Benson Edward Frederic

The Vintage: A Romance of the Greek War of Independence

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Edward Frederic Benson
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Part I
THE VINEYARD

CHAPTER I
THE HOUSE OF THE ROAD TO NAUPLIA

Nauplia, huddled together on the edge of its glittering bay, and grilled beneath the hot stress of the midsummer noon, stood silent as a city of the dead. Down the middle of the main street, leading up from the quay to the square, lay a scorching ribbon of sunshine, and the narrow strips of shadow, sharp cut and blue, spoke of the South.

Along one side of the square ran the barracks of the Turkish garrison of occupation, two-storied buildings of brown stone, solid but airless, and faced with a line of arcade. These contained the three companies of men who were stationed in the town itself, less fortunate in this oven of heat than the main part of the garrison who held the airier fortress of Palamede behind, overlooking the plain from a height of five hundred feet. Down the west side stood the quarters of the officers, and opposite, the prison, full as usual to overflowing of the native Greeks, cast there for default of payment to the Turkish usurers of an interest of forty or fifty per cent. on some small loan; for these new Turkish laws of 1820 with regard to debt had made the prisons more populous than ever. A row of shops and a couple of cafés along the north struck a more domestic note.

A narrow street led out of the square eastwards, and passing the length of the town, burrowed through the wall of Venetian fortification in the manner of a tunnel. On the right the outline of the gray fortress hill, precipitously pitched towards the town in a jagged edge like forked lightning, rose steep and craggy, weathered by the wind in places to a tawny red, and peppered over with sun-dried tufts of grass. Along the base of this the road ran, cobbled unevenly in the Turkish fashion, and after passing two or three villas which stood white and segregate among their gardens of flowering pomegranate and serge-clad cypress, struck out into the plain. Vineyards and rattling maize fields bordered it on one hand; on the other, beds of rushes and clumps of king-thistles, which peopled the little swamp between it and the bay. The spring had been very rainless, and these early days of June saw the country already yellow and sere. The clumps of succulent leaves round the base of the asphodels were dried and brown; only the virile stems with their seeding sprouts remained green and vigorous.

The blinding whiteness of the forenoon gave place before one of the day to a veiled but unabated heat, and sirocco began to blow up from the south. Furnace-mouthed, it raised mad little whirlwinds, which spun across the road and over the hot, reaped fields in petulant eddies, and powdered all they passed with fine white dust. Two or three hawks, in despair of spying their dinner through this palpable air, and being continually blown downwind in the attempt to poise, were following the example of the rest of the world, and seeking their craggy homes on the sides of Palamede till the tempest should be overpast. A few cicalas in a line of white poplars by the wayside alone maintained their alacrity, and clicked and whirred as if sirocco was of all airs the most invigorating. The hills of Argolis to the north were already getting dim and veiled, and losing themselves in an ague of heat.

By the roadside, a mile from the town, stood a small wine-shop, in front of which projected a rough wooden portico open to the air on three sides, and roofed with boughs of oleander, plucked leaf and flower together. A couple of rough stools and a rickety table stood in the shade in order to invite passers-by to rest, and so to drink, and the owner himself was lying on a bench under the house wall in wide-mouthed sleep. A surly-looking dog, shaggy and sturdy, guarded his slumbers in the intervals of its own, and snapped ineffectually at the flies.

Directly opposite the wine-shop stood a whitewashed house, built in a rather more pretentious style than the dwellings of most Greek peasants, and fronted by a garden, to which a row of white poplars gave a specious and private air. A veranda ran around two sides of it, floored with planks, and up the wooden pillars, by which it was supported, streamed long shoots of flowering roses. A low wooden settee, cushioned with two Greek saddle-bags, stood in the shade of the veranda, and on it were sitting two men, one of whom was dressed in the long black cassock of a priest – both silent.

Then for the first time a human note overscored the thundering of the hot wind, and a small gray cat scuffled round the corner of the veranda, pursued by a great long-limbed boy, laughing to himself. He was dressed in a white linen tunic and tight-fitting linen trousers; he had no shoes, no socks, and no hat. He almost fell over the settee before he saw the two men, and then paused, laughing and panting.

"She was after the fish," he explained, "and I was after her. She shall taste a slapping."

One of the two men looked up at the boy and smiled.

"You'll get into mischief if you run about in the heat at noonday without your cap on," he said. "Come and sit down. Where are your manners, Mitsos? Here is Father Andréa."

Mitsos knelt down, and the priest put his hand on the boy's rumpled black hair.

"God make you brave and good," he said, "and forgive all your sins!"

"Now sit down, Mitsos," said his father. "Who is going to taste a slapping?"

The boy's face, which had grown grave as he received the priest's blessing, dimpled into smiles again.

"Why, my cat, Psepséka," he said. "The greedy woman was going down to the cellar where I put the fish, and I went after her and caught her by the tail. She spit at me like a little she-devil. Then she scratched me, and I let go. But soon I will catch her again, and she shall pay for it all twice over, Turkish fashion. See!"

He held out a big brown hand, down which Psepséka had scored three red lines.

"What a fierce woman!" said his father. "But you're overbig to run about after little cats. You're eighteen now, Mitsos, and your uncle comes here this evening. He'll think you're a boy still."

The boy looked up from his examination of his hand.

"Uncle Nicholas?" he asked.

"Yes. Go and wash your hand, and then lay the table. Put some eggs to boil, and get out some bread and cheese, and pick some cherries."

Mitsos got up.

"Will the father eat with us?"

"Surely; and put your shoes on before you come to dinner."

And without waiting the boy was off into the house.

The priest looked up at Mitsos' father as he disappeared.

"He is full young yet," he said.

"So I think, and so perhaps Nicholas will think. Yet who knows what Nicholas thinks? But he is a good lad, and he can keep a secret. He is strong too; he walked from here to Corinth last week, and came back next day, and he grows like the aloe flower."

The priest rose and looked fiercely out over the garden.

"May the God of Justice give the Turks what they have deserved!" he cried. "May He send them bitterness to eat and death to drink! May their children be fatherless and their wives widows! They had no mercy; may they find none! The curse of a priest of God be upon them!"

Mitsos' father sat still watching him. Eleven years ago Father Andréa had been obliged to make a journey to Athens to settle about some plot of land belonging to his wife, who had lately died, and, if possible, to sell it – for under the Turkish taxes land was more often an expense than a revenue. He had taken with him his only daughter, a girl of five or six years of age, pretty even then, and with promise of wonderful beauty to come. On his way home, just outside Athens, he had been attacked by some half dozen Turks, and, after a desperate, hopeless resistance, had been left on the road more dead than alive, and his daughter had been carried off, to be trained, no doubt, to the doom of some Turkish harem. He must have lain there stunned for some hours, for when he awoke again to an aching consciousness of soul and body, the day was already reddening to its close, and the shadow of the hills of Daphne had stretched itself across the plain to where he lay. Wounded and bleeding as he was, and robbed of the money he had got for the land, he had dragged himself back to Athens, and stayed there for weeks, until his hope of ever finding his Theodora again had faded and died. For it was scant justice that was given to the Greeks by their masters, who treated them as a thoughtless man will scarce treat an animal that annoys him. Rape, cruelty, robbery was their method of rule, and for the unruly a noose.

Since that time one thought, and one only, possessed his brain, a thought which whispered to him all day and shouted to him in sleep – the lust for vengeance; not on one Turk alone, on those who had carried Theodora off, but on the whole of that race of devils. For eleven years he had thought and schemed and worked, at first only with nothing more than wild words and bloody thoughts, but of late in a soberer belief that his day would come; for organized schemes of throwing off the Turkish rule were on foot, and though they were still things only to be whispered, it was known that agents of the Club of Patriots were doing sure and silent work all over the country.

Father Andréa was a tall, finely made man, and, to judge from his appearance, the story that he would tell you, how he and his family were of pure Greek descent, had good warrant. He came from the southwest part of Argolis, a rough, mountainous land which the Turks had never entirely subdued. His father had died five years before, but when Andréa went home after the capture of his daughter, the old man had turned him out of the house and refused to see him again.

"A child is a gift which God has given the father," said he; "it were better for him to lose himself than lose God's gift; and now we, who are of the few who have not mixed with that devil-brood – we are fallen even as others. You have brought disgrace on me, and on our dead, and on our living, and I would sooner have seen you dead yourself than hear this from your lips!"

"They were six to one," said Andréa, "and they left me for dead. Would to God they had killed me!"

"Would to God they had killed you," said his father, "and her too."

"The fault was not mine. Will you not forgive me?"

"Yes, when the fault is wiped out by the death of Theodora."

"Of Theodora? What has she done?"

"She will grow up in shame, and mate with devils. Go!"

Five years passed before they met again. But one day Andréa's father, left lonely in his house, moved by some vague desire which he hardly understood himself, saddled his mule and went to Nauplia, whither Andréa had gone. He was very old and very feeble in body, and perhaps he felt that death could not be far from him; and to Andréa's cry of welcome and wonder – "I have come to you, my son," said the old man, "for otherwise we are both alone, and – and I am very old."

Day by day he used to sit looking up and down the road for Theodora. There was a bend in it some quarter of a mile farther up, and sometimes, when the spring days were warm to his bones, he would hobble up to the corner and sit waiting for her there, where he could command a longer

stretch of country. But Theodora came not, and one evening, when he came back, he sank into a chair without strength and called Andréa to him.

"I am dying," he said, "and this is no season to waste idle words. When Theodora comes back" – he always clung to the idea that she would come back – "tell her that I waited for her every day, for I should have loved to see her again. And if you find it hard, Andréa, to forgive her, forgive her for my sake, for she was very little and the fault was not hers; nor is it yours, and I was hard on you; yet if I had loved you not, I should have cared the less. But if, when the day comes, you spare your hand and do not take vengeance on the Turks to the uttermost, then may my ghost tear you limb from limb, and give you to the vultures and the jackals."

The old man rose from his chair.

"Vengeance!" he cried; "death to man, woman, and child. Smite and spare not, for you are a priest of God and they are of the devil. Smite, smite, avenge!"

He sank back in his chair again, his head fell over on to his shoulder, and his arms rattled against the woodwork. And with vengeance on his lips, and the desire of vengeance in his heart, he died.

From that day a double portion of his spirit seemed to have descended on Father Andréa. One hope and one desire ruled his life – to help in wiping out from Greece the whole race of Turks. To him innocent or guilty mattered not; they were of one accursed brood. But though the longing burned like fire within him, he kept it in, choking it as it were with fresh fuel. He was willing to wait till all was ready. For a year or two large organizations had been at work in North Greece collecting funds, and, by means of secret agents, feeding and fanning the smouldering hate against their brutal masters in the minds of the people. Soon would the net be so drawn round them that escape was impossible. And then vengeance in the name of God.

Mitsos had encouraged a small charcoal fire to heat the water, and he went to fetch the eggs. Two minutes of puckered brow were devoted to the number which he was free to boil. His father usually ate two, the priest – and he cursed his own good memory – never ate more than one, and he himself invariably ate as many as he could possibly get. He looked at the basket of eggs thoughtfully. "It is a hungry day," he said to himself, "and the hens are very strong. Perhaps father might eat three, and perhaps Father Andréa might eat two. Then I am allowed three, a tale of eight."

Mitsos drew a sigh of satisfaction at this liberal conclusion, and his eyes began to smile; his mouth followed suit, and showed a row of very white teeth.

"It is such a pity that I am always hungry," he said to himself; "but when Uncle Nicholas measures me he will see I have grown."

And putting the eight eggs into the pot, he ran off to pick the cherries.

For the last year both Constantine, Mitsos' father, and the boy had worked the little land he owned, like common laborers. Two years before a Turkish pasha, Abdul Achmet by name, in passing through the country had been struck by the Avilion climate of Nauplia, and had built a house on the shore of the bay. The land belonged to Constantine, and the Turk had promised him a fair price for it, feeling that a less scrupulous man would have taken it off-hand. At the same time he intimated that if he would not take a fair price for it, he would get no price at all. The money, of course, was still owing, and on Constantine's old vineyard stood the house, now finished. Abdul Achmet, who was Governor of Argos, took up his quarters here permanently, with his harem; for it was within easy distance of Argos, and on warm evenings the women were often seen in the garden looking over the sea-wall which separated it from the bay, a wall some ten feet high, over which creepers sprawled and flamed. Abdul himself was a fat, middle-aged Turk, slow of movement and sparing of speech. In temper of mind he was a Gallio, and his neglect to pay Constantine the money he owed him was as much due to negligence as to the usual Turkish method of dealing with Greeks, which was not to pay at all. His harem, for the years had long since quenched the ardor of his body, were given a good deal of freedom, and were allowed to wander about the garden, which was walled off from the country road, as they pleased.

Constantine had applied several times for payment, but had already given up hopes of securing any equivalent for the land seized. He was a Greek of the upper peasant class – that is to say, of the first class of the country – who lived on their own land and employed labor. Like his race, he was thrifty and industrious; but now, between the loss of his vineyard and the iniquitous increase in the last year's taxes, which promised to grow indefinitely, he found it difficult to do more than make a sparing livelihood. He and Mitsos worked all the spring with the laborers in the harvest-field, and in the autumn, when they had finished making the wine from a half-acre of vines still left them, as laborers in the neighboring vineyards.

Constantine felt the change in his position acutely. Instead of being a man with men under him, he was himself obliged to work for his bread, and, what was an added bitterness, it was by gross injustice, and through no fault of his own, that he was thus reduced. Every year the taxation became more and more heavy; only six months before he had been obliged to sell his horse, for a new tax was levied on horses, and all that remained were an acre or two of ground, a pony, his house, and his boat. But of late he seemed to have taken up a patient, uncomplaining attitude, which much puzzled the growling Greeks whom he met at the cafés. While others grumbled and cursed the Turks beneath their breath, Constantine would sit with a quiet smile on his lips, looking half amused, half indulgent. Only two nights before a neighbor had said to him, point blank:

"You have suffered more than any of us, except perhaps those who have daughters. Why do you sit there smiling? Are things so prosperous with you?"

The question was evidently prearranged, for the two or three men sitting round stopped talking and waited for him to answer.

Constantine knocked the ashes out of his chibouk before replying.

"Things are not prosperous with me," he said; "but I am a man who can hold his tongue. This I may tell you, however: Nicholas Vidalis comes here in three days."

"And then?"

"Nicholas will advise you to hold your tongues, too. He will certainly tell you that, and it may be he will tell you something besides. I will be going home. Good-night, friends."

And now, when Father Andréa was cursing the Turks in the name of God, though Constantine crossed himself at that name, he watched him with the same smile. Then he said:

"Father Andréa, I ask your pardon, but Nicholas does not like too much talk. He says that talking never yet mended a matter. You know him – in these things he is not a man of many words, save where it serves some purpose."

The priest turned round.

"You are right and wrong," he said; "Nicholas is a man of few words; but I have made a vow that for every time the sun rises, and at every noonday and every sunset, I will curse the Turk in God's name. That vow I will keep."

Constantine shrugged his shoulders slightly.

"Well, here is Mitsos. Do not curse before the boy. Mitsos, is dinner ready?"

Mitsos wrinkled up his forehead till his eyebrows nearly disappeared under his curly hair.

"Yes, it is ready; but for me, I can find one shoe only."

"Well, look for the other."

"I have looked for it," said the boy, "but it is not, and I ache for emptiness."

He raised his eyes appealingly to his father, but Constantine was firm.

"You must find it first," he said. "Come, Father, let us go in."

Father Andréa followed him, leaving Mitsos half-shod and disconsolate.

CHAPTER II
THE COMING OF NICHOLAS VIDALIS

An hour later, Mitsos, having found his shoe and eaten his dinner in decency, was curled up in the shady corner of the veranda fast asleep. He had been out fishing most of the night before, and as the harvest was over there was no work on hand except to water the vines when the sun was off the vineyard, which would not be before four. He slept, as his father said, like a dog – that is to say, he curled himself up and fell into a light sleep, from which any noise would arouse him – as soon as he shut his eyes.

He was an enormous boy, of the Greek country type, close on the edge of manhood, with black, curly hair coming down onto his shoulders, straight, black eyebrows, long, black eyelashes, and black eyes. His nose was short and square-tipped, his mouth the fine, scornful mouth of his race, quick to reflect the most passing shades of emotion. His hands and face were of that inimitable color for which sun, wind, and rain are the sole cosmetic – a particularly soft, clear brown, shading off a little round the eyes and under the hair. As he slept, with his head thrown back, there showed on his neck the sharp line where the tanning ended and the whiter skin began. He had that out-door appearance which is the inheritance of those whose fathers and grandfathers have lived wholesomely in the open air from sunrise to sunset all their lives, and who have followed the same course of life themselves. He had kicked off his shoes again, and his hands were clasped behind his head, and what would at once characterize him to any one who was acquainted with the Greek peasant race was that both hands and feet were clean.

He slept for a couple of hours, and was awakened by the pale, dust-ridden sunshine creeping round the corner of the veranda and falling on his head. At first he rolled over again with his face to the wall, but in a few moments, realizing the uselessness of temporizing, he got up and stretched himself lazily and luxuriously, with a cavernous yawn. Then he went round to the stone fountain which stood at the back of the house and plunged his head into the bright cool water to finish the process of awakening, and, seeing that the tall shade of the poplar had stretched its length across the vineyard, took up his spade and went off to his work.

The stream, which passed through their garden and out into the bay below, ran for some half-mile along a little raised aqueduct, banked up with earth to keep it to its course. It passed between small vineyard plots on each side, so that the water could be turned into them for irrigation, and Mitsos went out of the garden gate straight into their vineyard, which lay just above.

Each of the vines stood in its several little artificial hollow dug in the ground, and he first cleared the water-channels in the vineyard of all accumulated rubbish and soil, so that, when he let the stream in, it might flow to all the trees. Having done this, he went back to the aqueduct and removed a spadeful of earth from the bank, which he placed in the bed of the stream itself, stamping it down to keep it firm, so that the whole of the water was diverted into the vineyard. Standing, as he did, a few feet above the surface of the vines, he could see when the water had reached them all, and then, hooking out his temporary dam from the bed of the stream, he replaced it, so as to again send the water back into its channel; then, jumping down, he hoed away round the roots of the vines, so that the water might sink well in close to them, for there had been no rain for weeks, and they must be thoroughly watered.

The sun was off the land, but it was still very hot, for the sirocco had increased in violence and was sweeping over the fields like the blast from the pit. On the windward side of the trees the dark rich green of the vine-leaves was powdered over with the fine white dust driven up from the bare, harvested fields. Mitsos stopped now and then to wipe the sweat off his forehead, but otherwise he worked hard and continuously, singing to himself the peasant song of the vine-diggers.

His work was nearly over when he saw his father coming towards him. The latter stood for a moment on the edge of the bank, looking at what the boy had been doing.

"Poor little Mitsos," he said, "you have had to work alone to-day! I was obliged to go into Nauplia. You have watered the vines very well. You have finished, have you not?"

"There are three more vines here," said Mitsos, "which are yet to be dug. But it won't take long."

His father stepped down into the vineyard.

"You can go and rest," he said. "I'll finish those."

Mitsos threw down his spade.

"Oh, it is hotter than hell!" he said. "Uncle Nicholas will be roasted coming across the plain."

"He will want a bath," said Constantine. "Do you remember his making a bath last year out of those spare planks? I suppose it holds water still?"

"I wish it didn't hold so much," said Mitsos; "it holds six cans."

Constantine laughed.

"And Mitsos' back will ache, eh?"

"I hope not; but it is a great affair to carry six cans of water from the fountain."

Constantine worked on for half an hour or so, while Mitsos looked on.

"There, that is finished," he said, at last. "You won't go fishing to-night, will you? The wind is too strong."

"It may go down at sunset," said Mitsos; "but there are enough fish for to-night and to-morrow night, unless this hot weather turns them. But I put them in the cellar in water, and I expect they will keep."

They walked back together, but as soon as they got onto the road they saw that three mules were standing opposite the house. Constantine quickened his pace.

"Nicholas must have come," he said. "He was ever quicker than a man could expect. Come, Mitsos."

The veranda was full of boxes and rugs, and the two went through into the house. A man was sitting on a low chair by the window. As they came in he got up.

"Well, Constantine," he said, "how is all with you? I have just come. And Mitsos, little Mitsos is growing still. I will give you a hundred piastres when you are as tall as your father. It is the devil's own day, Constantine, and I am full inside and out of this gritty wind. Man is not a hen that he should sit all day in the dust. May I have a bath at once? Mitsos, we made a bath together. The mule men will help you to fill it."

He laid his hand on Mitsos' shoulder.

"You look fitter than a mountain hawk," he said. "Get me plenty of water, and give me ten minutes of scouring, and then we will talk together while I dress."

Mitsos left the room, and Constantine turned to his brother-in-law. "Well?" he asked.

"He is a fine boy," said Nicholas; "I must see if he can be trusted."

"A Turk would trust him," said his father, eagerly.

"Ha! we shall not require that. But in the face of fear?"

Constantine laughed.

"He does not know what fear is."

"Then he has that to learn," said Nicholas, "for the bravest men learn that best. No one can be brave until he has known the cold fear clutching at the stomach. However, we shall see."

Nicholas was dressed like Constantine, in Albanian costume, with a woollen cloak thrown over one shoulder, a red embroidered jacket, cut very low and open, showing the shirt, a long fustanella and white leggings, tied with tasselled ends. He was tall and spare, and his face seemed the face of a man of forty who had lived very hard, or of a man of fifty who had lived very carefully. In reality he was nearly sixty. He was clean shaven and very pale in complexion, as one who had never lived an out-door life; but you might have been led to reject such a conclusion, if you remarked the wonderful

clearness and freshness of his skin. His eyes looked out from deep under a broad bar which crossed his forehead from temple to temple; they were large and dark gray in color, and gathered additional depth from his thick black eyebrows. His nose was finely chiselled, tending to aquiline, with thin, curved nostrils, which seemed never still, but expanded and contracted with the movement of the nostrils of some well-bred horse snuffing some disquieting thing. His mouth was ascetically thin-lipped, but firm and clean cut. His hair, still thick and growing low on his forehead and long behind, was barely touched with gray above the temples. His head was set very straight and upright on a rather long neck, supported on two well-drilled shoulders. In height he could not have been less than six feet three, and his slightness of make made him appear almost gigantic.

"I have travelled from Corinth to-day," he continued, "and there is much to tell you. At last the Club of Patriots have put the Morea entirely into my hands. I have leave to use the funds as I think fit, and it is I who shall say the word for the vintage of the Turks to begin. Are there men here whom you can trust, or are they all mule-folk and chatterers?"

"The main are mule-folk," said Constantine.

"The mule-folk can be useful," remarked Nicholas; "but the man who travels with a mule to show the way goes a short journey. They follow where they are led, but some one has to lead. But is there not a priest here – Father Andréa, I think – with a trumpet for a voice? I should like to see him. As far as I remember, he talked too much, yet you would not call him a chatterer."

"He curses the Turk in the name of God three times a day," said Constantine. "It is a vow."

"And little harm will the Turk suffer from that. Better that he should learn to bless them, or best to keep a still tongue. Well, little Mitsos, is the bath ready? You will excuse me, Constantine, but I am an uneasy man when I am dirty. Come to my room in ten minutes, Mitsos, and tell me of yourself."

"There is little to tell," said Mitsos.

"We will hope, then, that it is all good. By the way, Constantine, I have brought some wine with me. Mitsos will drop it into the fountain, for it must be tepid. Tepid wine saps a man's self-respect, and if a man, or a boy either, doesn't respect himself, Mitsos, nobody will ever respect him."

Mitsos followed him out of the room with his eyes, and then turned to his father.

"My hands are so dirty from that vine-digging," he whispered. "Do you think Uncle Nicholas saw?"

"He sees everything," said his father. "Wash, then, before you go up to his room."

Mitsos adored his uncle Nicholas with a unique devotion, for Nicholas was a finer make of man than any he had ever seen. He had been to foreign countries, a feat only attainable by sailing for weeks in big ships. He had been able to talk to some French sailors who had once been wrecked, within Mitsos' memory, on the coast near, and understand what they said, though no one in the place, not even the mayor, could do that; indeed the latter, before Nicholas had interpreted, roundly asserted that they spoke as sparrows speak. Then Uncle Nicholas was constantly going on mysterious journeys and turning up again when he was least expected, but always welcome; and he had a wonderfully low, soft voice, as unlike as possible to the discordant throats of the country folk; and he had long, muscular hands and pink nails. Also he could shoot wild pigeon when they were flying, whereas the utmost that the mayor's son, who was the acknowledged Nimrod of the neighborhood, could do, was to shoot them if they were walking about. Even then he could only hit them for certain if there were several of them together and he got very close. Also Uncle Nicholas was omniscient: he knew the names of all birds and plants; he could imitate a horse's neigh so well that a grazing beast would leave its fodder and come to his voice; and once when Mitsos was laid up with the fever he had picked some common-looking leaves from the hedge and boiled them in water, and given him the water to drink, the effect of which was that next morning he awoke quite well. Above all, Nicholas told the most enchanting stories about what he had seen at the ends of the earth.

So Mitsos washed his hands and went up to Nicholas's room, finding him already bathed and half dressed. His dusty clothes lay on the floor, and he pointed to them as Mitsos came in.

"I shall be here four days at the least," he said, "and I want these washed before I go away. The most important thing in the world is to be clean, Mitsos."

"Father Andréa says – " began the boy.

"Well, what does Father Andréa say?"

"He says that to love God and hate the devil – I think he means the Turk – is the most important thing."

"Well, Father Andréa is right. But you must remember that I am right too. Sit you in the window, Mitsos, and talk to me. What have you been doing since I was here?"

"Looking after the vines," said Mitsos, "since the reaping was over. And I go fishing very often, almost every night."

"Then to-morrow we will go together; to-night I have much to say to your father."

"Will you really come with me?" asked the boy. "And will you tell me some more stories?"

"Yes, I have a new set of stories, which you shall hear – I want to know what you will think of them. How old are you?"

"Eighteen, nineteen in November; and my mustache is coming."

Nicholas turned the boy's face round to the light.

"Yes, an owner's eye might detect something. Why do you want a mustache?"

"Because men have mustaches."

"And you want to be a man," said Nicholas; "but a man makes his mustache, not his mustache the man. But before we go down I have one thing to say to you, a thing you must never forget: if a Turk ever asks you if you know aught about me, where I am, or where I may be going, you must always say you know nothing. Say you have not set eyes on me for more than a year. Do you understand? That must be your answer and no other."

"I understand, just that I have not seen you for a year, and know nothing about you."

"Yes. Whatever happens, do you think you can always answer that and no more? I may as well tell you that if you answer more than that, if, when you are questioned – I do not say you will ever be questioned, but you may be – you tell them where I am, or whether I am expected here, or anything of the kind, you will perhaps be killing me as surely as if you shot me this moment with my own gun. Do you promise?"

"Of course, I promise," said Mitsos, with crisp, boyish petulance.

"And should they threaten to kill you if you do not tell them?"

"Why do you ask me?" he said. "I have made the promise."

Nicholas laid his hand on the boy's shoulder, and with a flashing eye – "And, by God, I believe you are one to keep it!" he said.

The sirocco blew itself out during the night, and a light north wind had taken its place when day dawned. A smell extraordinarily clean was in the air, and the whole sky was brisk with the sparkling air of the south. Northwards from Nauplia the sharp mountainous outlines of the Argive hills were cut out clear against the pale cobalt of the heavens, glowing pink in the sunrise, and all their glens and hollows were brimmed with bluest shadow. To the west, a furlong away, the waters of the bay gleamed with a transparent, aqueous tint; you would have said that two skies had been melted together to make the sea. Beyond, the hills over which the Turkish road to Tripoli wound like a climbing, yellow snake, lay still in darkness. The lower slopes were covered with pines; above, the bare, gray stone climbed up, shoulder by shoulder, to meet the sky. By degrees, as the sun rose higher, the light struck first the tops, and flowed caressingly down from peak to spur, and spur to slope, till it reached the lower rounded hills at the base, and then flashed across the bay and the plain of Argos. There it caught first the tawny fortress walls of the citadel which kept guard over the town, then the town itself which clustered round its base, until suddenly from Constantine's house the sun swung over the rim of the hills to the northeast, and the whole plain leaped from shadow into light.

There had been a heavy dew during the night, and the close-reaped cornfields were a loom of gossamer webs, hanging pearly and iridescent between the stubble-stalks, and in the vineyards the upper surface of the broad, strong leaves was wet and shining, as if with a fresh coat of indescribable green. In that first moment of light and heat all the odors of flowering plants, grafted on the wholesome smell of moist earth, which had been hanging as if asleep close to the ground all night, rose and dispersed themselves in the air. A breath of wind shook the web of sweet smell out of the mimosa trees that grew at the gate of Constantine's garden, and sent it spreading and shifting like the gossamers in the fields on to the veranda, and in at the open windows. The border of wild thyme by the porch trembled like a row of fine steel springs as the wind passed over it, and gave out its offering of incense to the morning. A sparrow lit on a spray of rose and flew off again, scattering dew-drops and petals. The world smiled, breathed deep, and awoke.

During the morning Mitsos was chiefly employed in making coffee, for many of the leading Greeks, to whom the secret of the imminent uprising was known, came from Nauplia to see Nicholas, and to each must be offered a cup of Turkish coffee. Nicholas sat in the veranda with his narghilé, which he smoked without intermission, and he appeared to be giving instructions to his visitors. Among the first to come was Father Andréa, whom he treated with great respect. When he rose to go, Nicholas accompanied him as far as the back gate, which led into a field path towards his house, and Mitsos, who was washing cups at the fountain screened behind bushes, heard them go by talking.

As they parted he heard Nicholas say, "Above all, be silent. We shall want you to talk later, and to talk then with the full voice. At present a word overheard might ruin everything, and the devil himself scarcely knows when he is being overheard. Even now Mitsos, whom you never noticed, but whom I noticed, knows all I say to you. Mitsos, come here."

Mitsos came, cup in hand, flushed and angry.

"You are not fair to me, Uncle Nicholas," he said. "I was not listening. I could not help hearing."

"No, little one, I am not blaming you," said Nicholas; "I only wanted Father Andréa to see. That is an instance to hand, father; please let there not be more. And here is my offering to the Christ and to my patron saint for having brought me here safely."

Nicholas was punctual to his promise to Mitsos, and soon after sunset they went off together to where the boat was lying. Mitsos carried a couple of big pewter ladles, a bag full of resin, a wicker creel for the fish, and two spears, while Nicholas walked on a little ahead with the net wound round his shoulders. They were to begin the evening's work with the spears, and later when the moon was up to sail across the far side of the bay, where they would use the sweep-net in the shallow water, where the bottom was sandy and shelving. But the nearer shore of the bay was rocky, descending rapidly into deep water, and was no place for netting. Nicholas, however, got into the boat in order to arrange the net and dispose the lead in what he considered a more satisfactory manner, leaving the boy to do the spearing alone.

Mitsos took off his linen trousers, fastening his shirt round his waist with a leather belt. He then slung the creel and the bag round his neck, and putting a half handful of resin into the ladle, set light to it, took the spear in his right hand, and rolling up his sleeves to the shoulder, stepped into the sea. He held the flare close to the surface, so that its light showed clearly on the bottom of the shallow water, a luminous lure for the fish. The spear he held ready to bring down if he saw anything.

It was a scene which Rembrandt would have painted with the hand of love. The moon was not yet risen, but in the clear starlight the edges of the serrated hills were sharply etched against the sky, and the water of the bay, just curdled by the wind, lay vast and sombre across to the farther shore. The light from the resin-flare vaguely showed the lines of the boat in which Nicholas was preparing the net, but all was dim except Mitsos' figure and a few feet of glittering, flame-scribbled water round him. The highest light was cast on his brown down-bent face and on his left arm bared to the shoulder, which stood out as clear-cut as a cameo against the darkness behind, and as he moved, the water, which lapped about his knees, was stirred into fire-crested ripples. The sea was slightly

phosphorescent, and his trail was palely luminous like the Milky Way. Now and again, with a sudden splendid motion, down went the poised spear with a splashing cluck into the sea, and he would draw it up again, sometimes with a red mullet, sometimes with a thin brill flapping and struggling on the point. More rarely he missed his aim, and looked up at Nicholas smiling and showing his white teeth.

At the end of half an hour the latter had finished his fresh leading of the net, and as a stiffer breeze had awoke, ruffling the surface of the water and making it difficult to see the fish distinctly, they started to sail across the bay. Mitsos waded out to the boat, trousers and shoes in hand, set the big brown sail, and giving a vigorous shove or two with the oar sent the boat round so that it caught the wind. In a moment it heeled over without stirring, and then the whisper of its moving came sibilantly from the forefoot, and gathering speed it glided on across the dark water.

Nicholas had taken the rudder, and Mitsos sat down beside him.

"Eight mullet and a dozen other fish," he said. "That is no bad catch for half an hour. Put her head for under that point, Uncle Nicholas. Do you see it? There is a house with a light burning a little above it."

"I see. It will take nearly an hour with this wind. Well, what is it?"

"Will you tell me some of the new stories, Uncle Nicholas?"

"No, we will keep the stories for when we go home. It will take us twice as long to get back against this wind. They are long stories."

For nearly an hour they sailed on in comparative silence; the wind had freshened, and from over the hills towards Tripoli there came blinking flashes of summer lightning. The lamp in the house above the point to which they were steering had been put out, but in the half-darkness of the summer night the promontory itself was clearly visible. Towards the east the hills were blocked out with a strange intensity of blackness, for the moon was on the point of rising behind them, and the deep velvet blue of the zenith had turned to dove-color.

"Now for our fishing, Mitsos," said Nicholas, as they drew near to the shore. "Can we run the boat in behind the promontory?"

"Yes, there is four feet of water right up to the land. Just there the shore is steep. I will take in the sail."

"There is no need. As soon as we pass the corner it will be dead calm."

Nicholas put the helm hard to port as soon as they were opposite the little point; next moment the sail flapped like a wounded bird against the mast, and they ran up to the rocks. Mitsos jumped out and tied the boat up.

They lifted the net on shore, and made their way round the wooded headland to the little bays which they were to fish. Here the shore was sandy and shelving, and sprinkled with clumps of succulent seaweed which grew up from the rocks below, a favorite feeding ground, as Mitsos knew, for mullet and sole. Nicholas had put on Constantine's long fishing-boots, reaching up to his hips, before he left the boat, Mitsos, as before, merely taking off his shoes and trousers.

The net was some twenty-five yards long, and Mitsos, taking one end into his hand, stepped into the water at right angles to the shore. He waded out till the net was taut between them, and then Nicholas followed. As soon as the latter was some ten yards from land they both moved shorewards up the little bay, which lay in front of them, getting gradually nearer to each other as they approached the beach, till when they were within five or six yards of the land they were walking together, the net trailing in a great bagging oval behind them. The resistance of the water, the dragging of the lead along the bottom, and, it was to be hoped, the spoils enclosed made no small weight, and it was a quarter of an hour or so before they got it in. The moon had risen, and it was easy to see the silvery glitter of the fish as they lay fluttering in the dark meshes of the net. The flat, brown soles, however, required a more careful search, and the sound of their flapping, rather than the eye, led to their discovery.

They fished for an hour or two with only moderate success, until Mitsos proposed they should try a little farther down the coast, where shoals of a certain fish, as small as the whitebait, and as

sweet, grazed the watery pastures. Here the depth was somewhat greater, and before going in Mitsos divested himself of his shirt, leaving it on the rocks, and went in completely naked. Nicholas, who had put himself entirely under his directions, waited in the shallower water near the shore till the boy had waded out to where the water covered him to the waist; then, as before, they moved in converging lines towards the shore.

They had approached to within about twenty yards of the beach, and within about five yards of each other, when Mitsos stopped and pointed back. The upper edge of the net, fitted at intervals with corks to keep it floating, was visible on the bright surface of the sea, trailing in an irregular oval. But inside this oval the moonlit water was strangely agitated and unquiet, quivering like a jarred metal-plate, and from moment to moment a little silvery speck would glitter on it.

"Look," he said to Nicholas, "the little fish are there. We must be as quick as we can. Sometimes if the shoal begins jumping they will all jump out."

And bending forward to get his whole weight into the work, he pushed forward towards the land.

The moonlight fell full on his body, dripping and glistening from the waist downwards with the salt water, and threw the straining muscles which line the spine, and those chords behind the shoulder-blade which painters love, into strong light and shadow, as he pulled against the weight of the dragging net. Already the water came only to his knees, and the catch was imminent, when suddenly from the net there came a rustle and a splash like myriad little pebbles being thrown into the sea, and he turned round just in time to see the whole shoal, which glistened like a silver sheet, rise and drop into the water outside.

"The little Turks," he said, angrily, "they are all gone."

"Better to pull the net in and look," said Nicholas; "a part only may have leaped."

Mitsos shook his head.

"When they go like that it is all of them," he said.

Mitsos was quite right. There was a stray fish or two still in the net, but so few that they were hardly worth picking out.

"That will do for to-night, won't it?" he said. "We have fished all the best places."

Nicholas assenting, he lay down and rolled over in the warm, dry sand once or twice, and then standing up brushed the wet stuff off his body. Then spreading the net out on the rocks higher up on the beach, Mitsos went off to fetch his shirt. Nicholas employed himself in picking up a few stray fish, and put them into the creel. Then rolling up the net they walked back to the boat.

CHAPTER III
THE STORY OF A BRIGAND

The wind, which had taken them straight across the bay, still blew freshening from the same quarter, and was dead against them. They would have to make two long tacks to get home – the first, right across to the island in the middle of the bay; the second, back again to the head of it; and as soon as they were well off on the outward tack, Mitsos went to the stern of the boat and sat down by Nicholas.

"It is time for the stories, is it not?" he said.

"Yes, we will have the stories now."

Nicholas paused a moment.

"Mitsos," he said, "I am going to tell you about a part of my life of which I have never spoken to you before, for, until now, I have only told you boys' stories to amuse a boy. But now I am going to tell you a story for a man. This all happened before you were born, twenty years ago, when I was a brigand."

Mitsos stared.

"A brigand, Uncle Nicholas? You?"

"Brigand, outlaw, klepht, whatever you like to call it. A man with a price set on his head – it is there now for you to take if you like – a man without any home but the mountains. Yet one may do worse than live in the mountains, Mitsos, and drink to the 'good bullet,' praying one might be killed rather than fall alive into the hands of the Turk. The first part of my story is like many other stories I have told you before; it is the second part, when I tell you why I was a brigand, that will be new to you – a story, as I have said, not for a boy, but for a man.

"I used to live then at Dimitzana, in Arcadia, and I became a brigand on the night that my wife died. Why and how that happened comes later. Well, there I was living in the mountains round Arcadia, sheltering and hiding for the most part of the day in the woods, but keeping near some mountain path, so that if a Turk or two or three came by I could – how shall I say it? – do business with them. For a month or two I was a-hunting alone, and then I was joined by other men from Dimitzana, who also had become outlaws. With them I went hunting on rather a larger scale – we used to take Turks and get ransoms for them. But never did we take or molest a Greek or lay hands on any woman, Greek or Turk. For the most part we were very fortunate, and all the time we lost but few men, and of those the heads of none fell into the hands of the Turks, for if one was wounded beyond healing we all went and kissed him and said good-bye; and then one cut his head off and buried it, so that the Turks should not dishonor him."

Nicholas paused a moment, and then laughed gently to himself.

"Never in my life shall I forget when we took Mohammed Bey – a fat-belly man, Mitsos, and a devil, with a paunch for two men and a woman's skin. To see him tied on his mule, crying out to Allah and Mohammed to rescue him and his dinner from the infidels, as if Mohammed had nothing better to do than look after such swine! I told him that he would only spend a day or two with us in the mountains until his friends ransomed him, adding that we would do our best to make him comfortable. But he wept tears of pure oil and said that Mohammed would avenge him, which, as yet, the Prophet has omitted to do. But there is one drawback to that sort of life, little Mitsos – one cannot keep clean. Sometimes, if one is travelling or being pursued, one has to go a whole day, or more, without water to drink, much less to wash in. Once, I remember, we had been all day without water, and could not find any when we stopped for the night; but there was a heavy dew, and, though it was a cold night, we all sat without our shirts for an hour, laying them on the ground until they were wet with dew, and then wrung them out into our mouths. Ah, horrible! horrible!"

Nicholas spat over the side of the boat at the thought, and then went on.

"For the most part we lived up in the mountains to the north of Arcadia, but somehow or other when summer came we all began to head southward again. We never spoke to each other of where we were going, for we all knew. And one evening, just before sunset, we were on the brow of a big wooded hill above Dimitzana and looked at our homes again. Homesickness and want of water – these were the two things which made me suffer, and I would drink the wringings of a shirt sooner than be sick for home.

"All next day we stopped there, sitting on that spur of wooded hill looking at home as if our eyes would start from our heads. Now one of us and then another would roll over, burying his face in his hands, and the rest of us would pretend not to notice. I cannot say for certain what the others did when they buried their faces like that; for myself I can only say that I sobbed – for some had wives there, and some children. And it hurts a man to sob unless he is a Turk, for Turks sob if the coffee is not to their taste.

"That evening I could not bear it any longer, and I said to the others, 'I must go down and see my house again.' They tried to stop me, for it is a foolish thing for an outlaw to go home when there is a price on his head; but I would not listen to them.

"And I went down to the village and walked up the street, past the fountain and past the church. I met many Greeks whom I knew, but I made signs to them that they should not recognize me. Luckily for me the garrison of Turks had been changed, and though I passed several soldiers in the street, they stared at me, being a stranger, but did not know who I was.

"Then I went up past the big plane-tree and saw my house. The windows were all broken and the door was down, for that, too, had the Turks done in their malicious anger at not finding me there. And on the door-step my father was sitting. He was very old, eighty or near it, and he was playing with a doll that had belonged to my daughter."

Nicholas paused a moment.

"Mitsos," he went on, "you do not know what it is to feel keen, passionate joy and sorrow mixed together like that, ludicrously. It is not right that a man should have to bear such a thing, for when I saw my father sitting there nursing the doll I could not have contained myself, not if ten companies of angels had been withstanding me or twenty of devils; and I ran up to him and sat down by him, and kissed him, and said, 'Father, don't you know me?' But he did not say anything. He only looked at me in a puzzled sort of way, and went on nursing his doll.

"It is odd that one remembers these little things, but the stupid face of the doll, somehow, I remember better than I remember the face of my father.

"I stopped in the village for an hour, perhaps more, and I swore an oath which I have never yet forgotten and which I will never forget. In the church we have a shrine to the blessed Jesus and another to His mother, and one to St. George, and to each of them I lit tapers and prayed to them that they would help me to accomplish my oath. They have helped me and they will help me, and you, Mitsos, can help me, too."

The boy looked up.

"What was your oath, Uncle Nicholas," he said, "and how can I help you?"

He laid his hand on Nicholas's knee, and Nicholas felt it trembling. The story was going home.

"I will tell you," he said; "but, first, I must tell you how it was I became an outlaw. This was the way of it:

"You never knew my wife: she died before you were born. She was the most beautiful and the best-loved of women. That you will not understand. You do not know yet what a woman is to a man, and your cousin Helen, to whom the doll belonged, would have been as beautiful as her mother. A fortnight before I became an outlaw there came a new officer to command the garrison at Dimitzana. He was a pleasant-seeming man, and to me, being the mayor of the village, he paid much attention. He would sit with us all in the garden after dinner. Sometimes I asked him to take his dinner with us; sometimes he asked me to dine with him. But Catharine always disliked him; often she was barely

civil to him. He had been in the place nearly a fortnight when I had to go away for a night, or perhaps two, to Andritsaena for the election of the mayor, for I had some little property there, and therefore a vote in the matter. I left about midday, but I had not gone more than four hours from the town when I met a man from Andritsaena, who told me that the election would be an affair of form only, as one of the two candidates had resigned. So I turned my horse round and went home.

"It was dark before I got to the village, and I noticed that there was no light in my house. However, I supposed that Catharine was spending the evening with some friend, and I suspected nothing. But it got later and ever later and she did not come, so at last I went out and called at all the houses where she was likely to be. She was not at any of them, and no one had seen her. Then unwillingly, and with a heart grown somehow suddenly cold, I determined to go to the officer's quarters and ask if he had seen her. There was a light burning in one of the upper windows, but the door was locked.

"It was when I found that the door was locked that I drew my pistol from my belt and loaded it, and then I waited a moment. In that moment I heard the sound of a woman sobbing and crying from inside the house, and the next minute I had burst the door open. The room inside was dark, but a staircase led up from it through the floor of the room above, and I made two jumps of it. Helen – she was only seven years old – ran across the room, perhaps knowing my step, crying 'Father, father!' and as my head appeared the officer fired. He missed me, and shot Helen dead.

"Before he could fire again I fired at him. He fell with a rattling, broken sound across the floor, and never spoke nor moved. Catharine was there, and she came slowly across the room to me.

"'Ah, you have come,' she said; 'you are too late.'

"I sat down on the bed, and my throat was as dry as a sirocco wind, and laid the double-barrelled pistol, still smoking, by me. Neither of us, I am sure, gave one thought to the man who was lying there, perhaps hardly to Helen, for dishonor is worse than death; and for me I could say no word, but sat there like a thing broken.

"'You are too late,' she repeated; 'and for me this is the only way.'

"And before I could stop her she had taken up the pistol and shot herself through the head.

"The shots had aroused the soldiers, and two or three burst in up the stairs. With the officer's pistol, for I had no time to reload mine, I killed the first, and he went bumping down the stairs, knocking one man over. Then I opened the window and dropped. It was not more than ten feet from the ground, and I had only a few feet to fall."

He paused a moment and stood up, letting go of the rudder and raising his hands.

"God, to whom vengeance belongs," he cried, "and blessed Mother of Jesus, and holy Nicholas, my patron, help me to keep my vow."

He stood there for a moment in silence.

"And my vow – " he said to Mitsos.

"Your vow – your vow!" cried Mitsos. "The foul devils – your vow is to root out the Turk, and to-morrow I, too, will light tapers to the holy saints and make the vow you made. Christ Jesus, the devils! And you must show me how to keep it."

"Amen to that," said Nicholas. "Enough for to-night, we will speak of it no more."

He sat down again and took the rudder, and for five minutes or so there was silence, broken only by the steady hiss of the water round the boat, and then Mitsos, still in silence and trembling with a strange excitement, put about on the second tack. Nicholas did not speak, but sat with wide eyes staring into the darkness, seemingly unconscious of the boy.

This second tack brought them up close under the sea-wall of Abdul Achmet, and the white house gleamed brightly in the moonlight. Then, as Mitsos was putting about again on the tack which would take them home, Nicholas looked up at it and spoke for the first time.

"That is a new house, is it not?" he said.

"Yes, it is the house of that pig Achmet," said Mitsos.

"Why is he a pig above all other Turks?"

"Because he took our vineyard away and said he would pay a fair price for it. Not a piastre has he paid. Look, there are a couple of women on the terrace."

Two women of the house were leaning over the wall. Just as they went about Nicholas saw a man, probably one of the eunuchs, come up out of the shadow, and as he got up to them he struck the nearer one on the face. The woman cried out and said to him, "What is that for?"

Nicholas started and looked eagerly towards them. "Did you hear, Mitsos?" he said, "she spoke in Greek."

"One of those women?" said Mitsos. "And why not?"

"How do you suppose she knows Greek?"

"Yes, it is strange. We shall not get home in this tack."

CHAPTER IV
THE MIDNIGHT ORDEAL

For the next two days Nicholas devoted himself to the education of Mitsos. He took the boy out shooting with him and taught him how to stand as still as a rock or a tree, how to take advantage of the slightest cover in approaching game, and how, if there was no cover, to wriggle snake-wise along the ground so that the coarse tall grass and heather concealed him. There were plenty of mountain hares and roe-deer on the hills outside Nauplia towards Epidaurus, and they had two days' excellent shooting.

They were walking home together after sunset on the second day, and slung over the pony's back were two roe-deer, one of which Mitsos had shot himself, and several hares which Nicholas, with a skill that appeared almost superhuman to the boy, had killed running. The pony was tired and hung back on the bridle, and Mitsos, with the rope over his shoulder, was pulling more than leading it.

"And if," Nicholas was saying to him, "if you can approach a roe-deer as you approached that one to-day, Mitsos, without being seen, you can also approach a man in the same way, for in things like these the most stupid of beasts is man. And it is very important when you are hunting man, or being hunted by him, which is quite as exciting and much less pleasant, that you should be able to approach him, or pass by him unseen. After two days I shall be going away, but I shall leave this gun behind for you."

"For me, Uncle Nicholas?" said Mitsos, scarcely believing his ears.

"Yes, but it shall be no toy-thing to you. For the present you must go out every day shooting, but you must take the sport as a matter concerning your life or death, instead of the life and death of a piece of meat. Stalk every roe as if it were a man whose purpose is to kill you, and if ever it sees you before you get a shot you must cry shame on yourself for having wasted your time and my gift to you. But go fishing, too, and treat that seriously. Do not go mooning in the boat just to amuse yourself, or only for the catching of fish. Before you start settle how you are to make your course, in two tacks it may be, or three, and do so. Practise taking advantage of a wind which blows no stronger than a man whistling."

"I can sail a boat against any one in Nauplia," said Mitsos, proudly.

"And Nauplia is a very small place, little Mitsos. For instance, we ought to have got back from our fishing in two tacks, not three. And study the winds – know what wind to expect in the morning, and know exactly when the land breeze springs up. Go outside the harbor, too; know the shapes of the capes and inlets of the gulf outside as you know the shape of your own hand."

"But how can I shoot and fish, and also look after the vines and get work in other vineyards in the autumn?"

"That will be otherwise seen to. Obey your father absolutely. I have spoken to him. Also, you stop at home too much in the evenings. Go and sit at the cafés in the town and play cards and draughts after dinner, yet not only for the sake of playing. Keep your ears always open, and remember all you hear said about these Turks. When I come back you must be able to tell me, if I ask you, who are good Greeks, who would risk something for the sake of their wives and children, and who are the mules, who care for nothing but to drink their sour wine and live pig-lives. Above all, remember that you haven't seen me for a year – for two, if you like."

Mitsos laughed.

"Let it not be a year before you come again, uncle."

"It may be more; I cannot tell. You are full young, but – but – well, we shall see when I come back. Here we are on the plain again. Give me that lazy brute's bridle. Are you tired, little one?"

"Hungry, chiefly."

"And I also. But, luckily, it is a small thing whether one is hungry or not. You will learn some day what it is to be dead beat – so hungry that you cannot eat, so tired that you cannot sleep. And when that day comes, for come it will, God send you a friend to be by your side, or at least a drain of brandy; but never drink brandy unless you feel you will be better for it. Well, that is counsel enough for now. If you remember it all, and act by it, it will be a fine man we shall make of the little one."

Nicholas went to see the mayor of Nauplia the next day, and told Mitsos he had to put on his best clothes and come with him. His best clothes were, of course, Albanian, consisting of a frilled shirt, an embroidered jacket, fustanella, gaiters, and red shoes with tassels. To say that he abhorred best clothes as coverings for the skin would be a weak way of stating the twitching discomfort they produced in him; but somehow, when Nicholas was there, it seemed to him natural to wish to look smart, and he found himself regretting that his fustanella had not been very freshly washed, and that it was getting ingloriously short for his long legs.

The mayor received Nicholas with great respect, and ordered his wife to bring in coffee and spirits for them. He looked at Mitsos with interest as he came in, and, as Mitsos thought, nodded to Nicholas as if there was some understanding between them.

When coffee had come and the woman had left the room, Nicholas drew his chair up closer, and beckoned Mitsos to come to him.

"This is the young wolf," he said. "He is learning to prowl for himself."

"So that he may prowl for others?" said Demetri.

"Exactly. Now, friend, I go to-morrow, and while I am away I want you to be as quiet as a hunting cat. I have done all I wanted to do here, and it is for you to keep very quiet till we are ready. There has been much harm done in Athens by men who cannot hold their tongues. As you know, the patriots there are collecting money and men, but they are so proud of their subscriptions, which are very large, that they simply behave like cocks at sunrise on the house-roofs. Here let there be no talking. When the time comes Father Andréa will speak; he will put the simmering-pot on the fire. I would give five years of my life to be able to talk as he can talk."

"The next five years?" asked Demetri.

Nicholas smiled.

"Well, no, not the next five years. I would not give them up for fifty thousand years of heaven, I think. Have you any corn?"

"Black corn for the Turk?"

"Surely."

Demetri glanced at Mitsos, and raised his eyebrows. "Even now the mills are grinding," he said.

"Let there be no famine."

Mitsos, of course, understood no word of this, and his uncle did not think fit to enlighten him.

"You will hear more about the black corn," he said to him. "It makes good bread. At present forget that you have heard of it at all. Have you got these men for me?" he asked, turning again to Demetri.

"Yes; do you want them to-day?"

"No. Mitsos will go with me as far as Nemea, and they had better join me there to-morrow night. Turkish dress will be safer."

He rose, leaving the brandy untasted.

"Will you not drink?" asked Demetri.

"No, thanks. I never drink spirits."

Nicholas left next day after sunset, for a half-moon would be rising by ten of the night, and during the day the plain was no better than a grilling-rack. Already also it was safer for Greeks to travel by night, for it was known or suspected among the Turks that some movement of no friendly sort was on foot among them, and it had several times happened before now that an attack had been made upon countrymen, who were waylaid and stopped in solitary mountain paths by bands of Turkish soldiers.

They were questioned about the suspected designs of their nation, on which subject they for the most part were entirely ignorant, as the plans of their leaders were at present but sparingly known, and the interview often ended with a shot or a dangling body. But through the incredible indolence and laziness of the Turks, while they feared and suspected what was going on, they contented themselves with stopping and questioning travellers whom they chanced on, and made no increase in the local garrisons, and kept no watch upon the roads at night. Nicholas, of course, knew this, and when, as now, he was making a long journey into a disaffected part of the country, where his presence would at once have aroused suspicion – and indeed, as he had told Mitsos, there had been a price put on his head twenty years ago – he travelled by night, reaching the village where he was to stay before daybreak, and not moving again till after dark.

Accordingly he and Mitsos set off after sunset across the plain towards Corinth. The main road led through Argos, which they avoided, keeping well to the right of the river bed. Their horses were fresh, and stepped out at an amble, which covered the ground nearly as quickly as a trot. By ten o'clock the moon was swung high in a bare heaven, and they saw in front of them a blot of huddled houses in the white light, the village of Phyctia. Again they made a detour to the right, in order to avoid it, for a garrison of Turks was stationed there, turning off half a mile before its outlying farms began, so as not even to run the risk of awakening the dogs. Their way lay close under the walls of the ancient Mycenæ, where it was reported that an antique treasure of curious gold had lately been found, and as they were in plenty of time to reach Nemea by midnight, Nicholas halted here for a few minutes, and he and Mitsos looked wonderingly at the great walls of the citadel.

"They say the kings of Greece are buried here, little Mitsos," said he; "and perhaps your beard will scarce be grown before there are kings of Greece once more."

Beyond Mycenæ they followed a mountain path leading through the woods, which joined a few miles farther up the main road from Corinth to Argos, and as it was now late, and the ways were quiet, Nicholas saw no reason for not taking this road as soon as they struck it, and they wound their way up along the steep narrow path towards it.

The moon had cleared the top of Mount Elias behind them – the moon of midsummer southern nights – and shone with a great light as clear as running water, and turning everything to ebony and gleaming cream-colored ivory. Mitsos was riding first, more than half asleep, and letting his pony pick its own way among the big stones and bowlders which strewed the rough path, when suddenly it shied violently, nearly unseating him, and wheeled sheer round. He woke with a start and grasped at the rope bridle, which he had tied to the wooden pommel on the saddle-board, to check it. Nicholas's pony had shied too, but he was the first to head it round again, and Mitsos, who had been carried past him, dismounted and led his pony, trembling and restive, up to the other. Nicholas had dismounted too, and was standing at the point where the bridle-path led into the main road when Mitsos came up.

"What did they shy at?" Mitsos began, when suddenly he saw that which stopped the words on his tongue.

From a tree at the juncture of the paths, in the full, white blaze of the moonlight, hung the figure of a man. His arms were dropped limply by his side, and his feet dangled some two feet from the ground. On his shoulder was a deep gash, speaking of a struggle before he was secured, and blood in black clots was sprinkled on the front of his white linen tunic. Above the strangling line which went round his neck the muscles were thick and swollen and the glands of the throat congested into monstrous lumps.

But Nicholas only stopped the space of a deep-drawn breath, and then, throwing his bridle to Mitsos, drew his knife and cut the rope. The two horses shied so violently as Nicholas staggered forward with his murdered burden that Mitsos, unable to hold them both, let go of his own and clung with both hands to the bridle of Nicholas's horse, while his own animal clattered off down the path homeward. Then soothing its terror from the other, he led it past into the main road, where he tied it up to a tree some twenty yards on, and himself returned to where Nicholas was kneeling over the body.

He looked up and spoke with a deadly calm. "We are too late," he said; "he is quite dead."

And suddenly, after the hot-blooded, warm-hearted nature of his race, this strong man, who had lived half his life with blood and death and murder to be the companions of his days and nights, burst into tears.

Mitsos was awed and silent.

"Do you know him, Uncle Nicholas?" he asked, at length.

"No, I do not know him, but he is one of my unhappy race, whom this brood of devils oppresses and treats as it would not treat a dog. Mitsos," he said, with a gesture of fire, "swear that you will never forget this! Look here, look here!" he cried. "Look how they have made of him an offence to the light; look how they killed him by a disgraceful death, and why? For no reason but because he was a Greek. Look at his face; force yourself to look at it. The lips are purple; the eyes, as dead as grapes, start from his head. He was killed like a dog. If they catch you alone in such a place they will do the same to you, to you whose only offence is, as this poor burden's has been, that you are Greek. Look at his neck, swollen in his death struggle. Do you know how the accursed men killed Katzantones and his brother? They beat them to death with wooden hammers, sparing the head only, so that they might live the longer. Katzantones was ill and weak, and cried out with the pain; but Yorgi, as he lay on the ground, with arms and legs and ankles and hands broken, and lying out of semblance of a man, only laughed, and told them they could not kill a fly with such puny blows."

The boy suddenly turned away.

"Enough, enough!" he said. "I do not wish to look. It is too horrible. Why do you make it more frightful to me?"

Nicholas did not seem to hear what he said, and went on, in a sort of savage frenzy.

"Look, look, I tell you!" he cried, "and then swear in the name of God, remembering also what I told you of my wife and child, that you will have no pity on the race that has done this – on neither man, woman, nor child; not even on the poor, weak women, for they are the mothers of monsters who do these things. This is the work of the men they bear – this and outrage and infamous lust, and the sins of the cities which God destroyed."

He was silent a moment, and then spoke more calmly.

"So swear, Mitsos, in the name of God!"

And Mitsos, with quivering lips of horror, but suddenly steeled, looked at the dead thing and swore.

"And now," said Nicholas, "take hold of the feet, and we will give it what burial we can. Stay, wait a moment." He tore off a piece of the man's tunic, and, dipping his finger in the blood that still was wet on the shoulder, wrote in Turkish the word "Revenge," and fastened it to the end of the rope which still dangled from the tree. Then he and Mitsos took the body some yards distant into the copse that lined the road, and tearing up brushwood gave it covering. On this they laid stones until it was completely concealed and defended against the preying creatures of the mountain.

Then Nicholas bared his head.

"God forgive him all his sins," he said, "and impute the double of them to his murderers. Ah, God," he cried, and his voice rose to a yell, "grant me that I may kill and kill and kill; and their souls I leave to Thee, most Just and most Terrible!"

They went to where Nicholas's horse was tied up, and he, hearing the other had bolted, made Mitsos mount his, as he would have to walk back, and himself went on foot. It was in silence that they climbed the pass, but in another hour they came to the junction of the two roads from Nemea and Corinth, and Nicholas told his nephew to go no farther.

"It is safer that I should go alone here," he said; "and it is already late, and you will have to walk. Waste no time about getting back to the plain; the nights are short."

He paused for a moment, looking affectionately at the boy.

"Thus are you baptized in blood," he said, then paused, and he moistened his lips. "A great deal may depend on you, little one," he went on. "I have watched you growing up, and you are growing up as I would have you grow. Distrust everything and everybody except, perhaps, your father and myself, and be afraid of nothing, while you suspect everything. At the same time I want you, and many will want you; so take care."

He put his hands on his shoulders.

"I shall be back in a year or six months, or perhaps to-morrow, or perhaps never. That does not concern you. Your father and I will always tell you what to do. And now good-bye."

He kissed him on the cheek, mounted his horse, and rode off, never looking behind. Mitsos stopped still for a moment looking after him, and then turned to go home.

Five minutes more brought Nicholas to the edge of the village where the three men whom Demetri had sent were waiting for him. One of them was a Greek servant, who held Nicholas's horse while he dismounted and changed his Albanian costume for a Turkish dress; the others were leaders of local movements against the Turks, and were going with him to Corinth. Like Nicholas himself, they all spoke Turkish.

Nicholas dressed himself quickly, but then stopped for a moment irresolute. Then —

"Take the horse on," he said to the servant. "I will go on foot awhile."

Mitsos meantime was walking quickly along the road back towards Argos. He would scarcely acknowledge to himself how very much he disliked the thought of taking that bridle-path through the woods, for the recollection he retained of that end of rope dangling from the tree, with the fragment of tunic fluttering in the breeze, and that heap of white stones glimmering among the bushes, was too vivid for his liking. Even his pony would have been companionable; but his pony, as he hoped, was near home by this time.

Once or twice he thought he heard movements and whispered rustlings in the bushes, which made his heart beat rather quicker than its wont. Ordinarily he would not have noticed such things, but the scene at the crossroad still twanged some string of horror within him.

However, the road must be trod, and keeping his eyes steadily averted – for like his race he held ghosts in accredited horror – he marched with a show of courage past the spot, and began making his way down the rough bridle-path.

Thin skeins of clouds had risen from the sea, and the moon was travelling swiftly through them, casting only a diffused and aqueous light; but the path, with the glimmering white stones of its cobbling, showed clearly enough, and there was no fear of his missing his way. But about a couple of hundred yards down the path he heard a noise which made his heart spring suddenly into his throat and stay there poised for a moment, giving a little cracking sound at each beat. The sound needed not interpretation; two men, if not three, were running down the main road he had just left. Instantly he had left the path, and striking into the bushes at the side moved quickly up the hill again, hoping to turn them off the scent. But as they came nearer he stopped, still crouching in the bushes, and though he was, as he knew, very indifferently concealed, he dared not go farther among the trees for fear that the sound of his steps crackling among the dry brushwood should lead them to him, and, remembering Nicholas's lessons in the art of keeping still, he waited. His pursuers, if pursuers they were, seemed to go the more slowly as they turned into the path he had just left, and soon he caught sight of them through the tree trunks. There were two of them, and he saw they were Turks. As they came nearer he could hear them speaking together in low tones, and then one ran off down the path, in order, so he supposed, to see whether he was still on ahead.

Mitsos drew a long breath; there was only one to be reckoned with now, and stealing out of the bush where he had been crouching, he moved as quietly as he could farther into cover. But a twig cracking with a sharp report under his foot revealed his hiding, and the man who had waited in the path shouted out to the other. The next moment they were in pursuit.

As he pushed through the trees that seemed to stretch out fingers to clutch him, Mitsos felt in his belt for the knife he always carried with him, but to his wondering dismay found it had gone. Never in his life could he remember being without it; but this was no season to waste time, and knowing that his only chance lay in running he plunged along through the bushes in order to get back to the path and match his speed against theirs. But his pursuers were close behind him, and in jumping, or trying to jump, a small thicket which closed his path, he caught his foot and fell.

Then came cold fear with a clutch. Before he had time to recover himself they had seized him. Once he let out with his right hand at the face of one of the men, who just avoided the blow, and then both wrists were seized. They whipped a cord round his legs, tied his hands behind his back, and carried him off straight to the tree from which the end of the rope and its ghastly legend were still hanging.

A third Turk was sitting there on the ground in the shadow smoking, and as the others came up he said a word to them in Turkish which Mitsos did not understand. Then one of his captors turned to him, and speaking in Greek, "Tell us where Nicholas Vidalis is," he said, "and we will let you go."

Silence.

"We know who you are. You are Mitsos Codones, the son of Constantine, from Nauplia, and he is your uncle."

Mitsos looked up.

"That is so. But I have not seen him for a year – more than a year," he said.

One of the men laughed.

"Tell us where he is," he said, "and we will let you go, and this for your information, for you were seen with him yesterday in Nauplia," and he held out a handful of piastres.

This time Mitsos laughed, though laughing was not in his thoughts, and the sound was strange to his own ears.

"That is a lie," he said; "he has not been at Nauplia for a year. As for your piastres, if you think I am telling you a lie, do you suppose that I should speak differently for the sake of them? Be damned to your piastres," and he laughed again.

"I will give you one minute," said the other, "and then you will hang from that tree if you do not tell us. One of your countrymen, I see, has cut the rope, but there will be enough for a tall boy like you."

They strolled away towards where the third man was sitting, leaving him there bound.

"Perhaps the end of the rope might help him to speak," said one. But the third man shook his head.

What Mitsos thought of during these few seconds he never clearly knew, and as far as he wished for anything, he wished them to be quick. He noticed that the edge of the moon was free of the clouds again, and it would soon be lighter. He felt a breeze come up from the east, which fluttered the rag of tunic hanging from the rope, and once a small bird, clucking and frightened, flew out of a thicket near. Then the two men came up and pulled him under the tree. The end of the piece of tunic flapped against his forehead.

They untied the rope, and the one made a noose in it, while the other turned back the collar of his coat. Then the rope was passed round his throat and tightened till he felt the knot behind, just where the hair grows short on the neck.

"One more chance," said the man. "Will you tell us?"

Mitsos had shut his eyes, and he clinched his teeth to help himself not to speak. For a moment they all waited, quite still.

"Then up with him," said the man.

He waited for the choking tension of the rope, still silent, still with clinched teeth and eyelids. But instead of that he felt two hands on his shoulders, and fingers at the knot behind, and he opened his eyes. The third man, who had been silent, was standing in front of him.

"Mitsos," he said, "my great little Mitsos."

For a moment the world spun dizzily round him, and he half fell, half staggered against Nicholas.

"You!" he said.

"Yes, I. Mitsos, will you forgive me? I ought to have been certain of you, and indeed in my heart I was; but I wanted to test you to the full, to put the fear of death before you, for it was needful that I should give convincing proof to others. My poor boy, don't tremble so; it was necessary, believe me. By the Virgin, Mitsos, if you had hit one hundredth part of a second sooner one of these men would have gone home with no nose and fewer teeth. You hit straight from the shoulder, with your weight in your fist. And that double you made up the hill was splendid. Mitsos, speak to me!"

But the boy, pale and trembling, had sunk down on the ground with bent head, and said nothing.

"Here, spirits," said Nicholas, and he made Mitsos drink.

He sat down by him, and with almost womanly tenderness was stroking his hair.

"You were as firm as a rock," he said, "when you stood there, and I saw the muscle of your jaw clinch."

Mitsos, to whom spirit was a new thing, recovered himself quickly with a little choking.

"I wasn't frightened at the moment," he said; "I was only frightened before, when I knew I was caught."

Then, as his boyish spirits began to reassert themselves, "Did I – did I behave all right, Uncle Nicholas?"

"I wish to see no better behavior. It is even as your father told me, that you were fit for the keeping of secrets."

Mitsos flushed with pleasure.

"Then I don't mind if it has made you think that, though, by the Virgin, my stomach was cold. But if I had had my knife there would have been blood let. I cannot think how I lost it."

Nicholas laughed.

"Here it is," he said. "It was even I who took it away from you while you were dozing as you rode. I thought it might be dangerous in your barbarous young hands."

Mitsos put it back in his belt.

"I am ready now. I shall start off again."

Nicholas rose, too.

"I will come with you as far as the plain, and then my road is forward. The piastres were a poor trick, eh?"

"Very poor indeed, I thought," said Mitsos, grinning.

The uncle and nephew walked on together, and the other two men strolled more slowly after them. Nicholas could have shouted aloud for joy. He had found what he had sought with such fastidiousness – some one whom he could trust unreservedly, and over whom he had influence. To do him justice, the cruelty of what he had done made his stomach turn against himself; but he was associated with men who rightly mistrusted everybody, except on convincing proof of their trustworthiness. Mitsos had stood the severest test that could be devised without flinching. He was one of ten thousand.

At the end of the woods they parted. Mitsos' nerve had come back to him, and the knowledge that he had won Nicholas's trust, combined with the fascination the man exercised over him, quite overscored any grudge he might have felt, for Nicholas's last words to him were words to be remembered.

"And now, good-bye," he said. "You have behaved in a way I scarce dared to hope you could, though I think I believed you would. You have been through a man's test, the test of a strong, faithful man. Others will soon know of it, and know you to be trustworthy to the uttermost. Greece shall be revenged, and you shall be among the foremost of her avengers."

So Nicholas went his way northward and Mitsos towards home, and just as the earliest streak of dawn lit the sky he reached his father's house.

The truant pony was standing by the way-side cropping the dew-drenched grass.

CHAPTER V
MITSOS PICKS CHERRIES FOR MARIA

At Nauplia the summer passed quietly, though from other parts of the country came fresh tales of intolerable taxation, cruelty, and outrage, hideous beyond belief. But this Argive district was exceptionally lucky in having for its governor a man who saw that it was possible to overstep the mark even in dealing with these infidel dogs; partly, also, Nicholas's visit, his injunctions to the leading Greeks to keep quiet, and his hints that they would not need to keep quiet long produced a certain effect; as also did an exhortation delivered by Father Andréa, in which he spoke of the blessings of peace with a ferocious tranquillity which left no loop-hole for misconstruction.

July and August were a tale of scorched and burning days, but the vines were doing well, and the heat only served to ripen them the sooner. In some years, when the summer months had been cold and unseasonable, the grapes would not swell to full ripeness till the latter days of October, and thus there was the danger of the first autumn storms wrecking the maturing crop. But this year, thanks to the heat, there was no doubt that they would be ripe for gathering by the third week in September, and, humanly speaking, a fine grape harvest was assured.

A certain change had come over Mitsos since the events of the night recorded in the last chapter. He suddenly seemed to have awoke to a sense of his budding manhood, and his cat, much to that sedately minded creature's satisfaction, was allowed to shape her soft-padded basking life as she pleased. He used to go out in the dewiness of dawn, while it was still scarce light, to try for a shot at the hares which came down from the hills at night to feed in the vineyards, and at evening again he would lie in wait near a spring below Mount Elias to shoot the roe when they came to water. But during the day there was no mark for his gun, for the game went high away among the hills to avoid the broiling heat of the plains, or stayed in cover of the pine woods upon the mountain-sides, where the growth was too thick for shooting, and where some cracking twig would ever advertise a footstep, however stealthy.

But the sudden and violent winds of the summer months had set in, and sailing gave him day-long occupation. He made it his business to know the birth-hour of the land-breeze, the length of the dead calm that follows, and the hour when the sea-breeze again winnows the windless heaven; to read the signs of the thread-like streamers in the upper air, which mean a strong breeze; the vibration on the sea's horizon, like the trembling of a steel spring, which means heat and calm, and the soft-feathered clouds, with dim, blurred outlines that tell of moisture in the air, which will fall the hour after sunset in fine, warm, needle-pointed rain. His boat might often be seen scudding across the bay and into the water of the gulf outside, skirting round the promontories, running up into the creeks and inlets until, as Nicholas had told him he should do, he got to know the shape of the land as he knew the shape of his own head. Above all, he would practise beating out to sea in the teeth of the sea-breeze, running out to a given point in as few tacks as possible, and then, when the sea-breeze died away, he would put into some inlet, fish for a little, and sleep curled up in the bottom of the boat, awake with the awakening of the land breeze, and run back again, close hauled, past Nauplia, and up to the side of the bay, where he beached his boat. In these long hours alone on the sea he would sit in the stern, when the boat was steady on some two-mile tack, thinking intently of the new life for which he was preparing himself. Though Nicholas's stories, and the tales of oppression and outrage with which all mouths were full, made personal to him the longing for vengeance on that bestial breed, it was Nicholas himself who was the inspirer, and his indignation was scarce more than an image in a mirror of Nicholas. His uncle had long been acquiring that domination a man can have for a boy, and the main desire and resolve of his mind was to obey Nicholas, whatever order he might lay on him, and this resolve to obey was rapidly becoming an instinct over-mastering and unique. His father, far from making objections to his spending his time in sailing and shooting, encouraged him thereto, for

Nicholas had bade him hire labor whenever he wanted a lad in Mitsos' place, saying that the club at Athens had authorized him to make payments for such things. Mitsos, in fact, had definitely entered into the service of his country, and it was only right that his father should be compensated for the loss of a hand.

But during these months there was little or no farm-work to be done. Early in July Constantine had put up a little reed-built shed to overlook his vineyard, and there he spent most of the day scaring away the birds that came to eat the grapes, and playing with his string of polished beads, which he passed to and fro between his hands, every now and then stopping to sling a pebble at a bird he saw settling in the vines. The sparrows were the greatest enemies, for they would fly over in flocks of eighty or a hundred and settle in different parts of the vineyard, and when he cleared one quarter and turned to clear another, the first covey would be back and renewing their depredations on the grapes. He had an almost exaggerated repugnance in taking the funds of the club unless it was absolutely necessary to hire an extra hand, and until the last week before the harvest he managed alone; but then – for the grapes were tight-skinned and juicy, and a single bird holding on to a bunch with its claws and feeding indiscriminately from this grape and that would spoil the hundredfold of what it ate – he hired a boy from Nauplia, and erected another shed some fifty yards off. There they would sit from sunrise to sunset, and at sunset Mitsos returned brown and fresh, with a song from the sea, with his black hair drying back into its crisp curls after his evening bathe, and an enormous appetite. He and Constantine sat together till about nine, and then Mitsos would go off to the cafés, following Nicholas's instructions, and play cards or draughts, ever pricking an attentive ear when comments on the Turks were on the board. Nicholas's directions, however, that there should be no talking of the great matter, was being obeyed too implicitly for Mitsos to pick up much; but he acquired great skill at the game of draughts, even being able to play three games at a time.

One evening, just before the vintage began, he returned earlier than usual with a frown on his face. His father was sitting on the veranda, not expecting him yet.

"Have you heard," said Mitsos, "what these Turks have in hand about the vintage?"

"About the vintage? No."

"Instead of paying one-tenth to the tax-collector, we are to pay one-seventh; and instead of paying in grapes, we pay in wine."

"One-seventh? It is impossible!"

"It is true."

"Where did you hear it?"

"In the last hour at the café in the square. They are all clacking and swearing right and left, and the soldiers are patrolling the streets."

Constantine got up.

"I must go, then," he said. "This is just what Nicholas did not want to happen. Have there been blows between the soldiers and the Greeks?"

"Yanko knocked a Turkish soldier down with such a bang for calling him a dog that the man will never have front teeth again. They took him and clapped him in prison."

"The fat lout shall eat stick from me when he comes out. I suppose, as usual, he was neither drunk nor sober," said Constantine. "As if knocking a soldier down took away the tax. Is Father Andréa there?"

"I passed him just now on the road," said Mitsos, "going to the town."

Constantine got up.

"Stop here, Mitsos," he said; "I will catch Father Andréa up, and make him tell them to be quiet. He can do what he pleases with that tongue of his."

"But mayn't I come?" said Mitsos, scenting an entrancing row.

"And get your black head broken? No, that will keep for a worthier cause."

Constantine hurried off and caught Father Andréa up before he entered the town.

"Father," he said, "you can stop this, for they will listen to you. Remember what Nicholas said."

Father Andréa nodded.

"I heard there were loud talk and blows in the town, and I am on the road for that reason. Nicholas is right. We must pay the extra tax, and for every pint of wine we pay we will exact a gallon of blood. Ah, God, how I have fasted and prayed one prayer – to wash my hands in the blood of the Turks."

"Softly," said Constantine, "here is the guard."

The guard at the gate was unwilling at first to let them pass, but Andréa, without a moment's hesitation, said that he was a priest going to visit a dying man who wished to make a confession, with Constantine as witness, and they were admitted.

"God will forgive me that lie," he said, as they passed on. "It is for His cause that I lied."

Since Mitsos' departure the disturbance had increased. There were some forty or fifty Greeks collected in the centre of the square, and Turkish soldiers were coming out one by one from the barracks and mingling with the crowd. The Greeks, according to their custom, all carried knives, but were otherwise unarmed; the Turks had guns and pistols. There was a low, angry murmur going up from the people, which boded mischief. Just as they came up Father Andréa turned to Constantine.

"Stop outside the crowd," he said, "do not mix yourself up in this. They will not touch me, for I am a priest."

Then elbowing his way among the people, he shouted: "A priest – a priest of God! Let me pass."

The Greeks in the crowd parted, making way for him as he pushed through, conspicuous by his great height, though here and there a Turkish soldier tried to stop him. But Andréa demanded to be let into the middle of them with such authority that they too fell back, and he continued to elbow his way on. He was already well among the people when two voices detached themselves, as it were, from the angry, low murmur, shrilling up apart in loud, violent altercation, and the next moment a Greek just in front of him rushed forward and stabbed a Turk in the arm. The soldier raised his pistol and fired, and the man turned over on his face, with a grunt and one stretching convulsion, dead. There was a moment's silence, and then the murmur grew shriller and louder, and the crowd pressed forward. Andréa held up his hand.

"I am Father Andréa," he shouted, "whom you know. In God's name listen to me a moment. Silence there, all of you."

For a moment again there was a lull at his raised voice, and Andréa took advantage of it.

"The curse of all the saints of God be upon the Greek who next uses his knife," he cried. "Who is the officer in command?"

A young Turkish officer standing close to him turned round.

"I am in command," he said, "and I command you to go, unless you would be seized with the other ringleaders."

"I shall not go; my place is here."

"For the last time, go."

"I offer myself as hostage for the good conduct of the Greeks," said Andréa, quietly. "Blood has been shed. I am here that there may be no more. Let me speak to them and then take me, and if there is more disturbance kill me."

"Very good," said the officer. "I have heard of you. But stop the riot first, if you can. I desire bloodshed no more than you."

The group had now collected round them, still waiting irresolutely, in the way a crowd does on any one who seems to have authority. Father Andréa turned to them.

"You foolish children," he cried, "what are you doing? The Sultan has added a tax, it is true, but will it profit you to be killed like dogs? You have knives, and you can cut a finger nail with knives, and these others have guns. This poor dead thing learned that, and he has paid for his lesson. Is it better for him that he has wounded another man now that he has gone to appear before God? And

those of you who are not shot will be taken and hanged. I am here unarmed, as it befits a priest to be. I am a hostage for you. If there is further riot you yourselves will be shot down like dogs, or as you shoot the little foxes among the grapes and leave them for the crows to eat; I shall be hanged, for I go hostage for you; and the tax will be no less than before. So now to your homes."

The crowd listened silently – for in those days to behave with aught but respect to a priest was sacrilege – and one or two of the nearest put back their knives into their belts, yet stood there still irresolute.

"Come, every man to his home," said Andréa again. "Let those who have wine-shops close them, for there has been blood spilled to-night."

But they still stood there, and the murmur rose and died, and rose again like a sound carried on a gusty wind, until Andréa, pushing forward, laid his hand on the shoulder of one of the ringleaders.

"Christos," he said, "there is your home, and your wife waits for you. Go home, man, lest you are carried in feet first."

The man, directly and individually addressed by a stronger, turned and went, and the others began to melt away till there were only left in the square the Turkish soldiers and Andréa. Then he spoke to the officer again:

"I am at your disposal," he said, "until you are satisfied that things are quiet again."

The officer stood for a moment without replying. Then, "I wish to treat you with all courtesy," he said, "and you have saved me a great deal of trouble to-night. But perhaps it will be better if you stop in my quarters for an hour or two, though I think we shall have no more of this. With your permission I will give you in custody."

And with the fine manners of his race, which the Greeks for the most part could not understand and so distrusted, he beckoned to two soldiers, who led him off to the officer's quarters.

The Turkish captain remained in the square an hour longer, but the disturbance seemed to be quite over, and he followed Father Andréa.

"You will smoke or drink?" he said, laying his sword on the table.

"I neither smoke nor drink," answered Andréa.

The officer sat down, looking at him from his dark, lustreless eyes.

"It is natural you should hate us," he said, "and but for you there would have been a serious disturbance, and not Greek blood alone would have been shed. I am anxious to know why you stopped the riot."

Father Andréa smiled.

"For the reason I gave to the rioters. Is not that sufficient?"

"Quite sufficient; it only occurred to me there might be a further reason, a further-reaching reason, so to speak. I will not detain you any longer. I am sure no further disturbance will take place."

Andréa rose, and for a moment the two men faced each other. They were both good types of their race: the Greek, fearless and hot-blooded; the Turk, fearless and phlegmatic.

"I will wish you good-night," said the captain; "perhaps we shall meet again. My name is Mehemet Salik. You owe nothing to me nor I to you. You stopped the riot and saved me some trouble, but it was for reasons of your own. I have detained you till I am satisfied there will be no more disturbance; so if we meet again no quarter on either side, for we shall be enemies."

"I shall neither give quarter nor ask it," said Andréa.

The vintage began the next week, and for the time Mitsos had to abandon his boat and gun for the wine-making, since he alone knew the particularities of manufacture which Constantine practised – the amount of fermentation before finally casking the wine, the measure of resin to be put in, and the right quality of it, all which were as incommunicable as the unwritten law of tea-making for an individual taste. The small vineyard close to the house, which was all that was left to them after the seizure of the bigger vineyard by the Turk, contained the best vines, which, being nearer to hand, had inevitably received the better cultivation. These again were divided into two classes, most of them

being the ordinary country stock; but the other was a nobler grape from Nemea, which yielded the finest wine. They were always gathered last, and fermented in a barrel by themselves.

The evening before the grape-picking began, several girls from neighboring farms came to find labor in the gathering for a couple of days, as the harvest would not be ripe in other vineyards for a day or two yet. Constantine engaged four of them, who came early next morning, just as he and Mitsos were getting out the big two-handled panniers in which the grapes were carried to the press from the vineyard, which lay dewy and glistening under the clear dawn. Spero, the boy who had been employed for the last week in scaring birds, was also engaged for the picking, and in all they were seven. For the larger half of an hour they all picked together, until two of the big baskets were full and the treading could begin. The press, an old stone-built construction, moss-ridden and creviced outside, and coated inside with fine stucco, stood close to the house. The bottom of it sloped down towards a small wooden sluice which opened from its lower end, and which could be raised from the inside when there was sufficient must trodden to fill one of the big shallow casks in which it was fermented. Mitsos had spent the previous day in washing and scouring it with avuncular thoroughness, scrubbing the sides with powdered resin, and when Spero had wanted to assist in treading the grape instead of gathering, he looked scornful, and only said:

"We do not make wine for you to wash in. Get you back to the picking."

They poured the first two big panniers of grapes into the press just as the sun rose, stalks and all, and after turning his trousers up to the knees, and scrubbing his feet and legs in hot water, Mitsos stepped in and began the treading. The purple fruit was ripe and tight-skinned, and the red stuff soon began to splash and spurt up, staining his legs. Another basket came before he had got the first two well under, and by degrees the pickers gained on him. The day promised a scorching, and the press, which had at first stood in the shade, had been swung round into the full blaze of the sun before a couple of hours were over. About nine o'clock Constantine, who had just carried up another basket with Spero, and stayed for a moment looking at Mitsos dancing fantastically in the sun, saw that there was already stuff enough to fill a cask.

"There is food for a cask there," he said to Mitsos, "but it is not trodden enough yet. You will not keep pace without some one to help you."

Mitsos paused a moment and wiped his face with the back of his hand.

"I am broiled meat," he said. "Yes, send one of the girls. Make her wash first."

Constantine smiled.

"There speaks Nicholas," he remarked, "who is always right."

So Maria was sent to help Mitsos. She was a pretty girl, about seventeen years old, fawn eyed and olive skinned. As she stood on the edge of the press before stepping in, with her shoes off and her skirt tucked up, Mitsos found himself noticing the gentle curve of her calf muscle from the ankle to behind the knee, and how prettily one foot, pink from the hot water, broadened as she rested her weight on it for a moment. He gave her his hand to help her down into the press, and their eyes met.

"We shall do nicely now," he said.

Constantine meantime had fetched one of the casks, open at the top, and with a tap at the bottom, about six inches above the other end, from which the fermented liquid would be drawn off when it was clear, and placing it under the sluice, looked over to see if the must was sufficiently trodden. No baskets had come in for a quarter of an hour, and Mitsos and Maria between them had reduced the whole must to one consistency.

"It is ready now," he said to Mitsos; "raise the sluice."

The must had risen above the ring by which the sluice was raised at the lower end of the press, and Mitsos and Maria groped about for half a minute or so before they found it. Once they tightly grasped each other's fingers, and both exclaimed triumphantly, "I've got it."

Maria found it first; but the wood had swollen with the scouring of the day before and it was stiff, so Mitsos had to raise it himself. Then with a gurgle and a gulp the purple mass of pulp, juice,

stalks, and skins poured riotously out, splashing Constantine, and foaming into the cask with a lusty noise. When it was three-quarters full Mitsos closed the sluice again, for in the process of fermentation the must would swell to the top, and Constantine and Spero took the barrel, clucking as it was moved, off into the veranda out of the sun, and covered it with a cloth.

They all rested for an hour at mid-day, and ate their dinner in the shade of the poplar by the spring. The others had brought their food with them, with the exception of Maria, who said she was not hungry and did not care to eat. But Mitsos, pausing for a moment in his own meal, saw her sitting close to him looking rather tired and fagged from the morning's work, and fetched her some bread and some fresh cheese, cool and sweet from the cellar, and Maria's want of appetite vanished before these things. After dinner they all lay down and dozed for that hour of fiercest heat, when, as the poet of the South says, "even the cicala is still," some in the veranda, some in the shade of the poplars. Mitsos was the first to wake, and he, under a stern sense of duty, aroused himself and the others. Maria had disposed herself under a farther tree, where she lay with her hands clasped behind her head, and her mouth half open and set with the rim of her white teeth. She had drawn up one leg, and her short skirt showed it bare to above the knee. Mitsos stood looking at her a moment, thinking how pretty were her long eyelashes and slightly parted mouth, and wondering why it had never occurred to him before that she was pretty, when she woke and saw him standing in front of her. She sat up quickly and drew her skirt down over her leg, and a faint tinge of red showed under her skin.

"Is it time to go on?" she said; "and I am nothing but a bag of sleep."

"I will help you up," said Mitsos, putting out his hand.

But she stretched herself, smiling, and got up without his assistance.

Then the work went on till nearly sunset; a second cask and a third were filled, which were taken away to the veranda, where they were put on trestles and covered like the first; and, as there would not be time to fill a fourth before sunset, they stopped work for the day.

Mitsos and Constantine ate their supper together, but afterwards Mitsos said he would not go to the café to-night, he was sleepy, and to-morrow would be as to-day. The two sat there in silence for the most part, the father smoking and playing with his beads, and Mitsos lying full length on the floor of the veranda intermittently eating a cherry from the remains of their supper.

About nine he got up and stretched himself.

"I am for bed," he said. "How pretty Maria is. I wonder why I never noticed before that girls were pretty."

Constantine smiled.

"We all notice it sooner or later," he said. "I noticed it when I was about as old as you."

"Did you? What did you do then?"

"God granted me to marry the one I thought the prettiest."

"My mother? It is little I remember of her. But I am not going to marry Maria. Yet she is even very pretty."

The second day was devoted to picking the remainder of the ordinary grapes, which Mitsos and Maria trod, as on the day before, and Mitsos feeling a desire – to which he had hitherto been a stranger – to look well in a girl's eyes, told her stories about the shooting, and his own prowess therein – for all the world like a young cock-bird in spring and the mating-time strutting before his lady. The girls were not required for the third day's picking, and in the evening Constantine paid them their two days' wage. Mitsos walked back with Maria through the garden, and together they washed their feet of the must at the spring. A little further on they came to the cherry-tree, and here he told her to hold out her apron while he picked a little supper for her, again taking pride to swing himself with an unnecessary display of gymnastics from one bough to another, while Maria looked on from below with up-turned eyes bidding him be careful, and saying, as was indeed true, that there were plenty of cherries on the lower boughs, and his exertions were needless. Something in his conduct seemed to amuse her, for

as they said good-night at the gate she broke out into a laugh, and, with the air of a great, fine lady to a pretty boy, "Good-night, little Mitsos," she said; "and will you come to my wedding?"

Mitsos, in spite of his determination of the night before, felt a perceptible shock.

"Your wedding? Whom are you going to marry?"

"Yanko. At least, so I think. He has asked me, and I have not said no."

"Yanko Vlachos? That ugly brute?"

Maria laughed again.

"I don't find him ugly – at least, not to matter."

Mitsos recollected his manners.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I like Yanko very much. He knocked a Turkish soldier down last week – such a bang on the back of his head!"

"Oh, he's a very good man," said Maria, walking off with a great, important air.

Mitsos went slowly back to the house, his strutting over.

The third day was devoted to the gathering of the finer grapes, which were fermented by themselves in a separate cask. These the two boys and Constantine picked together, until all the trees but one were stripped, but instead of throwing them in stalk and all, they picked each grape separately off the bunches and shed them into the cask, until there was a layer some fifteen inches deep. Mitsos trod these as before, while his father and Spero went on picking, and when they were sufficiently pulped he poured on to them about a quart of brandy. More grapes were then put in, trodden, and more brandy added. When the cask was three-quarters full they moved it away with the others, but covered it more closely with two layers of thick woollen blanket. The remainder of the fine grapes were sufficient to fill another half-cask.

Then there came the final act of the grape-gathering, a page of pagan ritual surviving from the time when the rout of Dionysus laughed and rioted through the vineyard. Mitsos fetched a big bowl from the house, and Constantine cut all the grapes from the remaining vine. These he placed in the bowl and left in the middle of the vineyard for the birds to eat.

For the next two days the must required no attention, though the fermentation, owing to the heat of the weather, was going on very rapidly, and by the end of the second day the thin acrid smell mingled strongly with the garden scents. Once or twice Constantine raised the cloths which covered the casks to see what progress it made, or drew a little from the tap at the bottom. But the stuff was still thick, and had not cleared sufficiently to be disturbed yet.

On the second day Mitsos went off to get fresh resin for the wine. The ordinary pine resin was generally used by Greeks for this, but Constantine always preferred the resin from the dwarf pine, which was less bitter and finer in quality. The sides of Mount Elias were plentiful with the common pine, but the dwarf pine only grew on the hills round Epidaurus, a five hours' journey. Mitsos took his gun with him on the chance of sighting and slaying game, and started off on his pony before dawn, for the way wound over low, unsheltered hills, a day-long target for the sun; but before he reached the shoulder of mountain in which was cut the old grass-grown theatre, about which the dwarf pines grew, the sun, already high, had drawn up the heavy dews of the night before, and the air was quivering with heat like a man in an ague fit. The growth of these pines was that of bushes rather than trees, some of them covering a space of ten yards square, gnarl-trunked, and sprawling along the ground. On some dozen of them he selected a place near the root and cut off a piece of bark a few inches square in order that the resin might ooze from the lips of the wounded trunk, placing below each a flat stone to catch the dripping. In a few days' time there would be sufficient resin collected for the year's wine. On several trees he found the incisions he had made in previous years, in some of which, where the flow of resin had continued after he had removed it for the wine, it had gone on dripping until a little pillar, like the slag-wax from a candle, stood up between the stone and the tree. He cut off one of these to see whether it was still good, but the damp had soaked into it, and the outside surface was covered with a gray fungus growth which rendered it useless.

He ate his dinner under shelter of the more shady trees which grew higher up the slope, and waited till the sun had lost its noonday heat, listening lazily to the bell on the neck of his pony, which was grazing on the hill-side above, dozing and wondering what the next year would bring for him. He had no idea what Nicholas would call on him to do, but he was willing to wait. The love of adventure and excitement was fermenting in him, though he was contented to go on living his usual life from day to day. Nicholas, he knew, would not fail; some day, he knew not when, the summons would come, and he would obey blindly. Then he thought of the horrible scene which Nicholas and he had looked on three months ago, when they saw that dead, misshapen thing dangling from a tree, and his blood began to boil and the desire to avenge the wrongs done to his race stirred in him.

"Spare not man, woman, or child," Nicholas had said.

He lay back on the short turf and began to think about Maria. Supposing Maria had been a Turkish woman, and Nicholas had put a knife into his hand while he was looking at her mid-day sleep beneath the poplars, and told him to kill her, would he have been able? Could he have struck anything so soft and pretty? Fancy that heavy lout, Yanko, marrying Maria; he was all fat, and sat drinking all day at the wine-shop, yet he was never drunk, like a proper man, and he was seldom sober. Then Mitsos for the first time in his life became analytical, though his vocabulary boasted no such word. Why was it that since the day he stood in front of Maria as she lay asleep he had regarded women somehow with different eyes? What was it to him whether Yanko or another had her? Hitherto he had thought of women in the obvious, work-a-day light in which they are presented to a Greek boy, as beasts of burden, hewers of wood and drawers of water, inferior beings who waited on the men, and when alone chattered shrilly and volubly to each other like jays, or a bushful of silly, jabbering sparrows – creatures altogether unfit for the companionship of men. But since that moment he or they had changed; there was something wonderful about them which men did not share, something demanding protection, even tenderness, affording food for vague, disquieting thought. He had not understood at all, not having known his mother, why Nicholas had spoken as he had of his wife, except in so far that she was a possession of which the Turks had robbed him. But Mitsos could think of nothing the loss of which would make him devote his life to the extermination of the race that had robbed him of it. Even if the Turks took away his gun he realized that he would not wish to destroy the whole race for that. The brutal hanging of a man was a different matter; a man was a man, and a woman – Well, that woman was Nicholas's wife. Suppose the Turks killed Maria, would that be worse than if they killed, say, Nicholas? Well, not worse, not nearly so bad in fact, but, somehow, different.

Thus knocked Mitsos at the door of the habitation called love, and waited for its sesame.

CHAPTER VI
THE SONG FROM THE DARKNESS

When Constantine looked at one of the casks of fermenting wine on the fourth day, he saw that the crust of skins, stalks, and stones had risen to within six inches of the top, like coffee on the boil, and was thickly covered with a pink, sour-smelling froth. The fermentation was at its height, and it was time to mix up the crust with the fluid again to excite it even further. In one cask, into which the ripest fruit from the more sun-baked corner of the vineyard had been put, this crust had risen even higher, and threatened to overflow. The ordinary custom in Greece at this time was for a naked man to get into the cask and stir it up again, a remnant, no doubt, of some now insignificant superstition; but Constantine, though he still put the grapes of one vine in a bowl for the birds to eat, did not think it necessary to make this further concession, but only stirred up the frothing mass with an instrument like a wooden pavier. The crust was already growing thick and compacted, and it was ten minutes' work to get it thoroughly mixed up again with the fluid in each case, and from the seething, bubbling surface there rose thickly the sour fumes of the decomposing matter, heavily laden with carbonic-acid gas. One cask leaked slightly round the tap at the bottom and was dripping on the floor. A little red stream had trickled down to the edge of the veranda, and he noticed that it was full of small bubbles, like water that had stood in the sun, showing that the fermentation was not yet over. He caulked this up with a lump of resin, and then moved all the casks out of the shade for an hour or two, so that the heat might hasten the second fermentation, which naturally was slower and less violent than the first. The cask and a half of fine wine, however, he did not touch; there it was better that the fermentation should go on slowly and naturally.

That evening Mitsos went out fishing, as the work of wine-making was over for the present. In four or five days he would have to go over to Epidaurus to get the resin from the pine-trees, but just now there was nothing more to be done. Later on the vines would have to be cut back, but Constantine preferred delaying this till the leaves fell and the sap had sunk back again into the roots and main stem.

Though the day was one of early autumn, and in most years the serenity of summer would continue into the middle or end of October, the top of the hills above the farther side of the gulf had been shrouded all day in thick storm-boding clouds, and as sunset drew near these spread eastward, making a sullen sky. The sun, as it dropped behind them, illumined their edges, turning them to a dark translucent amber, and the afterglow, which spread slowly across the heavens, cast a strange lurid light through the half opaque floor of cloud. The night would soon fall dark, perhaps with storm. It was very hot, and the land breeze was but a languid air, and blew as if weary with its travel over the broiling plain, but there was quite enough of it, with Mitsos' economical methods, to send the boat along at a good pace. He sailed almost before it out seaward for two miles or so, meaning to fish from the island, but then changed his mind, and went back on tedious tacks to the head of the bay, the water seeming to him a thick thing, and the boat going but heavily. Dark fell, dense and premature, and when an hour later he put the boat about on the last tack he had to keep two eyes open as he neared the land; but as there were no other boats abroad, he did not think it necessary to light his lantern at the bows. Against the dark sky and the dark water it would hardly have been possible to see the brown-sailed craft from more than forty yards distant, and even then, if the thin white line of broken water at the forefoot had not caught the eye, or the stealthy, subdued hiss as it cut through the sea fallen on the ear, it might have passed close and unnoticed. Then, with a curious suddenness, he saw faintly the white glimmer of the sea-wall of Abdul Achmet's house straight in front of him, and knew that in the dead darkness he had taken too starboard a course. However, by running up as close as possible to this, one tack more would certainly take him across to the fishing bay where he was bound, and sitting rudder in hand, he waited till the last possible moment before putting about. He had, however, forgotten that the wall would take the wind from him, and when he was about fifty

yards off, the sail flapped once and fell dead against the mast, and the boom swung straight, the line of white water faded from under the forefoot, and the hiss of the motion was quenched. He got up for an oar, so as to pull her round again, when quite suddenly he heard the sound of a woman's voice from the terrace singing. For a moment or so he stood still, and then his ear focussed itself to the sounds. She was singing a song Mitsos knew well, a song which the vine-tenders sing as they are digging the vines in the spring of the year, and she sang in Greek:

"Dig we deep around the vines,
Give the sweet spring showers a home,
Else the fairest sun that shines
Sends no sparkle to our wines,
Lights no lustre in the foam."

He could not see the singer; all he saw was the circle of black night, the faint lines of his boat a shade blacker against it, and just ahead the white glimmer of the wall. The voice, low and sweet, came out of the darkness like a bird flying through a desert – a living thing amid death. Mitsos stood perfectly still, strangely and bewilderingly excited. Then he took up his oar and turned the boat's head round, rowed a few strokes out, and waited again. But the voice had ceased.

He felt somehow unaccountably shy, as if he had intruded into another's privacy; but having intruded, he was determined to make his presence known. So just as the sail caught the wind again he stood up in the stern, and in his boyish voice answered the unseen singer with the second verse:

"Dig we deep, the summer's here;
Saw we not among the eaves
Summer's messenger appear,
Swallows flitting here and there,
Through the budding almond leaves?"

The boat bent over to the wind, the white line streaked the water, and he hissed off into the night again.

He sat down, let go of the tiller, and let the boat run on by itself. He had never known that that common country song was beautiful till he had heard a voice out of the darkness sing it – a voice low, sweet, soft, which might have been the darkness itself made audible. Who was this woman? How did she, a Greek, come to be in the house of a Turk? Then with a flash of awakened memory he brought to mind the evening when he and Nicholas had sailed home after fishing; how a man came up and struck a woman who was leaning on the sea-wall; how she had cried out and said, in Greek, "What was that for?"

The flapping of the sail in the last breath of the wind roused him and he looked up; the breeze had died out, and he was floating in the middle of a shell of blackness. He had no idea where he was until he saw the lights of Nauplia, where he least expected them, on the left of the boat instead of behind him, dim, and far away. For his craft, left to itself, had of course run straight before the land-breeze out into the mouth of the gulf, and now the breeze had died out and he was miles from the land. That did not trouble him much; fishing was a minor consideration, and spending the night in the boat was paid for by a shrug of the shoulders. He wanted one thing only – to get back to the white glimmering wall, to the voice from the darkness.

A puff of hot air wandered by the boat, the sails shivered for a moment and were still again. A veiled flash of lightning gleamed through the clouds over the Tripoli hills and was reflected sombrely across the sky, and a peal of thunder droned a tardy answer. A faint rim of light, like the raising of tired eyelids, opened over the sea, and he saw the ropes of his boat stand out sharp against it. Then,

suddenly, there came from the hills a sound he knew, and knew to be dangerous – the shrill scream of a mountain squall from the highlands to the west of the gulf. He sprang to the ropes and had the sail down just before it struck him, but in less than a minute the bows were driven round, and the white tops of little waves began to fleck the bay. He felt the salt spray on his face and hands, and laughed exultantly. This was what he wanted.

With a joy in the danger of the thing he hoisted the sail, struggling and pulling to be free, and in a moment he was tearing back straight to the head of the gulf, with the rudder pushed hard a-port.

At the pace he was going the boat was quite steady, cutting through the waves instead of rising to them, and now and then one was flung over the bows like a white rag. The wind screamed, the white snakes of foam flew by, and, bareheaded, Mitsos clung with both hands to his rudder, controlling the course of the boat like the rider of a restive horse, laughing to himself for some secret glee, and every now and then shouting out a verse of the vine-diggers' song. Before long the wall appeared again, and he took in his sail; the water was already rough, and was dashing up against it; but he let the boat drift on till he was within thirty yards of it. The rim of light over the sea had widened, and he could see the edge of the top of the wall quite distinctly, and, behind, the tall sombre cypresses in rows. But there was no one there.

Just then the rain began hissing into the sea like shot, and for a few minutes turning the whole surface milky white. Mitsos, frowning and peering awhile into the darkness, put up his collar, and with some difficulty proceeded to put about. The wind was blowing hard ashore, and he had to take down the sail altogether and row. Even then he seemed hardly to be making way against the maddened air, and it was a quarter of an hour's hard work to get far enough from the shore to sail again. Then he fetched a long tack towards Nauplia, and from there managed to handle the boat back opposite the shore where his house stood. The surf was breaking nastily on the rock-ridden beach, and he had to get through a narrow channel, both sides of which were shoal water, not sufficiently deep to allow the boat to pass. But he had the light from his own house and that from the café opposite to steer by, and he knew that he could run in when they were in a line. As he neared the shore he could see it was impossible to bring the boat round sharply enough, and while there was yet time he beat out again for a quarter of a mile and approached it more directly. This time he was successful, and the boat skimmed past the tumbled water on each side – and as he passed he saw sharp-toothed rocks foaming and gnashing at him – safe into the smoother water of his anchorage. Constantine was waiting up for him, and when his tall figure appeared in the doorway, he looked up with relief.

"Mitsos, you shouldn't sail on nights like these," he said; "the best seamen in the world might not be able to handle a boat in such a squall. How did you get in?"

"It's easy enough when you get the lights from the house and the café in a line," said Mitsos; "besides, I was six miles out in the bay when the squall came down."

"Six miles out? You have not been long getting back," said his father, marvelling at the lad's knowledge.

Mitsos walked to the door to close it, turning his back on Constantine.

"No, there was a fine wind to sail on," he said, and whistled the vine-diggers' song beneath his breath.

Constantine did not ask any more questions, and Mitsos went to make himself some hot coffee and get out of his wet clothes, for he was drenched from head to foot.

Two days after this the ordinary wine had cleared completely, and it was racked into fresh casks, for if it stood too long on the lees in contact with the skins and stalks it would become bitter. The crust itself Constantine removed from all the barrels and put into the still for the making of spirits. This only required one man to look after, and on the day Mitsos went to Epidaurus to get the resin he employed himself with it.

The apparatus was of the simplest. He placed all the crusts from the barrels in a big iron pot, under which he lit a slow charcoal fire; into a hole in the lid of this, which screwed on to the body,

he inserted a bent iron pipe, on to which he screwed another pipe made in spirals. A big wooden tub filled with water, through the bottom of which passed a third pipe fitting at one end into the spirals which lay in the water, and communicating at the other with the glazed jar into which the spirit was to be stored, completed the apparatus. The fire drove off the alcohol from the fermented crust in a vapor, which distilled itself into spirit as it passed through the tube that lay in the cold water, and dripped out at the farther end into the jar.

He finished the day's work by soon after five, and, having business in Nauplia, set off there at once; so that Mitsos, returning a little later from Epidaurus with the resin, found him out, and, without waiting to get any food, he set off again at once down to the bay.

It was drawing near that moment when all the beauty of the day in sea, land, and sky is gathered into the ten minutes of sunset. The sun, declining to its setting, was dropping slowly above a low pass in the hills, shining with an exceeding clearness, and it was still half an hour above the horizon when Mitsos got into the boat. The land-breeze was blowing temperate and firm, and his boat dipped to it gently, and glided steadily on the outward tack. Between him and the Argive hills hung a palpable haze of thinnest blue; but the whole plain slept in a garment of gold, woven by the level rays. The surface of the water, unruffled under the shadow of the land, was green and burnished like a plate of patinated bronze, and the ripple from the bows broke creamily and flowed out behind the boat in long, feather-like lines. As the sun neared its setting, the golden mist grew more intense in color, and the higher slopes of the mountains turned pink behind their veil of blue. The sky was cloudless from rim to rim, except where, low in the west, there floated a few thin skeins of vapor, visible against the incredible blue only because they were touched with red. Just as Mitsos neared the wall on his second tack the sun's edge was cut by the ragged outline of the mountain, and in ten minutes more it would have set.

She, the nameless, ineffable she – and Mitsos never questioned that this was the sweet singer – was leaning on the edge of the wall looking seawards. She saw Mitsos sitting in the stern of his boat, and guessed at once – for few boats passed so close – that it was he who had sung the second verse of the vineyard song two nights ago, and that it was his boat which passed close under the wall last night, when the other women of the harem were there with her. She had not known till she saw him that she wished to see the owner of that half-formed boyish voice, which had come so pleasantly out of the darkness; and now, when she did see him, she looked long. He, too, was looking, and her eyes made a bridge over the golden air that lay between them and brought them close together.

The boat drew nearer, and she dropped her eyes and began playing with a spray of roses that trailed along the top of the wall. She picked a couple of buds, smelled them, and then very softly she began the first verse of the vine-diggers' song.

The boat had got under shelter of the wall, and drifted windlessly near. Mitsos was still looking at her; her eyes were still cast down. She sang the first verse through, and the first two lines of the second verse, and then apparently she recollected no more, for she stopped, and from the boat Mitsos sang very softly the two lines that followed. Still, without looking up, she sang them after him; he finished the verse, and she sang the whole through.

From the bay the sun had set, but the mountains on the east glowed rosier and rosier every moment. All that Mitsos saw was a girl's slender figure wrapped in a loose white cloak, with a gold band round the waist – a hand that held two rosebuds, a face veiled up to the eyes, eyes down-dropped, and eyelashes that swept the cheek.

"There is a third verse," he said.

Then she looked up, and her eyes smiled at him, and they were as black as shadows beneath the moon.

"I will learn that another night," she said, softly, "if it be you will teach me; and this is for your teaching. Go, now; others are coming."

Half carelessly she threw into the boat the roses she had picked, and turned away.

Mitsos waited a moment longer, and then, hearing voices in the garden behind the wall, rowed quickly away. His thoughts were a song; his mind, one sweet secret frenzy, that made the heart quick and the eye bright. All the common details of life were seen and taken in by him but dimly, as sounds come dimly to a sleeper, and are but the material out of which he weaves a golden vision; for the first splendor of love, hackneyed as a theme, but as an experience from generation to generation ever new, was dawning on him.

Maria was married next morning, and Mitsos went without emotion to the wedding. The bride and bridegroom appeared to him to be admirably suited to each other.

About four o'clock that afternoon the lad was just about to set off down to the shore when his father appeared.

"We'll finish with the wine this evening," he said. "Come and begin at once, Mitsos."

Mitsos paused a moment.

"I was just going sailing," he said. "Cannot it wait till to-morrow?"

"No; it had better be finished now. Besides, you can sail afterwards. Come, it won't take a couple of hours."

"Uncle Nicholas told me to sail every day," he began.

"And to obey me, Mitsos."

Mitsos stood for a moment irresolute, but soon his habit of obedience reasserted itself.

"Yes, father," he said; "I am sorry. I will come."

The casks in which the first fermentation had taken place had been thoroughly scoured with boiling water, which had quite got rid of the sour-smelling fermented stuff, and they were to rack the cleared resinated wine back into them. They filled each cask again three-quarters full, and into the remaining space they poured a portion of the fine wine, dividing it equally among all. To Mitsos the process seemed insufferably long and tedious. The sun had set before the casks were filled, and it was dark before the work was over. Never before, it seemed to him, had the taps dribbled so dispiritingly. His father now and then addressed some remark to him, which he barely answered, and after a time they both lapsed into silence. Mitsos knew that he was behaving badly, and he thought he could not help it. Perhaps she was there; perhaps – bewildering thought – she was even wondering why he did not come. How could he simulate the slightest interest in the wine of grapes when the wine of love was fermenting within him, driving him mad with those sweet, intoxicating fumes for which there is no amethyst?

At last it was over. No, he would not eat now; he would eat when he came in, and ten minutes later he was on his way. Soon the wall began to glimmer in front of him. Something, it looked only like a white shadow, was leaning on it, and as he drew nearer he heard again the voice singing low in the darkness, singing the common country song which had become so beautiful.

CHAPTER VII
THE PORT DUES OF CORINTH

Nicholas got safely across to Corinth early in the morning after he had parted from Mitsos, but was obliged to wait there two days for a caique to take him to Patras. The revolution for which the leading Greeks throughout the Peloponnese were preparing was there in the hands of the Archbishop Germanos. Like Nicholas, he too had felt the cruel appetites of the Turk, and, like Nicholas, he was willing to leave revenge unplucked until the whole scheme was ripe to the core. An agent of his had met the latter at Corinth, bidding him come, if he had a few days to spare, at once; if not, as soon as he could. But as Nicholas had left Nauplia with the idea of proceeding to Patras at once, he sent the messenger back, saying he was on his way, but that for greater security he would come by sea. That he was suspected of being concerned in intrigue against the Turk he knew, and as his plans were now already beginning to be thoroughly organized, and the club had made him their principal agent in the Morea, he wished to avoid any needless risk in passing through the garrisoned towns on the gulf.

On the second day, however, a Greek caique laden with figs was starting from Corinth, and Nicholas went on board soon after dark, and about midnight they started.

For a few hours an easterly breeze drew up from the narrow end of the gulf, but it slackened and dropped between three and four in the morning, and daylight found them becalmed, with slack sails, some eight miles out to sea, and nearly opposite Itea. To the north the top of Parnassus wore morning on its face, and stood high above them rose-flushed with dawn, while they still lay on a dark, polished plain of water as smooth as glass. On the opposite side of the gulf, but farther ahead, Cyllene and Helmos, on the north side of which last winter's snow still lay heraldically in bars and bezants, had also caught the light, which, as the sun rose higher, flowed like some luminous liquid down their slopes, wooded below with great pine forests.

Nicholas had pillowed himself on the deck, and woke when the sun had risen high enough to touch the caique. The captain and owner of the boat, who had been all night in the little close cabin below, came up as he roused himself and sat down near him.

"The wind has dropped altogether," he said; "we may be here for hours. Are you in a hurry to get on?"

Nicholas filled his pipe very carefully.

"I am never in a hurry," he said, "if I am going as quick as I can. I would make a wind if I could, but I cannot, and so I am content to wait. If swearing would do any good I would even swear, but I find it has no effect on the elements. You have a good heavy cargo."

"A good, heavy cargo?" said the man. "Yes, and we should have a dipping gunwale if those devils had not seized six crates of figs at Corinth."

"The Turks?" asked Nicholas.

"Who else? Port dues, they call them. Much of a port is Corinth – a heap of stones tumbled into the water, and five rickety steps."

"Harbor dues! They are a new institution, are they not?"

"A month old only," said the man; "but if I hear right they will not be very much older when they are taken off again."

"Taken off? How is that?" asked Nicholas, blandly.

"They say there will soon be a great cutting of the swines' throats. I spend my life on the sea, and for the most part my ears are empty of news; but surely you know what was being said at Corinth? – that before a year is out we Greeks shall not have these masters any longer."

One of the crew was standing near, and the captain motioned him to go farther off.

"I do not like to say this before my own men," he said; "but why should I not tell you? you will be landed at Patras, and you will go your way and I mine. Besides, for all your Turkish clothes you

are no Turk, for they are a short-legged folk. I heard it at the café last night. Four Turks were talking about the arms which they say the peasants are collecting. They spoke of one Nicholas Vidalis as a leader – they expected to take him, for word had come to them that he was travelling to Corinth."

"Thus there are disappointed men," thought Nicholas. Then aloud, "Who is this Nicholas?"

"Nay, I know him not," said the man. "I am from the islands. I thought it might be you could tell me of him."

"From which island?" asked Nicholas.

"From Psara."

Nicholas lit his pipe with a lump of charcoal and inhaled a couple of long breaths, silent, but with a matter in balance.

Then, looking straight at the man, he said:

"I am Nicholas Vidalis, the man whom the Turks would dearly like to catch. But at present they catch me not, for I am a clean and God-fearing man, and I hate the Turk even as I hate the devil, for the two are one. And now there are two ways open to you – one is to give me up at Patras, the other to try to help me and others in what we are doing. For this will be no time for saying 'I have nothing to do with this; let those who will fight it out.' You will have to take one side, and you had better begin at once. See, I have trusted you with my secret, because you may be of use to me. You come from Psara, and you probably know the coast of Greece as a man knows the shape of his boots and gaiters. We have got plenty of men to fight on land, and plenty to pay them with; what we want are little ships, which, in case of need, will hang about the Turks if they try to escape from their destruction, and sting them as the mosquito stings the slow cattle in the evening."

Nicholas paused for a moment, and his face lit up with a blaze of hatred.

"For it is already evening with them," he cried, "and when the day dawns night shall have swallowed them, and they will awake no more. Do you know what is the strongest feeling that ever grips a man's heart? No, not love, nor yet fear, but revenge. And if you had suffered as I have suffered you would know what it is to be filled with one thought only – to see blood in the sunrise and blood in the setting of the sun; to feel that you have ceased to be a man and have become a sword. That is what I am, and the hand that holds me is the right hand of God. And by me He will smite and spare not. And when there are no more to smite, perhaps I shall become a man again, and live to see peace and plenty bless a free people. But of that I know nothing, and I do not greatly care. Come, now, what answer do you give me?"

Nicholas rose to his feet; the other had risen too, and they faced each other. There was something in the earnestness and intensity of this man with one idea which could not but be felt, for enthusiasm is the one fact that cannot be gainsaid, a noble disease in which contagion ever makes infection. And his companion felt it.

"Tell me more," he said, eagerly; "but wait a moment – here is the wind."

He hurried aft to give orders to the men. Far away on the polished surface of the water behind them, smooth and shining as a sealskin, a line had appeared as if the fur had been stroked the wrong way. In a couple of minutes the men were busy with the ropes, and two stood ready to slacken the sheets of the heavy square sail if the squall was violent, and one stood at the tiller, for some cross-current had turned the boat round, and it would be necessary to put about. Meantime the rough line had crept nearer, and behind it they could see the tops of little waves cut off by the wind and blown about in spray. A couple of men had put out the long sweep-oars, and were tugging hurriedly at them to get the head of the boat straight before the wind before it struck them. But they were not in time; the wind came down with a scream, the boat heeled over till the leeward gunwale touched the water, and the mast bent; then, and with a perfect precision, the sheets were slackened for a moment to let her right herself; and, braced again, she began to make way, and in a few seconds they were scudding straight down the gulf almost directly before the wind, till, with their increasing speed, it seemed to die down again. The water all round them was broken up into an infinite number of little green

foam-embroidered wave troughs, through which, at the pace they were going, they moved as quietly as a skater over smooth ice.

Nicholas had a careful eye to the handling of the boat during these operations, and he saw that the little crew of six men knew their work perfectly, and that they were quick and prompt at the moment when a mishap might easily have occurred. He never let slip the smallest opportunity which might some day prove to be useful, and he knew that for anything like united action it would be necessary for the Greeks to have, if not command of their sea-coast, at any rate the power to communicate with each other. The outbreak, as he would have it, would take place first in the Peloponnesus, but, not to fail of its completeness, it would have to spread over the north. Patras and Missolonghi were within a few miles of each other by sea, but unless there was free communication by the waterway they would be powerless for mutual support. To some extent both his fear and his hope were realized.

Half an hour later he and Kanaris, the captain of the boat, were breakfasting together, and Nicholas was explaining to him exactly what the weakness of the movement was, and the necessity for conjunction between the sea and land forces. He wished him, he said, to continue to exercise his trade for the sake of appearances, but always to be ready at a moment's notice. When the outbreak took place it was quite certain that many of the Turks, especially those on the sea-coast, would try to escape by sea. That must not be; it was no polite or diplomatic war on which they were to embark; their aim from the first must be the annihilation of the Turks. He told him in detail how this means of escape was to be cut off, as will appear later, and as he unfolded his bloody plan Kanaris's heart burned within him, and he promised, in the name of God, to help him gather that red vintage.

About mid-day the wind went down, and they lay becalmed again; but Nicholas, who, as he had said, was never in a hurry when he was going as quick as he could, felt that his time could hardly have been better employed. Kanaris, it appeared, was of a large Psarian clan; for generations he and his had been seafaring folk, men of the wind and wave, whose help Nicholas knew to be so essential. He promised, if possible, to come to Psara himself before the year was out; but he said that his hands were very full, and he could pledge no certainty.

For three hours or so they lay on a tossing water, for the wind of the morning had roughened the narrow sea, which so quickly gets up under a squall from the mountains, and great green billows came chasing each other down from the east beneath the brilliant noonday sun, which turned them into a jubilant company of living things. The boat, lying low in the water with its heavy cargo, reeled and rolled with a jovial boisterousness, alternately lifting up sides all ashine with the sea over the crest of a wave, and burying itself again with a choking hiccough in its trough. The sun drew out from the crates of figs their odor of mellow luxuriance, which hung heavy round the boat, dispersed every now and then by a puff of wind which blew in the salt freshness of the sea.

By four o'clock, however, the wind, still favorable, sprang up again, and on they went into the sunset, the black nose of the boat pushing and burrowing through the waves, and throwing off from its sides sheets of spent foam. As the hours passed Kanaris felt ever more keenly the fascination and strength of this strange man, and after supper they sat together in the stern watching the heavens reel and roll above them, and the top of the mast striking wildly right and left across a hundred stars. Nicholas, perched on the taffrail, balancing himself with an exquisite precision to every movement of the boat, talked in his deep low voice of a thousand schemes, all blood-stirring, with the Turk for target. For no one knew better than himself the value of personal power, and the success of his proselytizing had been to a large extent, even as in the case of Mitsos, the outcome of his own individuality, which could so stir the minds of men, and fan to a flame the smouldering hatred against the Turks, and cause it to leap up in fire.

Germanos, the Metropolitan Bishop of Patras, had only just risen next morning when his messenger came back, having travelled through the night to announce Nicholas's coming, and also report the same talk in the cafés which Kanaris had heard. The bishop smiled to himself at the idea

of any untoward fate laying hands on Nicholas, and told his servant to let it be widely known that Nicholas had been taken and killed.

"For," as he said, "the Turks will be delighted to believe that (and men always succeed in believing what they wish), and all Greeks to whom Nicholas is more than a name will know that this is one of those things which do not occur. I am ready for breakfast, and let a room for my poor dead friend be got ready, and also a bath in which the body may be washed."

Germanos was a splendid specimen of a Greek of unmixed blood, now nearly or quite extinct. His family came from the island Delos, still unviolated by the unspeakable race, and from generation to generation they had only married with islanders. He was rather above the middle height, and his long black cassock made him appear taller. In accordance with Greek rite, neither his hair nor beard had ever been cut, and the former flowed black and thick onto his shoulders, and his beard fell in full rippling lines down as far as his waist. Though for three or four years his life had been one long effort of organizing his countrymen against the Turks, the latter had never suspected his complicity, and he intended to take the fullest advantage of their misplaced confidence in him. Though Germanos had not trodden the world so widely as Nicholas had done, he was nevertheless a man of culture – shrewd, witty, and educated. And Nicholas too, though for the sake of the great cause he would have condemned himself cheerfully never to speak to a man of his own rank and breeding again, found it a pleasant change, after his incessant wanderings among peasants, to mix with his own kind again. His few days with Constantine at Nauplia, it is true, he had much enjoyed, for it was impossible not to be happy when that apostle of happiness, the little Mitsos, was by; and Constantine, too, was of the salt of the earth. He only arrived in the evening, just before dinner, and they sat down together as soon as he had washed.

"There is a good man to hand, I think, to-day – the captain of the boat I came by," said he. "I suggested he should come and talk with us to-morrow. I would have brought him with me, but he was busy with his fig cargo."

"My dear Nicholas, you are indefatigable. I do not believe there is a man in the world but you who would wake at dawn on the gulf and instantly set about making a proselyte. You should have been a priest. What made you see a patriot in him?"

"It was a long shot," said Nicholas. "He spoke without sympathy of the new Turkish harbor dues at Corinth, and told me my capture was imminent. I risked it on that."

The archbishop frowned.

"New harbor dues? It is time to think of harbor dues when there is a harbor."

"So he said," answered Nicholas. "Their methods have simplicity. They seized six crates of his figs."

"We are commanded," remarked Germanos, "to love all men. I hope I love the Turk, but I am certain that I do not like him. And I desire that it will please God to remove as many as possible of his kind to the kingdom of the blest or elsewhere without delay. I say so in my prayers."

Nicholas smiled.

"That gives a double sound," said he; "you pray not for their destruction, but for their speedy salvation. Is that it?"

"To love all men is a hard saying; for, indeed, I love my nation, and I am sure that the removal of the Turks will be for their permanent good. What does the psalmist say, though he was not acquainted with the Turk, 'I will wash my footsteps in the blood of the ungodly'?"

"As far as I can learn the ungodly were expecting to wash their footsteps in my blood at Corinth," said Nicholas; "but they behaved as it is only granted to Turks to behave. They expected me twenty-four hours after I had gone away."

"How did things go at Nauplia?"

"Better than I could possibly have expected. I found the very man, or rather the boy, I wanted in my young nephew."

"The little Mitsos? How old is he?"

"Eighteen, but six feet high, and with the foot of a roe-deer on the mountains. Moreover, I can trust him to the death."

"Eighteen is too young, surely," said Germanos. "Again, you can trust many people to just short of that point, and they are the most dangerous of all to work with. I could sooner work with a man I could not trust as far as a toothache!"

In answer Nicholas told him of that midnight test, and Germanos listened with interest and horror.

"You are probably right then, and I am wrong," he said; "and a boy can move about the country without suspicion where a man could not go. But how could you do so cruel a thing? Are you flesh and blood – and a young boy like that?"

"Yes, it was horrible!" said Nicholas; "but I want none but those who are made of steel. I knew by it that he was one in a thousand. He clinched his teeth, and never a word."

"What do you propose to do with him now?"

"That is what I came to talk to you about. It is time to set to work in earnest. The Club, as you know, have given me a free hand and an open purse. Mitsos must go from village to village, especially round Sparta, and tell them to begin what I told them and to be ready. The Turks are, I am afraid, on the lookout for me, and I cannot travel, as you say, in the way he can without suspicion."

"What did you tell them to begin?" asked Germanos.

"Can you ask? Surely to grind black corn for the Turk. It must be done very quickly and quietly, and chiefly up in the villages there in Maina. You say you are collecting arms here?"

"Not here, at the monastery at Megaspelaion. Many of them have been bought from the Turks themselves. There lies a sting. The monks carry them in among the maize and reed stalks. Father Priketes was met the other day by a couple of their little Turkish soldiers, who asked why they were carrying so many reeds, and he said it was to mend the roof. Reeds make a capital roof."

"Yes, the monastery roof will want many mules' loads of mending," said Nicholas. "Do you suppose they suspect anything?"

"Certainly, but they have nothing to act on; besides, I would be willing to let them search the monastery from top to bottom. Do you remember the chapel there, and the great altar?"

"Surely."

"The flag-stone under the altar has been taken up and a hole made into the crypt. The door into the crypt, which opens from the passage in the floor below, has been boarded over and whitewashed, so that it looks exactly like the rest of the passage wall. It is impossible to detect it. Mehemet Salik, the new governor in Tripoli, appointed only this month from Nauplia, was there last week and examined the whole place. He is a young man, though suspicious for his age."

"That is good," said Nicholas. "Your doing, I suppose. How many guns have you?"

"About a thousand, and twice as many swords. In another month we shall be ready. Megaspelaion makes a far better centre than Patras would, as it is so much nearer Tripoli. That is where the struggle will begin."

"Who knows?" said Nicholas. "When we are ready we will begin just where it suits us. Personally, I should prefer – " He stopped.

"Well?"

"It is this," said Nicholas. "It is no gallant and polite war we want; we do not want to make terms, or treaties, or threats. We want to strike and have done with it; to exterminate. I should prefer, if possible, striking the first blow either at Kalamata or Nauplia. Then the dogs from all round would run yelping into Tripoli, as it is their strongest place, and so at the end there would be none left."

"Exterminate is no Christian word, Nicholas. The women and the children – "

"The women and children," said Nicholas, rising and pacing up and down the room; "what are they to me? Once when I was an outlaw I spared them – yes, and spared the men, too, only sending

them riding back face to the horse's tail. But did they spare my wife and my child? If there is a God in heaven I will show them the mercy they showed me!"

Germanos was silent a few moments, and waited till Nicholas had sat down again.

"Will you drink more wine?" he asked; "if not, we will sit on the balcony; it is hot to-night. I think you are right about striking the first blow somewhere in the south, so that they shall go to Tripoli. I had thought before that it would be better to strike at the centre. But your plan seems to me the wiser. Come outside, Nicholas."

Germanos's house stood just out of the town, high up on the hill, which was crowned by the castle, and from his balcony they could see the twinkling lights in the fort below like holes bored in the dark, and beyond the stretch of starlit water, and dimly on the other side of the gulf the hill above Missolonghi shouldering itself up in the faint black distance. Before long the moon rose above the castle behind them, and turned the whole world to silver and ebony. Cicalas chirped in the bushes, and the fragrance of the southern night came drowsily along the wind. Every now and then a noise would rise up for a moment in the town, shrill to its highest, and die away again.

A boy brought them out coffee, made thick and sweet in the Turkish manner, and two narghilés with amber mouth-pieces, and brazen bowls for holding the coarse-cut tobacco. On each he placed a glowing charcoal ember, and handed the mouth-pieces to the two men. For a long while they sat in silence, and then Nicholas spoke:

"It will be no time for mercy – I shall go where my vow leads me, and I have vowed to spare neither man, woman, nor child. I will show them the mercy they showed me, and no other."

"God make you merciful on that day, as you hope for mercy," said Germanos. "For me, I shall not be a party to any butchering of the defenceless. There will be plenty of butchers without me. Blood must be shed; it cannot be otherwise. Fight and spare not, but when the fighting is over let the rest go out of the country, for we will not have them here. But for massacre, I will not make myself no better than a Turk!"

The two narghilés bubbled in silence again for a few minutes, and at last Germanos broke in with a laugh:

"The Turks all think you are dead," he said. "I told the boy to let it be widely known that you had been killed at Corinth. It is just as well they should believe it. Mehemet Achmet, the sleepiest man God made, was here this afternoon, and he regretted it with deep-seated enjoyment. They seemed to know all about you here!"

"But none in Patras know me by sight," said Nicholas, "and as I am dead they never will. It is possible that it may prove useful to me. What are your plans for to-morrow?"

"We will do what you like. It might be well for you to see Megaspelaion. We could get there in a day if the wind held to Vostitza. They have, as I said, a curious little crypt there, which is worth a visit."

Nicholas smiled.

"It is impossible for a man to see too much," he said, "just as it is impossible for a man to pretend to know too little. I would give a fortune, if I had one, for a face like my brother-in-law Constantine's, for it is as a mask in carnival time, behind which who knows what may be? Yet there is force in him, and Mitsos obeys him as – as he obeys me! And yet he is too large a lad to take commands easily."

"Perhaps no other influence has come in yet. To fall in love, for instance, sometimes makes a good lad less obedient than an orphan to his parents."

"The little one in love would be fine," said Nicholas. "He would send the whole world to the devil. Why, shooting is the strongest passion he has known yet, and he shoots as if all the saints were watching him."

"I hope some of them are," remarked Germanos, "and that they will especially watch him when he is inclined to send the whole world to the devil. I hope Mitsos will not think of including me."

"I will warn him when I see him next. I shall go on there, I think, in November. I must get back to Maina first and see my cousin, Petros Mavromichales, who is the head of the clan, and find out if the clan are prepared to rise in a body. That man Kanaris was handy enough with his boat, but I would back Mitsos to sail against him in any weather."

"Ah! that fire-ship is a horrible idea of yours, Nicholas."

"Horrible, but necessary. We must not have supplies of arms and gunpowder coming to the Turks by sea, and there must be no escape out of the death-trap which we will snap down on them. And now let me tell you all that is in my mind, for it may be we shall not meet again till the great Vintage is ripe for the gathering."

For an hour or so Nicholas talked eagerly, unfolding his schemes, Germanos listening always attentively, sometimes dissenting, but in the main approving. He spoke of the Club of Patriots in north Greece, who had given him leave to act in their name until the time came for them to send a delegate who would act openly; for at present if it became known that the leading men of Greece, many of whom were in official positions under the Turks, were concerned in schemes of revolution, the whole project would be a pricked bubble. He sketched the rising of the peasants, in whom the strength of the war would lie; the flame that should run through the land, as through summer-dry stubble, from north to south and east to west; and it seemed in after years to Germanos that a spirit of prophecy had been on the man.

And as Nicholas went on another vision rose before the bishop's eyes: the vision of his church, the mother of their hearts, throned not only there, but in the glory of an earthly magnificence, in visible splendor the bride of her Lord. Therein to him was food for hope and aspiration, and his thoughts drifted away from war and bloodshed to that.

And when Nicholas had finished he met an eye that kindled as his own, but with thoughts that were not spoken, but partook of their sweet and secret food in silence and self-communing.

CHAPTER VIII
THE MENDING OF THE MONASTERY ROOF

Kanaris had finished his unlading the same evening, and he was ready at daybreak to take Nicholas and Germanos as far as Vostitza, a fishing village lying some four miles from the mouth of the gorge, at the top of which stands Megaspelaion. Here the archbishop and Nicholas would get mules and reach the monastery the same evening. Vostitza, with their fair wind, was not more than four hours from Patras, and on arriving there the archbishop went straight to the house of the Turkish governor, from whom he procured mules, and to whom he introduced Nicholas as his cousin; and the three talked together a while over a cup of coffee, discussed the idle rumors that were abroad concerning a movement against the Turks among the Greeks, and found cause for comfort as lovers of peace in the undoubted fact that Nicholas had been killed two days before at Corinth. He was a turbulent, hot-headed man, said the archbishop, and did not value the blessings of tranquillity. His cousin also had met him, a quarrelsome, wine-bibbing fellow, quoth Nicholas; he could have had no more appropriate end than a brawl in a wine-shop.

Thus they chatted very pleasantly and harmoniously while their mules were being made ready, and Said Aga, who was no man of the sword, being rotund and indolent in habit, was much relieved to find that Germanos scoffingly dismissed the idea of any hostile movement being on foot among the Greeks. True, there had been disturbances lately; a Turkish tax-collector had been killed at Diakopton, three miles from Vostitza. Had they not heard? The news had come yesterday!

"Alas! for this unruly people," said Germanos. "What was the manner of it?"

"I hardly know," said Said Aga. "It was the usual story, I believe. He had taken to himself a Greek woman, and the husband killed him. The man has fled, but they will catch him, and he will suffer, and then die. For me, I shrug my shoulders at these things. We Turks have certain customs, and the Prophet himself had four wives, and when we are the lords of a country we must be obeyed."

"True," said Nicholas, "quite true, and we must submit. It is not the will of God that all men should be equal."

He caught Germanos's eye for a moment.

"I am glad that you think there is nothing in these rumors," went on Said Aga. "Your countrymen would hardly be so foolish as to attempt anything of the sort. But the rumors are somewhat persistent. It was even said that the monks at Megaspelaion were collecting arms, and my colleague Mehemet Salik, a very energetic young man who was lately put in charge at Tripoli, thought best to make an inspection there. But he was quite satisfied there was no truth in it."

Germanos laughed heartily.

"That is a little too much," he said. "You may at least rest assured that we priests of God are men of peace. Our mules, they tell me, are ready. A thousand thanks, Excellency, for your kindness."

They mounted and rode up the straying village street, paved with big, uneven stones. The villagers were all out in the fields for the fruit harvest, and the rough, shaggy-haired dogs, keeping watch in the deserted house-yards, came rushing out barking and snarling with bared teeth at the sound of their mules with their tinkling bells and iron-shod feet grating over the cobbles. The mule-boys paid little attention to their noisy menaces, though now and then some dog more savage or less wisely valorous than his fellows would come within stick distance, only to be sent back with better cause for crying than before.

But in ten minutes or so they got clear of the village, and taking one of the field roads struck across the plain towards the mouth of the gorge, about four miles distant. The grapes were not yet so far advanced as at Nauplia and still hung hard, and tinged with color only on the sunward side; but the fruit harvest was going on, and under the fig-trees were spread coarse strips of matting on which the fragrant piles were laid to dry. A few late pomegranate-trees were still covered with their red

wax-like blossoms, but on most the petals had fallen, and the fruit, like little green-glazed pitchers, was beginning to swell and darken towards maturity. The men were at work in the vineyards cutting channels for the water, and through the green of the fig-trees you could catch sight every now and then of the brightly-colored petticoat of some woman picking the fruit, or else her presence was only indicated, where the leaves were thicker, by the dumping of the ripe figs onto the canvas strips below. The sun was right overhead before they struck the mouth of the gorge, and the heat intense – a still, fruit-ripening heat in the heavy air of the plains. But as they approached the hills a cooler draught slid down from between the enormous crags, bearing on it the voice of the brawling torrent, which is fed by the snow of Cyllene and Helmos, and knows not drought.

Here the country was given up to olives and wheat, and occasional clumps of maize near the bed of the stream. The oleanders were still in flower, and their great clusters of pink blossom marked the course of the river. Another mile took them to the ford, on the far side of which the path began to climb through the ever-narrowing gorge. Further up they found it impossible to keep to the course of the stream, for the road had been washed away in places and not repaired, and leaving it on their right, they turned up over a steep grassy stretch of moor, sprinkled here and there with pines. Looking back they could see below them the hot luxuriant plain they had left, trembling sleepily under the blue haze of heat, and further off the shimmering waters of the gulf. As they ascended the vegetation changed: pines entirely took the place of the olives, and the grass, all brown and dead below from the summer's heat, began to be flushed with lively green, and studded with wild campanulas and little blue gentians, throbbing hotly with color. Then descending again they passed along the upper slope of the cliffs above the gorge and saw before them the deep, sheltered valley stretching up to Kalavryta, a land of streams and a garden of the Lord.

The sun was already near its setting when they joined the main road leading up to the monastery from the valley, and they struck into a train of some half-dozen mules covered and enveloped in loads of reeds, the tops of which brushed rustling along the ground behind like some court lady's dress. Two of the monks from the monastery were in charge of these, and when they saw who it was with Nicholas they stopped and kissed the archbishop's hands. As they moved forward again he said:

"I see you are carrying reeds, my sons. From where did they come, and for what purpose?"

"From Kalavryta, father," said one. "We have six mules laden with them. The monastery roof needs mending."

"That is good. Observe, Nicholas, how fine these reeds are. They seem to be a heavy load. The monastery roof, they say, wants mending."

The younger of the two monks smiled.

"A great many things want mending, father!" he said. "We are making preparations for mending them."

Nicholas, who was in front, checked his mule.

"And have you black corn," he said, "good black corn for the Turk?"

The monk shook his head.

"I do not understand," he said.

Germanos smiled back at Nicholas.

"A roof for the monastery first, Nicholas," he said; "there will be time for the good black corn when the roof is mended. And now, my son, I will ask you to go forward quickly and tell Father Priketes, with my salutations, that my cousin and I will arrive very soon. We shall stop with him for a day, or it may be two, for we wish to superintend this mending of the monastery roof, and see that it is well done for the glory of God."

Another half-hour through the gathering dusk brought them in sight of the monastery, which from the distance was indistinguishable from the face of the cliff, against which it was built. Chains of light shone from the narrow windows, row above row, some from the height of all its twelve stories, twinkling a hundred feet above them, as if from cottages perched high on the cliff, others larger

and nearer from the windows of the sacristy and library. To the right stood the great gateway, about which several moving lanterns seemed to show that the news of their coming had anticipated them, and that due preparations were being made to receive the archbishop. As they got close they could see that the monks were pouring out of the arch, and taking their places in rows on each side of the terrace leading up to the gate. In front of them stood the novices, some mere boys of fourteen and fifteen, but all dressed alike, and all with long hair, that had never known the scissors, flowing onto their shoulders. In the centre of the gateway – a tall, white-bearded figure – stood Father Priketes, who helped the archbishop to dismount, and then knelt to receive his blessing. Germanos paused a moment as he entered, and said in a loud, clear voice to them all:

"The peace of God be upon this holy house and all within it, and His blessing be upon the work" – and his voice dwelt on the word – "upon the work you are doing."

Nicholas was already known to Father Priketes, but the latter looked as if he had seen a ghost when he caught sight of him.

"We heard you were dead," he said.

Nicholas smiled.

"I am delighted to know it, father," he said. "Do not destroy the idea, if you please."

They passed on to Father Priketes's rooms, where they were alone.

"I see your repairs are going on steadily," said Germanos. "We passed some laden mules on the way. Nicholas wished much to see what you were doing. He is – how shall I say it? – our overseer; we are the workmen. He will tell us when the work must be finished. Let us go at once to the chapel, my brother, and thank St. Luke, your founder, and the Blessed Virgin, that they have brought us here safe. That is the first duty of the soldiers of God."

Father Priketes led the way to the chapel, and pushed open the great brazen door for Germanos to enter. He knelt in turn before the great altar, the altar to the Beloved Physician, and before the black relief of the Virgin, made, as tradition says, by the hands of St. Luke himself, and said for himself and Nicholas a thanksgiving for the aid of the Saints which had brought them safely to the end of their journey. They then supped with Father Priketes, and went back to the chapel.

The place was but dimly lighted with oil lamps, and after locking the door behind them – for at present only a few of the monks had been trusted with the secret of the crypt – the father lighted a lantern and led the way up to the east end. Then after crossing himself he drew from underneath the altar a small crowbar, and creeping under with the lantern, he prized away a square paving-stone, which covered a hole large enough for a single man to creep through. Rough wooden steps had been erected from the floor of the crypt up to the level of this, and one by one they descended. The crypt was some forty feet long by twenty broad, and the light of the lantern struck from all the walls a reflection of steel. Since Germanos's last visit, they had largely added to the number of arms, and on a hasty glance Nicholas reckoned that there could not be less than fifteen hundred guns.

His eyes glistened as he moved the lantern round the walls, and he turned to Father Priketes.

"This will make a hole in the Turks bigger than the hole in your roof," he said. "You have enough, I think. They will be hungry, these reeds; grind their food for them, and do not let them feel stint of that."

"Already?" asked Father Priketes.

"Already! It is August now, and when our vineyards are green with the fresh leaves in the spring, the juice of the greater vintage shall be spilled. And there will be a mighty gathering; the wine-press will be running red, and fuller than the vats of Solomon. Where can you stow the food for all these hungry throats?"

"There is room here, is there not?"

"Surely, room and to spare; but it would not be well to keep it here. Whoever enters here must carry a light; a chance spark, and he may cry to the Virgin in vain."

Father Priketes paused a moment.

"You shall take a walk with me to-morrow and we will see. You are satisfied at present?"

"I shall never be satisfied," said Nicholas. "I should not be satisfied if I saw all the armaments of angels in array against the Turk. But it is time to think of other things. Could you raise men at once?"

"Five hundred in one minute from within these walls," said Father Priketes, "and two thousand more in the time it would take an eager man to climb up here from Kalavryta."

Nicholas looked round again, smiling as a man smiles to look on one he loves.

"This feeds my soul," he said. "And swords too, little sickles for the gathering! Look you, perhaps we shall not meet again till after our vintage has begun; but remember this: After four months from now, we cannot tell when the day of the beginning of the gathering will come, and so be ready. Whatever the archbishop orders, do it, for he and I work together. And, O Father, let no man take thought for himself on that day. What matters it to whom the honor and the glory go, if once Greece is free? If you desire such things, I give to you now by bequest all the honor and riches that may come to me. Forgive me for saying this, but that is the only loophole where failure may creep into our camp, and that I fear more than ten Sultans and their armies. I say the same thing to all, and I remind myself of it daily. I have been chosen to conduct this matter, for the present, in the Morea, and I will give my life and all I possess to it; and in company with others, of whom the archbishop is one, and Petros Mavromichales, of Maina, another, I will do my best, so help me God, honestly and without a selfish mind. The moment a single dissentient voice is raised, not in the matter of councils or plan of actions, on which we will listen to all that is to be said, but of command and obedience, I only ask leave to serve in the ranks. Let us deliberate together by all means till the time comes to act, but when that time comes, and a word of command goes through the country, let there be no delay. For all will depend, so I take it, on the speed with which we act when we come to action. This is the beginning and the end of success, and all that lies between."

"But how is the word of command to come," said Father Priketes, who had secretly hoped for a little independent campaign, "if you are not with us? Must I not act on my own judgment?"

"No, a thousand times no," said Nicholas. "What I have seen here shows me that you in Megaspelaion and Patras will be no small portion of our first success. How the war will spread afterwards, God knows; but when the first grapes are cut it will be you, so I think, to garner them. This is why you must obey absolutely. Nothing will be left to your judgment. A message will come, and you will obey."

"How am I to tell who your messenger is?"

Nicholas smiled.

"Some afternoon, when you are sitting in the spring sunshine, or perhaps some night in this next winter, when you are sleeping, a monk will come to you and say, 'There is a man here, or a boy it may be, or a girl even, who wishes to see you, and we cannot understand what he means.' Then you will delay not, but go and see what it is. You will say, 'I am Father Priketes; you have a message for me?' And the message will be in this form: 'I am bidden to ask you if there is corn to be given to those who need it?' And you will say, 'Is it black corn they need, and are the needy hungry, or are they Turks?' And the messenger will say, 'Send black corn for the Turks to Kalamata or Kalavryta, or wherever it is, and let two hundred or five hundred or a thousand men carry it.' Other instructions may come as well, but always in that form. And as you obey, so may the Lord give you a place among His saints in heaven."

Father Priketes was silent for a moment.

"You are right, Nicholas," he said; "and I swear by the picture of the mother of God that I will obey in all things. Come, shall we go up again?"

They climbed up into the chapel, and went out down the vaulted stone passage to the story below, where another passage, whitewashed and boarded on both sides, led to the monks' library and Father Priketes's own rooms. Nicholas, who carried in his hand an olive-wood stick, tapped the panelling carelessly as he went along, and once stopped a moment and smiled at Germanos.

"The wall seems to be a little less thick here than at other places," he said. "Mehemet Salik, however, was too cunning to attend to such simple things."

"The Lord be praised for making so many clever men," said Germanos, piously. "To have a fool for an enemy has been the undoing of more good people than Satan himself."

They went on to Father Priketes's room where they had supped before, and Nicholas lit himself a pipe.

"That is quite true," he said. "A fool is always blundering into the weak place by accident – there is nothing so disconcerting; whereas a clever man is on the lookout for less patent weaknesses, and passes over the patent ones on purpose. And the Turk is both clever and indolent – a very happy combination."

"For us," said Priketes, who had, as Nicholas once said, a wonderful faculty for seeing that which was obvious.

"As you say, for us," said Nicholas; "and we intend to profit by it. And now, father, with your leave I will go to bed. I have seen all I came to see, and think I had better push on to-morrow. You will find, no doubt, a prudent place for your granary. It is impossible to be too prudent now, just as it will be more than possible to be too wary hereafter. When once we get into the open we keep there until all is finished."

"Where do you go now?" asked Germanos.

"Southwards," said Nicholas. "I must travel as widely as I can in Messenia, and also see my cousin Petrobey. The Maina district will be raised by him. If once the war begins, as I would have it to begin, I shall be at ease about the rest. Only the beginning must be as sudden as the thunderbolt. Ah, but there is fever in my blood for that!"

Nicholas, as his custom was, rose early next morning and went from the dark-panelled room, where he had slept, down towards the chapel. The great green bronze bell hanging in the wooden balcony outside had just begun to ring for matins, and the sound, grave and sonorous, floated out over the valley like a dream. He waited there awhile looking at the blackened Byzantine paintings which covered the roof, till the monks began trooping up the cobbled passage, and with the first of them he went inside the chapel. From the centre of the roof hung a great gilt candelabrum in the form of a crown, and from side to side of the building ran a row of silver lamps – some thirty in number – which had been burning all night, but looked red and dim in the fresh morning light. Set in the gilt altar-screen were the paintings of the Panagia and of Christ, and at the south end – more precious to the faithful than all – the wax relief of the Virgin and Child. The silver panel, behind which it is placed, had been opened, and Nicholas, with the others, made his obeisance before it. The head of the Virgin and the head of the Child are all that can be seen, and these are black with age; the rest is one mass of chased gold. The crown which the Child wears is studded with rubies and emeralds grown dim; His mother's crown is less magnificent; and on the silver rail in front of it hang the offerings of those to whom, in the days of faith, its contemplation had brought healing of many diseases. Over the gate to the altar hung two stoles of red velvet, in which the priest who said the mass would robe himself. A border of gold holly leaves ran down them on each side, and down the middle they were embroidered with floreated and cusped ornaments in red and gold, in the centre of each of which was worked the figure of Christ. On the north wall, by the easternmost of the monks' stalls, hung the picture of the daughter of the Emperor Palæologus. She is dressed in a red cloak with golden eagles embroidered over it; her hair is golden auburn, and she raises a face charmingly childlike and naïve, and holds up hands of prayer to the gracious figure of the Virgin who stands beside her.

Priketes and Germanos were the last to enter, and when the short prayers were said, Nicholas went out with them, and they walked up and down the terrace awhile talking. Some of the elder monks, with their purple cassocks trimmed with fur wrapped closely round them, sat outside the iron-sheeted gate, under the fresco of Adam and Eve being driven out from Paradise, which fills the triangular space above it, watching them with eager attention, for it had become known who

Nicholas was and what his errand. On their right rose the enormous mass of the monastery, crowned by an overhanging cliff of gray rock, which the smoke from the chimney had stained in places to a rich vandyke-brown, in the hollow of which, as in the hollow of a sheltering hand, the great pile of buildings stood, seeming rather to have been the core round which the rock rose than to have been built into it. In front the ground fell rapidly away into the valley, but was terraced up into little gardens, full of cypresses and poplars or figs and plane trees; under these stood many little wooden arbors, trellised over with vines, where the brethren spent their tranquil days; and a hundred riotous streams – some conducted down wooden shoots, some straying over the paths – rattled headlong to join the river below. Further down, the hill-side was covered with low-growing scrub, and on the opposite side of the valley, the village of Zachlórou hung on by teeth and nails to the climbing moor. A company of swallows cut curves and circles in the thin morning air, their black backs showing metallic, like oxidized steel in the sunlight, and a great flight of white pigeons clattered out of the rock above and settled in a cloud by the fountain. In one of these little arbors Germanos and Nicholas drank their coffee and smoked a pipe of the monastery tobacco until the latter's horse was brought round. Then, rising,

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