

**Shadow of Colossus**  
**Book One in the Seven Wonders Series**  
By T.L. Higley

"The finest of all the votive gifts and statues in the city of Rhodes is the Colossus of Helios. Now it lies on the ground, overthrown by an earthquake, severed at the knees."

Strabo, *The Geography*, c. AD 23

"...even lying on the ground it is a marvel. Few people can make their arms meet round its thumbs, and its fingers are larger than most statues."

Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 34.18, AD 77

Ω

The wealthy island of Rhodes,  
Desired by the Ptolemies of Egypt  
Coveted by the Seleucids of Syria  
Admired by the Romans, now birthing an empire

Rhodes,  
Last stronghold of democracy  
Patron of arts, center of learning, pride of Hellenism

An island of people awaiting their destiny,  
shifting even now beneath their feet.

## CHAPTER 1

*Rhodes, 227 B.C.*

*Six days before the great quake*

In the deceitful calm of the days preceding disaster, while Rhodes still glittered like a white jewel in the Aegean, Tessa of Delos planned to open her wrists.

The death of her body was long overdue. Her soul died ten years ago.

*Ten years this day.*

Tessa dragged in a breath of salty air and shivered. From her lofty position outside Glaucus' hillside home, she watched the torches of the dusk-held city flicker to life. Across the capital, the day's tumult at the docks slowed. The massive statue of Helios at the harbor's frothy mouth caught the sun's last rays as it slipped into an azure sea. The torch he thrust skyward seem to burst aflame, as though lit by the sun god himself.

He had been her only constant these ten years, this giant in the likeness of Helios. A central figure, as life ripped freedom and hope from her. Painful as it was, tonight she wanted only to remember. To be alone, to remember, and to mourn.

"Tessa!" A wine-sodden voice erupted from the open door behind her.

The symposium began only minutes ago, but Glaucus was already deep into his cups. Bad form in any company, but he rarely cared. Tessa inhaled the tang of sea air again and placed a steadying hand against the smooth alabaster column supporting the roof. She did not answer, nor turn, when she heard her fat master shuffle onto the portico.

"Get yourself back into the house!" Glaucus punctuated his command with a substantial belch.

"Soon," she said. "I want to watch the sun god take his leave."

A household servant crept out and set two torches blazing. An oily smell surged, then dissipated. From the house floated harsh laughter, mixed with the tinny sound of a flute.

Glaucus pushed his belly against her back and grabbed her arm. The linen chitôn she'd taken care to arrange perfectly fell away, exposing her shoulder. She reached to replace it, but Glaucus caught her hand. He brought his mouth close to her ear, and she could smell his breath, foul as days-old fish. "The others are asking for you." He raised his voice to a sing-song. "'Where is your hetaira, Glaucus?' they say. 'The one with more opinions than Rhodes has ships.'"

Tessa closed her eyes. She had long entertained Glaucus' political friends with her outspoken thoughts on government and power. While his wife remained hidden away in the women's quarters,

Glaucus' *hetaira* was displayed like an expensive pet with sharp teeth.

She stroked the polished filigree of the gold necklace encircling her throat and remembered when Glaucus fastened it there, a gilding for his personal figure of bronze.

"Now, Tessa." Glaucus pulled her toward the door. Her heart reached for the statue, clinging to her first memory of it, when Delos had been home and innocence had still been hers.

*When I open my wrists, I will do it there.*

The andrôn, central room of the men's quarters, smelled of roasted meat and burning olive oil. Glaucus paused in the doorway, awaiting the attention of those who had curried enough of his favor to be invited tonight. When the eyes of the small crowd lounging on low couches at the room's perimeter turned his way, he pushed her into the lamp-lit center. "Tessa, everyone," he shouted. "Making a grand entrance!"

The room laughed and clapped, then returned their attention to the food and wine on the three-legged tables beside them. In the corner, a young girl dressed in gauzy fabric blew thin streams of air into a small flute. Tessa's eyes locked onto the girl's for a moment. A private understanding that they were both objects of entertainment passed between them. A desire to protect the girl surfaced in Tessa, a maternal feeling that of late seemed only a breath away.

Glaucus pulled her to a couch and forced her down onto the gold-trimmed red cushions. He lowered himself at her right and leaned against her possessively. A black pottery bowl with gold designs waited in the center of their table and Glaucus ladled wine into a goblet for her. To the rest of them he said, "To Tessa... always the center of attention!" He raised his own cup, as did the fifteen or twenty people around the room.

Tessa's gaze swept the andrôn, taking in the majority of men and the few women reclining against them. The moment seemed to suspend itself, with cups raised toward her, drunken and insincere smiles affixed to faces, lamplight flickering across tables piled with grapes and almonds and figs, and the lament of the flute behind it all.

*Will I remember this night, even in the afterlife?*

"To Tessa!" Shouts went round the room, cups were drained and thumped back to tables, and the party quickened around her. Glaucus reached for her, but she pushed him away.

He laughed. "It would appear my Tessa is a bit high-spirited tonight," he said to the others. "And what shall be done with a mischievous *hetaira*?" His thick-lipped smile and raised eyebrow took in the room and elicited another round of laughter. He nodded, then turned his attention to the man on his right, resuming a conversation whose beginning she must have missed.

"Your objections earlier to the naturalization of the Jews are noted, Spiro. But to extend citizenship to the foreigners among us can often be expedient."

Tessa could not see Spiro, his frame completely blocked by the bulk of Glaucus beside her. But his voice poured like warm oil, with an air of confidence and a hint of superiority. "Like-minded foreigners, perhaps. But the Jews make it no secret that they despise Greek ways. They disdain even our proudest achievement as Rhodians - our Helios of the harbor. They must be expunged, not embraced!"

Glaucus raised a pudgy hand. "You presume an authority not given to you -"

"Only a matter of time, Glaucus."

Glaucus snorted. "Again you presume. The people of this island are too clever to replace solid leadership with seductive charm."

Spiro laughed quietly. "You have never been so complimentary, Glaucus. Seductive charm? I didn't realize you had noticed."

Glaucus shook his head. "Perhaps the women are affected, but it is the *men* who vote."

Tessa sensed Spiro lean forward, his eyes on her. "And we both know where men's decisions

come from.”

Glaucus snorted again and swung his legs to the floor. It took several tries to raise his body from the cushions. “Get drunk, Spiro. Enjoy your delusions for one more night. But next week I sail to Crete, and I expect them to fully support my efforts.” He nudged Tessa’s foot with a sandaled toe. “Don’t go anywhere. I will be back.”

Tessa watched him leave the room, relief at his temporary absence flooding her. She was to travel to Crete with him next week. She had no intention of ever stepping onto the ship.

The previously unseen Spiro slid to her couch now, an elbow on the red cushion Glaucus had just vacated. He was older than she, perhaps thirty, with jet-black hair braided away from his face and falling just above his shoulders. He wore no beard like the others, and his eyes, deep-set and darker than the night sea, studied hers. A smile played at his lips. “What are you still doing with that bore, Tessa? You could do better.”

“One slave master is as another to me. To have something better is only to be free.” She was not truly Glaucus’ slave in the usual sense, and Spiro knew it, but it made little difference.

Spiro smiled fully now, and his gaze traveled from her eyes, slowly down to her waist. He took liberties, but Tessa had long ago become heedless of offense. “That is what I like about you, Tessa. One never meets a *hetaira* that speaks of freedom. They are resolved to their place. But you are different.”

“Why should I not be free?”

Spiro chuckled softly and inched closer. “Why, indeed? Ask the gods, who make some women wives and give others as slaves.” Spiro’s hand skimmed the cushions and came to rest on her thigh. “If you were mine, Tessa, I would treat you as the equal you deserve to be. Glaucus acts as though he owns you, but we all know he pays dearly for your favors. Perhaps it is *you* who owns *him*.” Spiro’s fingers dug into her leg and his eyes roamed her face and body again. Tessa felt neither pleasure nor disgust, a reminder that her heart had been cast from iron.

A shadow loomed above them, and Spiro’s hand snaked away from her leg, but not before Glaucus saw it. Tessa expected anger, not laughter.

“First you to think to rule the island, Spiro, and now you think to steal Tessa from me, as though she has the free will to choose whom she wants?” Spiro shifted to the next couch and Glaucus plopped down between them again. “She will never be yours, Spiro. Even when I am dead, her owner will only hand her to the next in line to have paid for her.” He wagged an eyebrow at Tessa. “She is worth waiting for, though, I can tell you.” Another coarse laugh.

Something broke loose in Tessa then. Caused, perhaps, by the vow taken while drinking in the memories of the harbor’s bronze statue, and the assurance that soon nothing she did would have consequence. Or perhaps it was ten years of a ruined life, commemorated this night with nothing more than continued abuse. Whatever the reason, she rose to her feet. The room silenced, as though a goddess had ascended a pedestal.

“May the gods deal with you as you have mistreated me, Glaucus of Rhodes. I will have no part of you.”

Glaucus grabbed her arm.

“Your heart is not in the festivities tonight, my dear. I understand. I will meet you in the inner courtyard later.”

He did this to save face, they both knew. Tessa wrenched her arm free of his clutching fingers, glanced at Spiro, and felt a chill at the look in his eyes. She raised her chin and glided from the *andrôn*.

In the hall outside the room, she looked both directions. She had no desire to stay, yet the world outside the house was no more pleasant or safe for her. She turned from the front door and trotted deeper into the house.

The hallway opened to a courtyard, with rooms branching in many directions. Along the back wall, a colonnaded walkway, its roof covered with terra cotta tiles, stretched the length of the courtyard. A large cistern gaped in the center.

Glaucus had said he would meet her here later, but from the sounds of the laughter behind her, the party raged without her. She should be safe for a few minutes at least.

Her head throbbed, as it always did when she wore her hair pulled back. She reached above her, found the pin that cinched her dark ringlets together, and yanked it. Hair loosed and fell around her, and she pushed fingers through it in relief.

A sharp intake of breath from across the room jarred her. She stood and whirled at the sound. "Who's there?"

A soft voice in the darkness. "I am sorry, mistress. I did not mean to startle you."

Tessa's heart gasped at the kindness and respect in his voice, the first she'd encountered this evening. She put a hand to her unfastened hair. Somehow she still found it within herself to be embarrassed by the impropriety he had discovered.

The man took hesitant steps toward her. "Are you ill, mistress? Can I help you in some way?" He was clean-shaven and quite tall, with a lanky build and craggy face, Glaucus' Jewish head-servant, Simeon.

"No, Simeon. No, I'm not ill. Thank you." She sank to the bench again. The older man dipped his head and began to back away.

Tessa reached out a hand. "Perhaps - perhaps some water?"

He smiled. "I'll only be a moment."

She had disgraced Glaucus tonight, in spite of his effort to laugh off her comments. How would he repay the damage she had done him? His position as chief archon of the polis of Rhodes outranked all other concerns in his life, and he would consider her disrespect in front of other city magistrates as treasonous.

In the three years since Glaucus had paid her owner the *hetaira* price and she had become his full-time companion, they had developed an unusual relationship. While he would not allow her to forget that she was not free, he had also discovered her aptitude for grasping the intricacies of politics, the maneuvering necessary to keep Rhodes the strong trading nation that it was, and to keep Glaucus in leadership within this democratic society. Power was a game played shrewdly in Rhodes, as in all the Greek world, and Glaucus had gained a competitive edge when he gained Tessa.

Rhodian society had declared her to be a rarity: beautiful, brilliant, and enslaved. But the extent to which the decisions of the city-state passed through her slave-bound fingers was unknown to most. And in this, she held power over Glaucus. She recalled Spiro's unknowing, yet astute, comment earlier... "Perhaps it is *you* who owns *him*."

Simeon returned, a stone mug in his hands. He held it out to her, and covered her fingers with his own gnarled hand when she reached for it.

His eyes returned to her hair. "I - I have never seen you with your hair down," Simeon said. He lowered his gray head again, but did not back away, and his voice was soft. "It is beautiful."

Tessa tried to smile. "Thank you."

He didn't look up. "If you are not ill, Tessa, perhaps you should return to the symposium. I should not like to see Glaucus angry with you."

Tessa exhaled. "Glaucus can wait."

Another noise at the courtyard's edge. They both turned at the rustle of fabric. A girl glided into the room, dressed in an elegant yellow chiton, her dark hair flowing around her shoulders. She stopped suddenly when she saw them.

"Simeon? Tessa?" What are you doing here?"

The man beside her bent at the waist, his eyes on the floor. "The lady was feeling ill. She re-

quested water." His eyes flicked up at Tessa, the expression unreadable, and then he trotted from the room.

Tessa turned her attention to the girl, inhaling the resolve to survive this next encounter. Persephone was perhaps twelve or thirteen, hovering on the delicate balance between girl and woman. Glowing pale skin framed by dark hair gave her the look of a ivory doll. In recent months, as she had gained understanding of Tessa's position in her father's life, she had grown more hostile.

She raised her chin and studied Tessa. "Does my father know you're out here?" Her tone contradicted the delicacy of her features.

Tessa nodded.

"So he let his plaything out of her cage?"

Tessa drew herself up at the insult, but sensed that the venom was meant for Glaucus.

The girl flitted to a potted tree in the center of the courtyard, picked a leaf, and seemed to examine it. "But who am I to speak of cages?" she said. She raised her eyes to Tessa. "We are all trapped here in some way. You. Me. My mother."

"Cages can be escaped," Tessa said. The words came from a deep place within her. The place that never wanted to be controlled again, that wished to be in control.

The girl turned toward her, studied her. "When you find the key, let me know."

"Tessa!" The voice was thick with wine and demanding. Tessa turned toward the doorway. The girl beside her took a step backward. "There you are," Glaucus said. "I've sent them all away." He waddled toward them. "I am sick of their company, also." He seemed to notice the girl for the first time. "Persephone! Why are you not in bed? Get yourself to the women's quarters."

Tessa could feel the hate course through the girl beside her as if it were her own body. "I am not tired. I wished to see the stars." She pointed upward.

Glaucus stood before them now, and he sneered at Persephone. "Well, the stars have no wish to see you. Remove yourself."

"And will you say goodnight to Mother?" Persephone asked. The words were spoken with sarcasm, tossed to Glaucus like raw bait. Tessa silently cheered the girl's audacity.

Glaucus was not so kind. "Get out!"

"And leave you to your harlot?" Persephone said.

In a quick motion belying his obesity, Glaucus raised the back of his hand to the girl and struck her against the face. She reeled backward a step or two, her hand against her cheek.

Tessa took a step forward, between them. "Leave her alone!"

Glaucus turned on Tessa and laughed. "And when did you two become friends?" he said.

Persephone marched to within an inch of her father and glared up into his corpulent face. "I despise you both," she said.

Glaucus raised his arm again, his hand a fist this time, but Tessa was faster. She caught the lowering arm by the wrist and pushed it backward. Glaucus rocked back on his heels and turned the hatred on her.

Tessa kept her eyes trained on Glaucus, but spoke to the girl, her voice low and commanding. "Go to bed, Persephone. I will deal with your father." She sensed the girl back away, heard her stomp from the room.

The anger on Glaucus' face melted into something else. A chuckle, sickening in its condescension, rumbled from him.

"High-spirited is one thing, Tessa. But be careful you do not go too far. Remember who keeps you in those fine clothes and wraps your ankles and wrists in jewels. You are not your own."

*But I soon will be.*

Glaucus reached for her, and she used her forearm to swat him away like a noisome insect. "Don't touch me. Don't touch her. Take your fat, drunken self out of here."

The amusement on Glaucus' face played itself out. The anger returned. Tessa was ready.

Glaucus stepped toward her, his words hissing between clenched teeth. "I don't know what has come over you tonight, Tessa, but I will teach you your place. You belong to me, body and spirit, and I will have you!" His heavy hands clutched her shoulders, his alcohol-soaked breath blew hot in her face. Every part of Tessa's inner being rose up to defend herself.

Ten years would end tonight.

## CHAPTER 2

Spiro lifted his fourth cup of the night, spilled three drops onto the floor of the andrôn in a libation to Helios, and drained the cup. He would wait for his moment.

Glaucus had called an end to his symposium and tossed Spiro and the other city leaders into the street before Spiro had drunk his fill of wine. And so the party simply moved to another's home, Xenophon's men's quarters, a double of the andrôn where Glaucus served them.

Across the room, their new host bowed low. "Welcome, men. Glaucus' headache is my gain. I am honored to host you this evening." Xenophon smiled, as one who had bested an opponent in the gymnasium. His competition with Glaucus had divided most of the polis between the two, and between them, they wielded more power in Rhodes than any of the rest of them. If Spiro were to become chief archon, both Glaucus and Xenophon must be dealt with.

Spiro surveyed the room through narrowed eyes. Dim-witted, most of them, believing they understood the game of power. Did any of them believe the headache Glaucus claimed? Or did they know the truth, that Tessa's disrespect had prompted him to end the party and deal with her properly?

*Tessa.* The image of her shimmered in his mind, like a treasure longing to be possessed. Spiro smiled, amusing himself with thoughts of Glaucus dealing with her even now. Would he strike her? Hold her down until fear sparked from her eyes, overcoming her insolence? Would he wait for her to weep, to beg for mercy? Spiro indulged the delicious images a few moments longer, until the conversation around him drew his attention away from the pleasure.

"Glaucus will lead Rhodes to future prosperity we have only dreamed of," an aging politician beside him said.

Spiro leaned back and sipped his wine. This conversation was his reason for coming. "Glaucus is a fool," he said, tossing the comment into the center of the room and waiting for it to burst into flame. As he hoped, all eyes turned toward him.

Spiro raised his cup to the others. "We in this room understand the value of powerful leadership. Glaucus continues to undermine that leadership, forcing us to be led by the populace, by the will of the majority - the majority of whom are fools."

"Spiro, you go too far," another magistrate said. "Democracy in Rhodes remains intact in spite of the conquering Macedonian, who has taken over nearly every other city-state of Greece. Would you have us bow to Alexander as well, even though he is dead these hundred years?"

Spiro swung his legs to the floor and set his cup on the small table beside him. "The Macedonians have much to offer. We could all learn from the Great Alexander." He dropped the pitch of his voice - cool water to quench hot tempers. "Membership in the Achaean League would grant us a military strength we must have if we are to remain free. And one of our own would still lead here, one who could do far more than Glaucus ever could."

Xenophon chuckled from the other side of the room. "One such as yourself, Spiro?"

Spiro returned the question with a cool smile.

"Come now, Spiro, it is no secret that you seek to rule Rhodes as your father rules Karpathos."

Another politician spoke up. "I doubt Spiro's father would appreciate the comparison!"

Spiro raised his chin. "What do you know of my father?"

"You're a man who drinks too much, who eats too much rich food, who seeks to possess everything he touches. Not the qualities of a great leader such as your father."

Spiro worked to control his voice. "I am a man who understands *quality* and seeks to have it, Hermes. Perhaps you could learn from me."

"Quality? Like Tessa?"

Snickers around the room lit a slow-burning flame in Spiro's gut. It was true, he wanted to possess Tessa nearly as much as he wanted to rule this island. But he would not speak of Tessa here.

The conversation had not transpired as planned. He had intended to focus attention on Glaucus' failings, not his own.

A bare-chested slave entered, bearing a small plate of nuts and figs, and placed it on a table before Xenophon. He exited with a bow.

"Come," Xenophon said, holding a fig aloft. "Let us leave off talk of government and turn our minds to other things." At that moment, a girl somersaulted into the room and jumped to her feet, hands high. The music from the corner picked up tempo, and the girl was followed by two more of her kind, wheeling into the room, hands-over-feet. The three linked arms and began an intricate series of steps in the center of the room.

The eyes and the smiles of every man in the room focused on the barely-clothed young girls. Every man except Spiro. He had no interest in gymnasts. His only desire was to be the man in Xenophon's place, hosting an impromptu symposium with more extravagance than most men could plan in weeks. He studied Xenophon's indulgent smile, the slow way he chewed a fig as he watched the girls.

And then Xenophon's expression changed. Spiro thought at first that one of the girls had misstepped, or perhaps crushed the toe of someone important. He glanced around the room for the cause of the man's dismay. But no one else seemed to have taken note of anything.

He looked across to Xenophon. His face had taken on a fiery hue, and he swallowed furiously. Around them, the festivity continued. Spiro raised himself from the cushions where he reclined and leaned toward Xenophon. There was no question now, the man was ill.

He thought to summon a slave, but before he had a chance, Xenophon jerked to his feet. The flutist ceased as though sheep's wool had suddenly plugged her instrument. The last note hung in the air discordantly, and the young gymnasts lowered themselves to the floor. All eyes turned toward their host.

Was it the fig? Had it blocked his air? The guests were standing now, too, though no one took action. Xenophon sucked in air, and the question of choking was answered. But his breathing rasped and his eyeballs bulged.

One of the partygoers came to life. "By the gods, someone call a physician!" Behind Spiro, a man slipped out the door in response. The two men on either side of Xenophon eased him down to the couch again. His face whitened, and flecks of foamy spittle clung to the corners of his mouth. His eyelids fluttered. And then the spasms began. A faint twitch of the head at first. Then an arm, a leg, and suddenly his entire body convulsed. The couch rocked beneath him. Those on either side held his arms.

"Where is the physician?"

"What can be done?"

Everyone spoke at once. They diagnosed, they dispensed advice, they backed away and drew close.

"Poison!"

Spiro never knew who first spoke the word, but once it had been said aloud the crowd knew it to be true. Someone knocked the plate of figs to the floor. Another attempted to pour wine down Xenophon's throat, as if it would ward off the evil effects of the poison.

Behind him, someone moved to leave, but the city elder, Hermes, prevented his exit. "No one leaves this room until it is known what has happened here."

The attention returned to Xenophon. Another convulsion gripped him. A moment later his body stiffened as though he were a sculpted figure instead of living man. His head jerked toward Spiro. Xenophon's eyes seemed to fix upon him. Spiro held the stony, unblinking stare for several moments, and then Xenophon's body sagged, his head dropped to his shoulder, and his tongue lolled from his mouth like a sleeping dog's.

The man was quite dead.

They were held there, every guest, and questioned. Had anyone been seen tampering with Xenophon's figs? Who was the slave who had brought them in? Did anyone have a reason to see harm come to Xenophon? Spiro had nearly laughed at that question. Every man in the room was envious of their host's position in the government. Who of them did *not* have a reason to see harm come to him? The question should have been, did anyone have the stomach to do it?

When they had all been sufficiently interrogated and allowed to leave, Spiro headed down toward the docks.

What changes would Xenophon's death bring to Rhodes? Between Glaucus and Xenophon, the two controlled the opinion of nearly every other politician in the city-state. With Xenophon gone, a power void awaited the first man to step into it.

Spiro slowed at the quay near the statue of Helios and watched the men hauling grain onto a ship. Such a simple task. And yet the blessed position of the island made it central to nearly all Greek trade, and brought riches to its people, washed in on every high tide.

Rhodes was greater even than Karpathos, his father's island.

*And I will be greater than he.*

His mind played with the thought. He would be the man to step into power. Xenophon was dead, and somehow Glaucus would have to be managed as well, but Spiro would have Rhodes.

Yes, he would seize the city for himself. And when Rhodes was his, somehow he would have Tessa, too.

Ω

Tessa raised both fists to her face, jerked them outward, and broke Glaucus' grip on her shoulders. She took a step backward. "Get away from me, you filthy beast."

Glaucus seemed to accept the insult as a challenge. A fire sparked in his eyes, one she had not seen before. Cause for fear. She backed away farther, placing distance between them in the courtyard. A rare breeze blew into the enclosure, as though to cool her anger, to save Tessa from herself.

But she had no desire to be saved. Not tonight.

"What did you think, Tessa?" Glaucus said, his speech slurred. "Did you think you are my equal, simply because I humor you with news of the city?" He laughed. "Not even my wife would make such a presumption."

"Humor me?" Tessa straightened. "You humor *me*? You could not lead a carrion bird to a carcass without me, let alone lead a city."

His arm shot forward and he slapped her. The slap rang out in the silent courtyard, its echo bouncing back from the tiled roof of the colonnade. Tessa placed a cool hand against her stinging cheek.

"Strike me, beat me, kill me if you like, Glaucus. But the truth remains unchanged. You need me. You need my insight, my opinions, the information I glean in the places you wouldn't dare enter. If that doesn't make me your equal, than nothing can."

Glaucus laughed again and folded his arms across his girth. "Finally you speak reason! You are correct there - nothing can make you my equal! You are and always will be a pleasant, if challenging, distraction. Nothing more."

Movement at the side of the courtyard caught her eye. Simeon entered and glanced around for a moment before spotting them under the walkway's tiled roof.

"Is there anything you need, master?" The older man's question was for Glaucus, but his eyes were on Tessa.

Glaucus half-turned and waved the man off. "Leave us, Simeon. This is no concern of yours."

Simeon bowed his way out, and Glaucus scowled. "That old goat has outlived his usefulness. I have arranged for his replacement already."

Tessa shook her head. "Do you have any affection for anyone other than yourself?" She counted on shaky fingers as his expression grew rancid. "Your wife, your daughter Persephone, Simeon – faithful to you always." She paused. "And me. None of us are any more to you than useful tools and amusing toys, to be discarded or abused as you wish."

Glaucus reached to Tessa and touched the gold circlet at her neck. There was a cunning behind his drunken half-smile, a slyness that Tessa had never seen before. "I think at last my *hetaira* understands me," he said. "You exist to be used, Tessa. That is your purpose. Did you think you were entitled to more? Do you dream of happiness, of a *family*, perhaps?"

His question was more of a sneer, and his mockery of her unspoken desire jolted her. "I hate you," she hissed.

Glaucus stared deeply into her eyes. He shook his head and shrugged one shoulder. "Why should that concern me?"

It was a simple question, quietly asked, but the implications caused Tessa to stagger backward a step.

She had nothing left then, nothing at all. The power she believed she wielded over Glaucus was an illusion. The role she played, of politically astute companion to one of the country's most powerful men, was nothing more than a bit of theater, a mask she assumed. And she would never have her secret wish.

The decision she'd made before the symposium hardened. She swore to Helios that before his first rays lit the Rhodian sky in the morning, she would offer herself at his feet and be free.

While her thoughts ran unbidden, Glaucus sidled closer, until he stood only inches from her. As if from outside herself, she watched his hands caress her arms, felt him pull her into a harsh embrace.

*Yes, a family. A child, yes. Happiness and love.* Release came with the acknowledgment.

She whispered into his ear the first thing that came into her mind, a familiar thought she had never before given voice. "I will kill you while you sleep."

There was no reaction, save for his hands traveling up her arms, to her throat. His fingers dug into her flesh, restricting her air slightly.

She lifted her arms to fight him off, but then relaxed. *Go ahead. Do it. Perhaps I haven't the courage to do it myself.*

More pressure. Less air. Tessa sucked in breath in tiny gasps, but she did not resist.

*Ten years. Ten years tonight.*

She remembered that girl who stood at the rail of the ship from Delos, not much older than Glaucus' daughter, naïve and carefree. She remembered her, and she mourned for her. Rhodes had been her prison, her cage, as Persephone had said. It was time to escape.

*And yet...*

Would she die as she had lived, at the whim of another?

A deep passion to control her own fate, in this, her last act before she entered the underworld, surged up from an unknown place.

She scrabbled at Glaucus' meaty fingers on her neck, but she could not tear them away. Cold spots of black trembled in her vision.

*Not you. Not you. I will do it myself.*

She called on the hatred of ten years, let it boil inside of her until it flowed into her arms, her hands, her fingers. She reached out and dug her fingers into Glaucus' eyes.

He yelped like a dog who'd been kicked and released her immediately. Tessa filled her lungs with sweet air and pushed him backward. She tried to step around him, but he wrapped an arm around her waist.

"You're not going anywhere," he gurgled. He turned her to him and pulled her close, and Tessa realized with horror that her attack had excited him more. She beat at his face with her fists. His breath was labored, and he was still unsteady from too much wine, but he was twice her size. "I've had enough of the high-spirited *hetaira*," he said. "I think I shall put an end to her tonight."

In desperation, Tessa brought her knee up, hard. Glaucus howled and bent forward. Tessa grabbed his shoulders and shoved him away from her. He stumbled backward one step, then two. His balance shifted. She watched as his weight fell against one of the columns supporting the roof that covered the walkway.

It seemed to happen slowly. The column shook under Glaucus' weight. His feet shuffled, but lost purchase. The wine did its work, and he fell. One shoulder bore the impact, and Tessa heard a crack. He lay at her feet at the edge of the walkway, face up, eyes closed but breathing hard.

And then there was a sliding sound above her, like a cooking pot being dragged across a stone floor. Tessa looked up. One single terra cotta tile slid down the roof, one small square of baked earth shaken loose by the jolt to the column. Down it slid, until it tipped over the lip of the roof, spun twice as it fell, and buried itself in the center of her master's forehead, cleaving flesh and then bone.

Tessa did not move. She did not breathe.

She watched his chest for his next breath. It did not come.

She braved another look at his face. Blood pooled on the floor beneath him. The tile remained upright, embedded in his skull. Tessa was reminded of the way the men at the docks sometimes left their knives buried in the cutting blocks after chopping the head from a fish.

Glaucus had crossed to the afterlife.

She looked away and clutched her stomach, waiting for the remorse that did not come.

Two beats of silence, then Simeon returned to the courtyard.

## CHAPTER 3

A half-mile away, thirty-two dock workers labored beside the dark sea, hauling sacks of grain from dock to barge.

Thirty-two workers, all but one a slave.

Nikos of Thera paused in his trek from the mountain of grain on the quay, a large sack resting in well-muscled arms. Arms once accustomed to this very labor, arms that remembered the former days as easily as Nikos did.

A grizzled old man bumped against him, then shoved an elbow into his gut. "Stand about while we work, will you?"

He turned to the man, searched the scratchy beard and greasy hair for what might remain of the old slave's humanity. Is this what Nikos would have looked like in a few-score years, if his father had not acknowledged and rescued him?

Behind him, a jab in the back. "Get to work, man!"

Nikos continued to the barge that dipped and bucked at the water's edge, flung his sack in line with others, and returned to the pile.

*Another hour, at most.*

His masquerade as a work-for-hire free man at the *empirion* had served him well. He had caught the attention of the man he had targeted, and been offered a position within his home. He was to report tonight, after his shift at the docks.

"What's your name?" a voice behind him demanded.

He turned from the grain, taking in a man dressed in a short tunic, the dark harbor behind him, the water lapping at the edge of the stone wall. His eyes were drawn toward flames a few hundred yards distant to his right, circling the base of the mighty Helios. Torches illuminated the statue's circular base and the bare feet and legs that rose from it. The body and head disappeared into the darkness, as though Helios communed with the gods of the night sky.

Another poke in his stomach, this time with the end of a stick. "I said, what's your name, water rat?"

Caution told him to remain unknown. He shrugged.

The man before him, younger than him by ten years, sneered. "Well, No-Name, either start carrying grain or find yourself in the sea. We've no use for pretty men standing about."

To avoid another jab with that stick, Nikos lurched forward with the others around him to pick up sacks and carry them to the barge. Farther out in the harbor, a wooden ship rested at anchor, waiting for the load of grain.

Nikos watched the dock-master stroll along the harbor's edge, swinging his stick, then engage in conversation with an older, well-dressed man. An angry scar like a crescent moon etched across the older man's cheek. Nikos frowned and studied the scar. Where had he seen this man before?

Head down, Nikos continued with the sacks of grain. Everything depended on his not being identified. If he were recognized and hailed, his careful plan to enter the inner circle of Rhodian politics and gain information might be destroyed.

From the corner of his eye, Nikos watched the younger man shake his head, then extend a hand around the dock, as if inviting the older man to his domain. The two parted before Nikos had a chance to contemplate disappearing. The well-dressed man faded into the darkness of the other end

of the dock, and the dock master wandered toward the line of sack-carrying men. His eyes traveled over Nikos again. "You! What did you say your name was?"

Nikos hesitated, then kept moving, head down. "Andros."

The man tilted his head and chewed his lip. "Have you gotten yourself in some trouble?"

Nikos shook his head.

"Because the law is looking for a fine-looking free man like you. He seems very eager to find him. A murderer, perhaps? A thief?"

Nikos hefted a crate to rest on his shoulder and kept walking. The dock master stepped in front of him. "I should think there would be a reward for finding a man so hotly pursued."

Nikos weighed his options. If he ran, he would be chased for abandoning his work before his shift ended, or because the scarred man sought him. If he stayed, he might be identified and he would fail in the task his father had set before him.

A shout and a crash arose from the end of the slave-line behind him. Nikos turned.

In its frantic rush to accept and disgorge as much trade as possible, Rhodes had begun to employ pulley systems to lift the heaviest items, treasures such as Athenian marble and ship-building timber from the wooded hills of Thrace. It was one of these pulleys that had failed, releasing a cache of logs to the dock below.

A scream sliced the night air. Nikos ran toward the source of it.

All but one slave had escaped the falling timber. This one lay on the quay, his lower leg bent at a perverse angle. Nikos pushed through the workers who closed around the injured man, his instinct erasing all thoughts of exposure.

In the days before he had been lifted from the life of these men and placed within the wealth of his father's favor, Nikos had been more than a dock worker. He had been a champion of the working conditions of slaves. And in his years of exposure to injuries suffered, he had developed a working knowledge of and a fiery passion for the healing arts.

"Let me see the leg," he said. The authority in his voice created a breach in the crowd.

The man moaned from the ground, his face a grimace of pain. Nikos recognized him as the old man who had elbowed him earlier. A boy knelt beside him, holding the injured man's head in his hand.

He had suffered a nasty break, there was no doubt. The man would not work the docks again. But with proper treatment, he might live out his days as a household slave.

"The leg must be set," Nikos said to no one in particular. "Fetch a narrow plank, and tear some clean rags!"

Nikos looked over his shoulder. Through a gap in the crowd, he scanned the darkness at the end of the dock. The well-dressed man with the scar emerged, eyes darting about like a hound on a scent.

Recognition flashed upon Nikos. The man was an enemy. More precisely, the right-hand man of his father's chief adversary.

Nikos reached a hand beneath his tunic, to a pouch well-belted at his waist. He drew out two drachmas and pressed them into the hand of the slave holding the old man's head. The boy raised incredulous eyes to Nikos, who whispered, "Use this to pay the physician. Be certain the leg is set and allowed to heal. He will walk again."

Without a backward glance, Nikos fled into the night, away from the *emporion* and its guardian statue, away from his father's enemy.

He would be hunted, he had no doubt. But by the time he was found, he hoped to be well-entrenched in the home and life of the man who was the key to his success... Glaucus of Rhodes.

## Ω

Tessa watched Simeon enter the courtyard. She saw the concern on his face. She observed him look toward Glaucus at her feet, perceived that he crossed the courtyard in haste and kneeled beside his master. All this she saw from a vague and hazy place within her mind, oddly detached. A place that had no words to speak as Simeon questioned her.

"Oh, Tessa, what has happened?"

The kneeling servant reached a tentative hand in the direction of the tile protruding from Glaucus' forehead, then withdrew it. He lifted his head to study her.

"I heard shouting," he said. "I came to be certain you - that all was well."

"He is dead." Tessa inhaled and looked away. "He is dead."

"Yes."

She heard the sadness in Simeon's voice, and was able to marvel that the servant held any amount of affection for his master. But then Simeon turned to her and stood.

"He pushed you too far, Tessa. This was foreseeable. A woman such as yourself, forced to submit to him..."

Tessa did not at first grasp the connection. Then realization came. She lifted a weak hand toward Glaucus. "Do you think that I did this?"

Simeon gripped her arm. "I do not blame you, Tessa. But we must think now. We must think about how to protect you!"

She shook her head. "The tile. The column." She pointed upward. "It came from the roof."

"Tessa! It makes little difference now. You must listen!" Simeon led her a few paces from the body. "All who attended the symposium tonight heard your imprudent words. All have seen the way he demeans you, in spite of the respect you command in this city. No one will doubt that you have killed him, finally."

Tessa could focus only on fragments of Simeon's words. Such a strange feeling. "What will happen to me?"

Simeon glanced at Glaucus. "If you are found guilty of murder, you will be executed."

"But I am not guilty."

"And if you are found innocent, you will be passed to the next patron who has paid your *hetaira* price."

"I will run," she said. "Disappear."

Simeon smiled sadly. "You're the most well-known *hetaira* on the island, Tessa. Where would you go that you would not be recognized? Who wouldn't return you to Servius for the price of the reward?" He sighed. "Stay here a moment."

He left, and sparks of panic surged to Tessa's fingertips. She began to wish Glaucus weren't dead. He was sometimes controllable. Even if she could make people believe what had happened, and escaped execution, what would her next patron be like?

Simeon returned a moment later, a dark swath of fabric in his hands. He flicked his wrists to snap the fabric taut in the air, then let it float to the ground where it covered Glaucus' bulk. Tessa began to breathe again, began to think.

"I must know who is next, Simeon," she said.

The Jewish man nodded. "I will pray that it is a better man, for your sake."

Tessa gripped his arms. "Tell no one, Simeon. Promise me that you'll tell no one until I return!"

Simeon smiled, sadness in his eyes. "We can't hide him for long, Tessa. He'll be missed as soon as the day is new."

Tessa looked at the fabric-draped body and thought of her vow to Helios, to offer herself before sunrise. But perhaps the god had heard her cry, and answered with a different sort of freedom, one she had not dared to dream. She was tasting it now, she knew. And once tasted, it could not be relinquished.

She released Simeon' arms and nodded. One backward glance, then she fled through the inner hall, onto the portico, and into the Rhodian night, her steps and her heart pounding a rhythm that whispered of hope.

She must learn who would own her next. Only then could she decide. Only then could she know where her freedom would be found...

In pursuing life or in embracing death?