simply rot on

this isle and pick off foolish men who dare to set foot on our province?"

"You are right, what is to become of us if we do not seize the world for our own. You know the way to Olympus, you can take your revenge and the world will be yours." Stheno raised herself in encouragement, her serpent rasping in agreement.

Medusa looked at Stheno with a cold stare. "For several years we have attempted to get off of this island with no results. Flight, sailing, even digging our way to freedom has proved useless! The gods, however imperfect as they truly are, know how to trap any being in their web of fate. Even humans are held more deeply in their sway than we are."

"But you know their ways, Medusa. You know how to beat them! For why else would that bitch Athena give you more power than she has herself? You are meant to destroy her!"

In yet another series of arguments that went nowhere, Medusa said nothing for a long while as she tasted her vegetable stew. Satisfied, she then prepared a bowl for herself and began to eat. The others never partook of Medusa's stew; their diet was unusual to say the least. Euryale seemed to constantly eat whereas Stheno had been known to go without eating for months on end. Medusa sat on her small cot and ate a few more mouthfuls before she spoke again.

"My sister, until we figure a way of releasing ourselves from this island, the goals of revenge and conquest will have to wait. It is not the gods I fear, but humans. In great numbers they pose a grave threat to us. Though we can slaughter them by the hundreds, they can eventually swarm and overpower us. We could be buried underneath their stone, ashen and skeletal remains and eventually die." Taking a few more sips, Medusa continued. "Besides, we need to find a way of separating the gods from their blind, naive worshipping humans and then we can rule the world!"

“Find a way soon my sister. I cannot wait another one hundred years before you act!” Stheno hissed.

Medusa raised one eyebrow at Stheno who had both of her mouths open in protest of Medusa’s plan. She quickly shrank back in her corner when the look of disapproval was evident on Medusa’s face. If looks could kill, and in the case of the Gorgons it was true, Medusa would slay Stheno a dozen times over. None of them knew why when they stared at each other their respective Gorgon’s gaze did not harm the other. All the better they supposed. Truly, Medusa was not in the mood for another argument about the decimation of the gods. If their time was to come, the plan must be infallible and executed without hesitation.

The sound of claws scraping stone entered the high cave in which the sisters shared refuge. Euryale climbed into space with several dead rats and in her hand and one large hawk clenched between her jaws. She tossed the decapitated rats to her sister Stheno, who smiled and began eating right away. “Look at what I caught, a messenger hawk from a faraway kingdom! It must have gotten lost in the storm from last night. Poor thing.” Euryale bit into its feathered torso as she tossed the message to Medusa. She unfurled it and read the message.

“It is just a message from a King Ballor to Queen Felna. It seems this hawk was to deliver a message of peace and mutual trade. Well, it looks like both of these nations will soon be going to war.” Stheno and Medusa shared a laugh as they continued to eat. Euryale looked at them in confusion but just kept eating the hawk.

“So what did I miss while I was hunting?” Euryale asked as she spat out brown feathers from the hawk.

“The same old argument: When will we destroy the gods,” Medusa answered.

Euryale sighed and then said, “I am beginning to agree with Stheno, Medusa. We are powerful enough to stop any power set

against us. Tell me you relish staying here on this island with us. I know you harbor a deep affection for your two sisters.”

Medusa had always known of the curious personalities of the demons she shared refuge with. Stheno always plotted and waited for an opportunity; Euryale sided with whoever made the most persuasive argument but expressed no opinion of her own. Medusa herself was the true “brains of the outfit”. She was getting tired of the same old conversation. Killing off warriors, mercenaries and fortune seekers was becoming repetitive and uneventful. Mortal men could not stand against one Gorgon, let alone three. Deep down she began to waver. “Perhaps the two of you are right. I believe the time is upon—”

A psychic tremor flowed through Medusa that made her drop her bowl of soup. She stood up quickly and walked to the entrance of the cave. She looked down into the temple from the mountain they inhabited with her Gorgon eyes and saw only the stoned statues of their victims. She then gazed at the beach and then to the sea. Her sight revealed nothing but the feeling was undeniable. Something summoned her attention like never before.

“What is it Medusa?” asked Stheno as she swallowed another headless rat.

“I hear my name on the winds. Someone seeks to challenge me. I smell arrogance and fear at the same time. A fool, a young boy, travels to seek my counsel in death, I will oblige him!” Upon hearing Medusa’s comments of an impending visitor, Stheno and Euryale howled in anticipation of a battle. Even Medusa had to smile, although she has been cursed, the prospect of destroying yet another minion of the gods appealed to her.

* * *

Thirteen days later, Medusa, Stheno and Euryale patrolled the temple courtyard waiting for their potential quarry. Stheno and Euryale, once excited about a possible good kill, were presently

bored.

“When is this boy, as you say, coming for you Medusa? Are you sure it was your name on the winds? Or are you finally going mad?” Stheno’s comments caused Medusa to let lose a growl in agitation. She was right, where was this boy?

Then, the sound of footsteps reached her ears and Medusa ran up to high terrace in the old temple and looked toward the beach. A young boy from a small village in Greece tied his boat to a trunk of a dead tree on the shore. He wore simple sandals, a short toga and tattered red cloak. He carried a small shield, a short sword and shook with frayed nerves. “Hardly worth killing,” Medusa thought aloud. “Why was I so worked up about this young man child?”

Stheno and Euryale joined their sister on the terrace. “Well, a small man child. I have not killed one so young but this is a perfect opportunity to do so,” said Stheno.

Euryale was also excited at the prospect of hunting down someone so young. His flesh would definitely be the sweetest she would have the opportunity to taste. Medusa was not feeling so inclined to dispense with him.

“No, my sisters. This one is too small to be concerned with our attention. Let him go,” Medusa ordered.

Stheno protested. “I refuse to let this boy go. If he came looking for you, let him pay the price with his life.”

“I said no, Stheno. I have no interest in killing this boy. I will give him a chance to flee with his life. If he decides a more, foolish path then you and Euryale can have him.”

Medusa found a discarded spear, a light colored rag and bit her forefinger. She wrote a message on the cloth in her blood and then tied it to the spear. Then with a smooth warrior motion she launched the spear toward the beach.

* * *

The boy who came to the isle of the Gorgons was named Perseus. His quest was to bring the head of Medusa as a wedding gift in order to stop the wedding of his mother Danaë to King Polydectes, who would most likely have him killed once his mother was his consort. His knowledge of Medusa was limited, which made him regret not consulting with the gods before he left on the journey. He tied his boat to a dead tree and then set out onto the beach. The area leading up to the courtyard and temple was deathly quiet, in the mid-day haze he could make out the shapes of people. Not people exactly but of human figures frozen and turned to stone!

Perseus swallowed hard and slowly made his way up the beach and onto the courtyard when out of nowhere a spear struck the ground near his feet. Startled, he jumped back several feet and drew his sword. He looked around but then realized that looking around was an easy way to die staring at a Gorgon. His senses didn't hear or see anything moving about as the youth approached the spear. At its center was some type of parchment tied to the shaft. Realizing it could be a message to him, Perseus untied the parchment very carefully as he thanked his mother for the education of reading. The message written in the Modern Greek language, read:

“You are a foolish, young boy that hasn't lived the years to learn what foolishness truly means. I offer you the opportunity to leave my island and in return no harm will befall you. No other warning will be given, no mercy will be granted if you choose to follow your current, unwise course.”

The note was signed “Medusa” and written in blood. Again Perseus looked around very cautiously and thought he should retreat. He feared that if he did not return with the head of Medusa, he may be killed and his mother may be under the sway of King

Polydectes forever. His heart was pounding hard in his chest. Medusa knew he was on the beach. She also knew of his purpose. After reading the warning delivered by a spear and not having any other means to win, failure was too much a reality for him to accept. The assistance from the wind sprites told Perseus in which direction to find the island in which the Gorgons dwelt but no other help came. Perseus looked at the spear and then at the message. He immediately turned around and ran for his life back to his boat, dropping his small shield and sword on the sand.

From upon the terrace overlooking the courtyard Medusa smiled and laughed. “You see, my sisters, it is possible to grant anyone mercy who follows sane advise. This one was too small to challenge us and not worth our time.”

Stheno’s mouths let out a sigh as she slithered from the terrace and into the cave. Euryale starred after her sister and then to Medusa. “Are you sure we should let him go, perhaps it was the gods who sent him—”

“If the gods did,” Medusa started, seething with anger. “They should have sent a warrior, or better still, dozens of warriors to even challenge the Gorgons. It is an insult to even consider this boy was ever a challenge.”

Euryale recoiled at the rebuke but then stood back up and faced Medusa. Without saying another word, Euryale walked back to the cave and positioned herself to sleep. Medusa continued to watch the beach and boy get ready to sail from the island. The position of the sun in the sky told Medusa night was about to fall and she thought to retire herself. Another day without incident or redemption, she thought. Perhaps Stheno’s plan of leaving the island would be best, if no other reason than to put an end to their mundane life, curse or no.

* * *

Perseus began to untie his boat at the beach shore. Between

panic and his overworked mind pondering his mother's plight back home, Perseus just wanted to leave as quickly as possible. Suddenly, Perseus noticed three mid-size ships with red sails approaching the beach. Several men from each vessel descend into the murky shallow water and pulled on ropes of their respective ships to beach them, while the rest of the crew and passengers disembarked. Perseus counted thirty-six men, all of them heavily armed and armored from head to toe. Some men bore swords and shields, others with long impaling spears, and a few with bows and arrow. A curious sight was to see eight men carrying long chains with large hooks at one end and an iron ball at the other. They seem to be from the Far East, Perseus surmised. Looking at the men assembled, he saw Greek countrymen, and desert nobles, several dark skinned warriors and the rest looked as if they came from fog lands to the north.

Marauders, fortune seekers, mercenaries, all of them gathered in a circle with the leader in the middle. He walked up to every man and saluted each one of them, talked to a few of them, even addressing them by their names. Perseus was not able to hear the individual conversations but he did hear the leader, a Greek man wearing a silver breast plate, red robes underneath, and holding a long sword. He raised it and addressed his group.

“Never has a finer collection of killers ever been assembled as I see here today,” the leader said, many agreeing with him. “Tonight we have come to this fabled island to kill witches and demons. And with that power will be ours. Their heads will be mounted on the bows of our ships and we will journey to all corners of the earth conquering and destroying all who oppose us. We will establish a new nation and the gods will not dare to interfere with us!”

Cheers rose up from all of the men. They could not know what horror awaited them. The notion of glory and power had blinded them to fact they would all die horrible deaths. Some of the men cheered their mission, others called out his name, Tiber! Spears raised, swords clattered on shields and chains rattled. These

seekers of fame long announced their arrival onto the island. Perseus shook his head in despair. "Fools! Damn fools all of you!"

* * *

Medusa could not agree more with Perseus as she rallied her sisters and watched the mercenaries from the balcony. What would have been a quiet, uneventful evening now will become a night of death! Stheno's mouths drooled as she was savoring the prospect of battle. Thirty-six men were slowly walking to their deaths as they made their way into the courtyard. Medusa analyzed how the men were progressing into the courtyard: dispersed and spread out, some of them moved in groups of four or five. Eight of them had chains and hooks carried in a ready-to-throw grasp. Two of the men with spears hung all the way behind to bring up the rear, possibly to prevent anyone from escaping, Gorgon or mercenary. Medusa focused on the leader Tiber and suddenly had an overwhelming urge to speak with him personally. The other mercenaries were no concern to her.

"Stheno, Euryale," Medusa spoke with a calm and quiet voice. "Kill the others except the one in the red and silver costume. Dispose of them as you see fit, but make sure the leader and I are alone in the temple."

Both Gorgons smiled and bowed their heads to Medusa as they flew from the terrace. Medusa wanted to watch from above to see the action. A small part of her did not wish the death of the mercenaries, but her darker more enigmatic side had no sympathy for them. She granted mercy to one boy, now thirty six men were about to die.

* * *

Two men stood with spears at the ready at the edge of the courtyard, keeping as calm and steady as best they could. They watched their comrades maneuver slowly through the maze of statues, piles of ash and skeletons. A foul smell rose up to greet

them; it reeked of death and thirty-four men moved about with caution. The guards to the rear kept alert and were ready to react to any situation. Unfortunately, they were not ready for the Gorgon Euryale creeping up on them on all fours. Her snakes were quiet, wings folded back she moved within three feet of them before standing to her full height.

Smiling, she noted that the two men were not aware of her stealth approach. Then in one sweeping motion, she grabbed them by the throats, squeezing them like vices as to not let any sound of an alarm escape their lips. She dragged them onto the ground for a minute before flying off with them. The two men fought against her grip all the while she flew away from the courtyard out sight of the remaining men and deposited them on a ledge away from the temple and their cave. She kept her head down but fought them, as if she was playing with her prey, she was. The two mercenaries, both with blood dripping from their mouths unable to speak or cry out, drew their swords and attacked Euryale furiously. Hacking and slashing wildly, they fought for their lives but Euryale merely laughed as she dodged the attacks.

Finally, after she had her fun with them, sharp claws found their mark and from their throats to lower abdomen as she viciously slashed both men. Blood poured from the gaping wound as the two mercenaries collapsed in a heap. With no hope of escaping, they looked at their tormentor for mercy who gladly returned their gaze. The bruised and battered flesh of the two mercenaries separated from their bones, leaving them in a frozen state of pain and horror. The Gorgon left the corpses to attend to the other invaders.

“Two killed, thirty-three to go,” she whispered to herself in amusement.

Stheno slithered on her belly as silently while watching the marauders penetrate further into their domain. She did not curse them for invading; rather she thanked them for providing sport and a possible meal of their eyes. As the sun began to set, the

marauders used torches to provide light for their search. Stheno stayed in the shadows as it was a good hiding place for the Gorgon. She circled them quietly noting their positions, postures and weapons they carried. All of them were afraid but foolish courage drove them to hunt the Gorgons. The leader was of particular interest to Stheno but Medusa picked him as her victim. A pity she thought, but there were plenty of other warriors she could destroy. All the better for her as killing human men was a pastime she enjoyed. With no restraints, save for the leader, she may do as she pleased, but inducing more fear in her prey is what she did best.

After she made the locations of the men, she waited in the shadows listening for Euryale to enter the inner court yard and take up her position opposite her sister. Their plan was to split up the hunters and pick them off one by one, a few at a time. A slight rustling sound, which the men would mistake for leaves blowing in a dead wind, was Euryale. She waited for Stheno to make her move and then the sport would commence. Stheno picked out four men with swords and shields and decided to attack them first. They stood by a large support column waiting and watching the shadows for any movement. Their tactic might have worked if they were staring to the left instead of the right, from which Stheno made her quiet approach. Crawling on her belly, she slid behind the column and brought her body upright, her two tail spikes at the ready. Then both mouths opened to let loose both a high pitch scream and a deep howl.

The noise startled all of the men in the inner courtyard and Stheno's tail struck two of the men on the edge in the throats and then she swung around the column so fast, the two remaining men fell to her brutal slashing just as they caught the eyes of the Gorgon and were turned to frozen ashen skeletons.

Tiber turned to see the aftermath of the deaths of four of his men and spied a creature disappearing into the shadows.

"Over there!" he yelled pointing. The men with the chains and hooks crouched low and crawled in the general direction when

from behind them. Euryale charged and rammed herself into the larger group, knocking a dozen mercenaries off their feet. As she ran, she grabbed two more men, dragging them off into the shadows to meet the same fate as the two spearmen. The inner courtyard and the temple entrance were filled with the sound of men dying and the Gorgons making their first kills.

Medusa watched from within the temple worship area with intrigue and revulsion. For an instant, she thought what would become of her if these two decided to turn against her. Would she be a match for their savagery? Could she muster her own in order to survive? "Yes you can!" A powerful, internal voice answered and provided no further information. Who or what was that, she thought. The sounds of men shrieking brought her back to the matter at hand. Soon there will be one and she will be happy to dispense with him once she had gotten all of the information from him.

"Shri, take out the torches on the walls and columns. Tell the rest of assassins to ready their chains. We will have two monsters to kill here first and then we will stalk the third one!" Tiber ordered the man who was in lead of the chainmen.

The masked man bowed and then signaled with his hands the instructions from Tiber. As quickly as the Gorgons were moving, the eight chain men destroyed the torches in the inner courtyard and evened the odds a bit in their favor. More than half of the men they came with were now dead the chainmen took to their stealth skills and focused on serpent Stheno. If they could isolate and possibly kill her, Euryale would be easier to deal with.

For a few nerve racking minutes, the area was quiet. Everyone strained their hearing to lock on the slightest noise: snakes hissing, men breathing, hearts pounding. The Gorgons had an advantage of seeing in the dark, not as well as Medusa, but the invaders did not know that. The chainmen drew closer to Stheno's last position. To not make their efforts seem in vain, she never moved from the column where she killed two more mercenaries. Instead she

wrapped her long body around the upper part of the column so her upper torso and arms were free to strike any wondered close to her position. The wait was not long as one chainmen walked right in front of her. She raised her bloody, clawed hand and grasped the chainman around the neck and lifted him off his feet. When she finally slashed him, the man let out a scream in pain but from the pitch, Stheno deduced he was not male, but female. For a moment Stheno was beside herself, both mouths open in astonishment. Her hatred of males was such that she needed no encouragement to kill them. But this female she just mortally injured gave her a moment of pause. In one instant she wanted to let her go and let her die peaceably but she finally decided to finish the job. Her hands clawed the female body until the flesh was completely stripped from her bones.

“They use women to hunt other women,” Stheno’s left mouth uttered while she tore the chainmen...chainwoman to shreds.

“Her fate should not be as merciful as the other males she arrived with,” the right mouth spat.

Her focus on the one chainman led the others to zero in on her position and with unerring accuracy, seven iron chains found their mark. One chain wrapped around her neck, another around her right wrist, dropping the remains of their comrade, one chain around her wing. With all of their might, the chainmen pulled Stheno down from the column and wrapped the other end of the chains around nearby columns. She thrashed about, screaming and howling, trying to free herself. Regardless of her super strength, she was unable to break the hold of the chains pulled on her in different directions. For the moment, she was trapped and could not escape.

Tiber heard the chainmen cheer in victory as they had one Gorgon trapped. “Quickly, all of you rally to the chainmen and kill the beast,” Tiber shouted. With his sword drawn, Tiber ran to their position but from behind them, what felt like a battering ram, Euryale ran through the men that were descending upon the

trapped Stheno.

The sounds of swords cutting hard flesh, Stheno screaming while being restrained and Euryale fighting with the mercenaries filled the temple as Medusa observed the *mêlée* with interest. This was probably the first time in decades did warriors present a real threat to the Gorgons. The possibility of Stheno and Euryale being killed was something Medusa could not allow. Darkness prevented her sisters from bringing their gaze to bear on the mercenaries; light would turn the tide in their favor. Medusa reached for a torch that was near her and lit it. Then she ran as fast as she could into the fray and lit the extinguished torches closest to Stheno and Euryale. With the inner courtyard lit, the two Gorgons used their powers and turned the rest of the mercenaries to ash and rotting bones.

Tiber was slammed face first on the temple floor after Euryale battered into his back. It took him a moment to get himself orientated as his ears were ringing and his eyesight blurry. With his right hand, he felt his head and it confirmed what his body told him. He was injured and bleeding from his head. Slowly he sat up and ripped his red robe into bandages and tended to his wounds. When he was ready, his senses seemed to come back to him as he heard the two Gorgons curse and scream as one of them sought to undo the chains the chainmen used to restrain Stheno. Tiber's hearing also told him that none of his men were alive. The smell of new death permeated in his nose. He was all alone with two monsters that were not too happy with the mercenary lot. He scarcely heard a third person walk about the temple. Quickly he tied one more bandage around his eyes as to prevent looking into the eyes of the Gorgon Medusa. He picked up his sword and shield and slowly backed deeper into the temple. He knew there was no way of running out from this place. He would make his last stand here!

“They hurt me, sisters. Never has anyone dared to rip my skin,” Stheno said as she removed the chains from her neck. Euryale untied the chains latched around her sister's wing and threw them

to the floor. The naga Gorgon extended and stretched her body to alleviate the pain and strain from the temporary bondage.

“Do not worry Stheno,” Medusa said in calm voice. “You and Euryale have managed to kill all of the mercenaries who came seeking death, now I wish to speak to their leader. Alone.” She turned to her injured sister. “Go. Rest and recuperate.”

Stheno and Euryale nodded and left the courtyard and returned to the cave. Medusa turned her attention to the leader and walked into the temple. Her vision spotted the leader off in a corner, attempting to hide in the shadows. She noted his eyes were covered with a red cloth. “That will not help him,” she uttered to herself.

Tiber heard footsteps enter the area and began to move in a circular pattern away from them, hoping to work his way to getting behind her. His sword and shield at the ready to defend him from attack.

“I must say, brave mercenary, you mounted an impressive campaign to do battle with the Gorgons. Your men should be commended for injuring Stheno. I thought it impossible but you were prepared for a battle against us. Were you not prepared for death? It seems to be the only outcome of your venture,” Medusa said as she moved among the statues, scraping her bronze nails on them as she passed.

“I told those I recruited that some of them will not come back, but the reward of your head was worth the sacrifice,” Tiber replied continuing to moving away.

“Worth the sacrifice? All of you could have lived long prosperous lives or to fight in a glorious battle for your homes, your people, your lands. Instead you will be damned to Hades flames. I will see to it personally.”

“Oh come now Medusa, are you not tired of living on this island with those demons? Surely that death can be your release

from this miserable life. And in return I can use your head to rule the world. Both of us can profit.”

The audacity of this mercenary was amusing. Had this been fifty years ago, Medusa may have surrendered to death and allowed herself to be beheaded. But now, she had a purpose to bring about the destruction of the gods. This mortal was just an impediment to be removed.

“Truly, my head? What will you do with such a powerful weapon? You cannot mount it on a spear; you will petrify all who see it, enemies and allies alike. You cannot fix it to your vessel; you will destroy every living creature that sails in your path. You, my dear mercenary, will be a pariah to all man. Is this the future you wish? All alone with just your prize. I doubt that.” Medusa walked behind Tiber who was still making his way through the statues, feeling the conversation was about to end she moved within striking distance. He heard the serpents from Medusa’s hair and moved away.

The two of them “danced” through the statues as he tried to get a clean sword strike at the Gorgon’s head. Medusa tried to get in close enough to look into his eyes, despite his eyes were covered by the red blindfold. Then fate stepped in. Tiber bumped and then tripped over a statue of a Spartan soldier. It toppled over and the statue shattered to bits. He fell and rolled attempting to put distance between himself and his quarry but rolled into Medusa, who in turn grabbed him by his throat and lifted him off of the ground. With his opposite hand he swung the sword but Medusa caught his hand and wrenched the sword from his bloody grip.

“I would ask you to join the other statues in my garden, but you are someone I would rather not have in my collection,” Medusa hissed as she tore away the blindfold, scratching his face. His wide eyes found Medusa’s and Tiber let out a scream that was quickly silenced by the curse turning him to stone from the inside out. Still lifted above her head, Medusa tossed wounded the mercenary away against the wall to crash and explode into pieces just as the

horrible gaze completed its work. The domain of the Gorgons was devoid of intruders.

* * *

Perseus scrambled onto the ships of the mercenaries looking for better weapons. He did not arm himself to attack the Gorgons but to have them ready in case Medusa changed her mind and came looking for the boy after the group of mercenaries invaded their temple. The screams and howls coming from the lair followed by deathly silence told Perseus all thirty-six men met their fates. How long would it be before the Gorgons would come out and search the beach for any other intruders? Perseus stumbled around on the larger vessel looking for enough armament to protect himself from possible attack. If he was able to, he would put the abandoned mercenary ship to sea he could sail away, maybe dock his boat at Seriphos and steal his mother Danaë in the night. Foolish thinking, he thought. Escape was the only thing on his mind. Afterwards he would deal with his other problems.

“PERSEUS! STOP!” A loud voice commanded the boy to be still. From the clouds appeared thunder and lightning. Perseus was about to tremble in fear when a pillar of light appeared before him.

“Be still my brother, I am Athena, Goddess of Wisdom, daughter of Zeus. I will not allow you to flee in fear. You are on a very brave and important quest to save your mother. Do not let fear keep you from your destiny.”

“How can we be related,” Perseus asked. “Am I a god as well?”

“A demigod, half man and half god. You have strength that flows from our father Zeus.” The column of light was replaced with a woman with blond hair twisted pinned above her shoulders, white skin, red striking lips and she wore a mixture of golden armor and white flowing robes. Athena was a beautiful as Perseus imagined any god to be. “I will give you the tools you will need to

defeat Medusa and save your mother.”

Perseus’ eyes brimmed up with tears and he knelt. “I hope one of them is courage because I heard the death screams of thirty-six men and I cannot hope to win Medusa’s head—”

“Be still!” Athena commanded. She looked at Perseus shaking and then grasped him by the shoulders and lifted him to his feet. “You have the courage and the desire to overcome the impossible. And with the weapons forged by the gods at your command, I imagine you can slay all three, but one Gorgon’s head will be sufficient.”

Athena waved her hand about and a small, swirling energy vortex appeared between them. She reached in and withdrew a short sword with a translucent blade. “This is a vorpal blade. This blade can cut through anything that comes in contact with, but it has limited use. You can only use it once or twice to find your mark. Strike quickly or you will suffer her wrath.”

Perseus took the blade and sheathed it in a sword holster he discovered on the mercenaries vessel. Athena placed her hand in the vortex again. “This is an enchanted shield. It will protect you from any brute force and also makes a great weapon to smite and bash your enemies with. Also, the reflective surface on the inside will enable you to look at any Gorgon should you need to. You will not suffer their gaze.”

He took the shield in his left hand and stood proud. “These sandals are from Hermes. They will enable you to fly back across the seas in time to save your mother Danaë. When you are ready to take flight, they will spring forth wings and carry you up in the air.”

Perseus took the pair of golden sandals and slipped them onto his feet. On each side of the sandal possessed embossed wings that folded over his bare feet. They felt so comfortable Perseus knew he could walk on air.

“Finally,” Athena continued. “This helm was forged by Hades during our battle with the Titans long ago. It can cast a reflection of yourself ahead of you or behind you to make your enemies strike at an illusion, giving you the opportunity to kill your foe. This is the power of the Helm of Invisibility. This will protect you from the Gorgon’s sight as they possess the uncanny ability to see in the darkness as well through any shroud you try to cloak yourself in. She will be upon you instantly before you can try to fight.” Athena closed the portal as he took the helmet and placed on his head. He snapped the protective face plate down over his eyes to complete the ensemble. She smiled at him and placed her hands on his shoulders.

“You are ready my young brother. The blessings of the gods are with you. I ask one thing of you.”

“What can I do to for you my goddess? How can I repay you for all you have done for me?” Perseus asked as he bowed at the waist.

Athena smiled with malicious intent. “When you have taken the head of Medusa from her shoulders and present it to the King Polydectes and his court, bring the head to my temple, the Parthenon, and leave the shrouded head at the altar. This will be payment to me for my assistance. I trust you will not fail because you have so much at stake.

In a flash of brief light, she was gone. He made sure he was not hallucinating when he looked at the new weapons Athena had blessed him with. He was now ready to take on the Gorgon Medusa.

* * *

Euryale poured fresh, clean water into a goblet for herself and some for Stheno as they settled into their sleeping areas in the cave above the temple. The wounds dealt by the mercenary chainmen

were healed and no scars appeared on her acidic skin. Memories of the fight still occupied both Gorgons as they compared notes on who killed the most. They snapped, hissed and laughed at each other. Medusa arrived at the cave entrance looking angered and tired from dealing with the last mercenary. Stheno noticed her sister's lament and slithered over to her.

“What is it my sister?” Medusa looked at Stheno and Euryale.

“I think it is time we plan for the destruction of the gods. They will continue to send men after us in order to kill us for their trophies,” Medusa said in anger, the snakes in her hair responding to her mood.

“Women will also join the fray,” Stheno added. “I killed a female human, so it is no longer men just seeking our heads and hides.”

Medusa turned to face her. “Then death to them all and to their gods. We will plan Stheno. We will plan their destruction. Even Hades will bow to the Gorgon Sisters!”

With clenched raised fist, Stheno and Euryale joined their sister. Stheno secretly was elated Medusa had finally seen her point of view and finally the rivers will run with blood, ash and stone. Euryale was also delighted, which meant Medusa and Stheno would no longer argue on a topic they would never see eye to eye if the day's attack had not occurred. However they will most likely argue on how to put their plan of destruction into action. At least for one night it will be quiet in the cave. She sniffed the air and then walked to the edge of the cave and looked down. She directed her sight to the beach where large plumes of black smoke bellowed from red flames. The three ships of the mercenaries had arrived in burst into flames. Medusa and Stheno joined their sister at the ledge.

“What could have caused those ships to simply combust? There was no lightening in the skies and we killed all of the

mercenaries,” Stheno surmised.

“Go to the beach and investigate, I will check the temple and courtyard for any additional intruders,” Medusa said as all three left the sanctuary of their cave.

Below in the courtyard, behind the several stone statues of warriors, Perseus crouched behind them waiting for any Gorgon to appear so he could attack or evade them. Setting the mercenary ships on fire should draw out the Gorgons. A noise brought his attention to the reflection in his shield. Two winged creatures flew quickly to the beach where he set the ships aflame. Only one remained behind. “Medusa,” he whispered to himself. He stood up and keeping his back turned and walking backwards, he began a methodical search through the courtyard and into the temple.

* * *

Medusa’s eyes revealed that the boy, whom she granted mercy to earlier in the day, had made his way into the courtyard and was now entering the temple. He was armed with weapons and seemed to have a godly presence about him. “The gods have empowered this boy to carry out his mission to take my head. He will be first to die in our conquest of the Olympians,” the Gorgon said to herself as she made her way into the temple.

She moved through the maze of columns and statues looking for the boy. Several times she thought she saw him and then he just disappeared. Perseus moved in the opposite direction, making sure he kept his eyes on the shadows and on the reflection. Twice he saw her reflection, once far away and the other close to him. Both times he noticed the reflection had no eyes. Curiosity almost caused him to turn and look to see if the eyes were really there, but that would mean his death. He continued to lead Medusa into a position that would enable him to strike her down in one flash of his sword. Perseus had only one chance to strike!

Medusa circled a petrified group of Greek soldiers she made

sixty-two years earlier. This group landed on the isle of the Gorgons accidentally during a violent storm. The five men and their squires huddled in the temple for warmth from the storm hoping to leave when the downpours let up. Medusa was in the grip of her curse and was sought them out for help. Upon venturing into the temple to offer help and seeking assistance for herself, she petrified all of them. One soldier drew his sword in attempt to kill Medusa with a lunging thrust. His attempt died in vain as the blade never touched the intended target.

She came up behind Perseus and slashed at him but her hand went through him. “An apparition,” she said aloud as she continued to walk around to find the real boy. Again she spotted him with his sword raised and stood in front him to petrify him but the mirage disappeared. This was madness. Frustration got the better of her and she went into a frenzy slashing and hacking with her powerful hands, only to destroy statues and scrape the column with deep claw marks. Breathing heavily, the Gorgon stopped and steadied herself.

“Maybe I am seeing things. I am becoming more of a rabid monster striking at shadows than a woman with power.” Medusa paused and considered the men her sisters fought and the mercenary leader she killed. Perhaps they were all carrying a form illness that infected only Medusa. She convinced herself to give up the pursuit. “Focus Medusa, go back to your cave and rest.”

Maybe sleep would cure her from the madness, but the feeling of the intruder still lingered. She knew she had seen someone entered the temple but she could not be sure. Could it have been sorcery that was tricking her senses? The excitement of the evening may have gotten to her or worse, she surmised, the mercenaries may have been carrying an affliction. Medusa could be suffering from a disease and this feverish hallucinate fury may have been a symptom. She turned abruptly and walked toward the back of the temple to the stairway leading to the cliff entrance of the cave. The boy may be long gone, she thought as she noticed she was very tired. She slowly walked up the stairs, leaving a

befuddled Perseus in the temple.

“Where is she going?” Perseus wondered as he watched from the back of the temple ready to strike. If Perseus was correct, Medusa was tired of the game and decided to withdraw. She would go to her cave where two more Gorgons would be waiting, possibly. He followed at a safe distance and made sure Medusa’s back was in his direct line of sight.

* * *

“There is nothing or no one here, Euryale. Whoever set these ships ablaze is gone,” Stheno remarked disappointedly as she picked through the smoldering wood of the mercenary ships. Euryale galloped on all fours up next to her digging through the remains. She looked at the sky, the last rays of the sun disappearing over the horizon and first stars began to appear.

“The hour is late, Stheno. If the boy did set these ships on fire, he has lessened his chances of leaving this island alive. His small boat is still tied to the tree over there.” She pointed at the small boat as the waves crashed gently against it.

With a long finger, Stheno scratched her chin and thought. “A diversion! He is in the temple hunting Medusa. We should fly back at once.”

“What is the hurry? One of us is a power to reckon with, but three? Folly!” Euryale boasted as she spotted a large dead fish wash up on the shore. She dashed after it before the waves took it back to the sea.

“Take your dinner back to the cave! We will join our sister Medusa with all haste!” Stheno coiled up and then sprung herself in the air. Euryale gathered her dead fish and followed after her sister. Soon they arrived back at the cave and there was no sign of Medusa. They looked briefly around the cave until they heard Medusa’s footsteps on the back stairs. She soon appeared at the

mouth of the cave looking exhausted.

“My sisters, there is an affliction upon us. I thought I saw the boy from the beach coming into the temple, however this was untrue. We should just rest ourselves—” The words stopped in mid-sentence as Medusa let out a gurgled cry.

Perseus charged from behind Medusa and with his sword drawn. He brought the blade down unevenly on Medusa’s collarbone and then tried to slice her throat. In so doing, Perseus severed three snakes and caused a nasty gash in her neck. Medusa felt blood welling in her mouth as she also felt a burning sensation where the vorpal blade sliced open her skin and throat. Perseus knew he had made a grave mistake. All it would take for Medusa to kill him was to simply turn around and turn him to stone before she choked on her own poison blood. He remembered Athena’s warning about the integrity of the special sword as he would have one time to strike, maybe two. The translucent blade was already disintegrating. In frantic speed, Perseus slashed Medusa’s throat from the opposite side, this time with a cleaner cut. The blade disappeared as it shattered in a glimpse of light, with only the hilt remaining.

* * *

Medusa felt weightless for a moment until she realized that someone was pulling her head by her serpent hair. The young demigod called upon his unnatural strength to rip and pull Medusa’s partially severed head off of her shoulders. Once it was pulled free, the headless body reached reflexively for its head only to find a plume of blood spurting into the air. All of this happened so quickly, the other Gorgon Sisters were stunned at the sight.

Perseus, still wearing Hades helm, placed the Gorgon’s head into a purse Athena provided. Then, as fast as he struck down Medusa, Perseus ran and flew into the sky. Medusa was dead and Perseus fulfilled his destiny. He only had to escape the two other Gorgons as they bellowed a cry of anguish over the death of their

sister.

“Medusa! Someone has slain our sister!” Euryale cried out loudly tugging at Medusa’s decapitated body.

“To flight Euryale. We will avenge our sister!” Stheno declared as they tore out of the cave in pursuit of Perseus.

He resisted the temptation to look behind him. He knew the other demons would be fast on his trail. Perseus heard them close behind him and he thanked the gods that the sandals of Hermes reacted instantly to propel him quickly from the cave. However, the Gorgons managed to spot Perseus and gave chase. He looked to the sky and spied clouds floating in. He headed for them. Once inside, the magical helm produced a duplicate of himself with the purse and flew off in the opposite direction, west, as Perseus flew east, heading home to stop the wedding.

Euryale and Stheno flew as fast as they could to catch Medusa’s murderer, intent on dealing such pain unto him that he will beg for death but they would not grant it. Their bellows and shouts filled an artificially clouded sky as Perseus thanked Zeus for sending the sky and storm clouds to assist in his escape.

As for Medusa, death tugged at her, but she did not die. While in the purse, Medusa heard another voice urging her to keep alive. It was not the first time a powerful internal voice asserted itself on her behalf. It would be years later until she would learn that she was joined with a demon from another dimension and it was the one responsible for her powers and fearsome appearance.

She managed to utter a few words to Perseus, but they went unheard. Unconsciousness forced Medusa into a near-death state for many years to come. She would not be alive in the sense that was understood in modern times but trapped between realms of life and death.



Photo by Jason Jamal Nakleh, Nakleh.com

AUTHOR BIO OF TYRONE ROSS

All of my life, I have been a fan of movies, television, plays, music and other performances. Many times I wished to tell a story of some grand adventure or to be a part of one. As a child, my parents have taken me to the movies where I have seen a man fly (Superman), humans in space (The Black Hole, Star Wars, Star Trek), and a host of other different movies and animations. From that point on, my imagination shined like a beacon in the dark! My schoolmates and teachers all said the same thing, “You need to be a writer!” I love telling stories as well as seeing and experiencing them.

At age 40, I am achieving the lifelong dream of storytelling. I feel if anyone should tell a story, you should connect not only with the characters but with the readers as well. Stories can entertain, teach a lesson or inspire you to follow your dreams. Being a lifelong New Yorker, I have been through many different situations and survived. Every day when a person can get up and do something, it is not only a blessing but an adventure of some sort worth of a story to tell. Another lifelong ambition is to travel the

world, meet people and experience different cultures. When I come home I will have another story to tell or two.

Even though I work full-time, I enjoy many extra-circular activities: mentoring/teaching, watching movies, reading, listening to music (Jazz, Chill-Out and R&B being the favorite genres), doing graphic designs and spending time with friends and family. Every day I get up (being very thankful for that) to do the best I can and keep moving forward. Where will my path lead? To a brighter future of life experiences and storytelling! And in so doing, I will have more stories to tell.

Thank you for your support and stay tuned for more upcoming stories!

COMING SOON...

thegorgonmedusa.com

Home site for Medusa and her stories.

mrtyroneross.com

Home site for Tyrone Ross and his literary work

THE GORGON MEDUSA

BOOK I: HERSTORY

Medusa, synonymous with the word monster, is one of three Gorgons who possess the power to petrify any living creature. With bronze claws, a mane of venomous snakes and deadly eyes that can snatch the life from anyone who look upon her, Medusa was ancient Greece's weapon of mass destruction. Mythology briefly told the story of the life, plight and death of the Gorgon.

However, it was a partial account of a being that lived over three thousand years ago. In truth, Medusa is alive today, in the 21ST century!

From the shadows of obscurity, she has risen to assume the guise of Madame Cynthia Petrakis, reclusive billionaire, philanthropist and humanitarian. One person, archaeologist Jerimiah Clarke, unwittingly stumbled upon her secret. It was a discovery that nearly ended in tragedy, yet became the foundation of a new and true friendship. Few know of Medusa's story and now she has decided to reveal it to one man.

This is Herstory!